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**FEMINISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF HIERARCHY:
THEORY AND PRACTICE**

**BY
BIRGIT VOIGT**

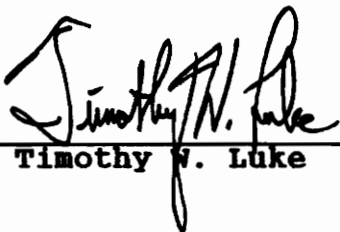
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by

Birgit Voigt

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Political Science**

(ABSTRACT)

The feminist movement of the last two decades decried the dominance of hierarchical structures in public and private organizations. This thesis scrutinizes the differences and overlappings of three major feminist "schools" in regard to their advocacy of non-hierarchical forms of organization. The three strands examined are 'radical feminism', 'cultural feminism' and 'difference feminism'. The theoretical positions of two of them (radical and difference feminism) are evaluated through the example of two feminist, egalitarian organizations. The discussion focuses on the problem of maintaining egalitarian structures and achieving a certain level of efficiency and effectiveness in such groups.

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INTRODUCTION

"The growth of organizations involves the bureaucratization of society and this is tantamount to society becoming bureaucracy."¹

The post-war era has brought an unknown wealth to the population of the United States. Never before have so many people lived in circumstances so comfortable as in the past half century. However, with growing wealth came growing supervision and a diminishing degree of personal freedom and responsibility in many realms of life. An uneasy feeling is now often voiced that the liberty of personal choice is being taken away from us and more and more replaced by formal, uniform procedures. Alienation and frustration in the face of seemingly rigid structures are common experiences of many people.

Those structural constraints are especially visible in goal oriented organizations, such as public administrations or business firms. Especially in firms the structure itself has become part of the business: an efficient structure makes a company more competitive, thus ensures revenues and the future survival of the company. The belief that efficiency is achieved best by employing some kind of hierarchical and authoritarian organization has become part of the western culture. The principle of organizing in a pyramid-shaped pattern is so common that people hardly can think of any other possibility; in other words, there is

¹ Albrow, 1970, p.105

a firm notion that "norms of formal rationality"² are superior to any other possible system of organization. Organization theories, basically concerned with management and administration of resources (people as well as products), see hierarchy as the best instrument to coordinate the diverse demands a complex organization is confronted with. Underlying the "oligarchic structure of organization"³ is the implicit assumption that "only managers, not workers, can plan and oversee the technical complexity of modern organizational processes."⁴ Although management and administration theories usually aim at the economic and public sector, their ideal of organizing has become the dominant form of societal structuring. From the first days of childhood throughout the rest of our lives we will have someone in a position above us and someone who is below us.

According to radical feminist theories, women have suffered and still do suffer most from this intrusion of hierarchical structures because such structures essentially reflect and manifest the pattern of male dominance and female subordination. Thus women are fighting on two fronts: as a working group they are notoriously underprivileged and at the bottom of the pyramid. At the same time they are stereotyped as the eternal female, who has to provide comforting service in the private family environment in order to make the cold rationality of the male's

² Rothschild-Whitt, 1979, p.510

³ Fischer and Sirianni, 1984, p.14

⁴ *ibid.*

working environment bearable.⁵ Radical feminists of the 70s drew two conclusions from these insights: 1) all men were considered oppressive and had to be excluded from all feminist activities so women could develop their own style. 2) Hierarchical structures were condemned as instruments of male power, and thus inappropriate forms of organization for feminist groups. With the notion of a truly equal society in mind, the feminist liberation movement began to look for organizational concepts that were based on egalitarian principles. In the course of this search "radical egalitarianism" became a core postulate for the structure of radical feminist organizations. Radical egalitarianism has been defined as "women's liberation's premise and goal, .. it is based on a belief that everyone has equal potential and it includes rules of behavior to encourage this potential. The violation of these rules is called 'elitism' which is perceived to be the opposite of feminism."⁶

If we compare the intentions of radical feminist groups with their accomplishments in regard to forming egalitarian organizations, the score is rather low. Radical feminism proposed an utopian type of organization where individual and group interest would be the same, where everybody's abilities would be of the same value, and where at the ultimate stage everybody's abilities would be the same. Ordering and controlling structures would become obsolete because group interest and individual interest would not be exclusive but complementary. Cassell remarks in this context: "Despite the

⁵ Kanter, 1977

⁶ Cassell, 1977, pp.160

fact that the radical egalitarianism of the new liberated society to come is discussed in comparatively rational, political terms, it contains an apocalyptic element, an intimation of future joy, ecstasy, and communion that transcends a mere absence of hierarchy."⁷

As we will see during the course of this paper, no feminist organization with any sense of task accomplishment was able to dispense entirely with ordering structures. Does this mean that feminism has failed in its attempt to establish organizational structures other than standard hierarchic ones? I do not think so. Neither absolute hierarchy nor absolute structurelessness is a workable form of organizational life. It is the attempt to optimize the feasible that is of interest. Feminism has generated some valuable critiques of the negative impact of contemporary societal structures on humanity. The public reintroduction of values that most of us have come to appreciate in personal relationships, and which women have cultivated as part of their personalities, seems not only normatively "right", but also in an utilitarian way "necessary", if this society is to be prevented from becoming uncomfortably close to Orwell's visions of a new world. It is in this context that Lynda Glennon argues: "feminism is potentially the most radical social movement today because, in challenging the dualism of private-expressive and public-instrumental selves and worlds, it reaches to the roots of the crises of modern society."⁸

⁷ Cassell, 1977, p.163

⁸ Lynda Glennon, "Women and Dualism", New York, Longman, 1979, p.18, as cited in: Ferguson, 1984, p.5

This thesis is an attempt to evaluate the degree to which feminist groups have successfully implemented egalitarian/participatory procedures into their organizations. The discussion focuses on feminist positions regarding hierarchical structures and the belief that one could dispense with such structures. What kind of structures emerged as a logical consequence of their theoretical propositions and how could those groups prevent the growth of hierarchy and bureaucracy? Are the reasons for failure or success rooted in feminist theory or in other factors?

My procedure for the thesis will be as follows: in the first chapter, a brief historical sketch will investigate the roots of the liberationist faction of the women's movement and its connection to other social movements in the 60s and 70s. I will highlight the historical reasons for the strong anti-hierarchical position of this faction.

In the second chapter, the focus will be on some contradictory positions in radical feminist theories. The discussion will try to elaborate whether these inconsistencies had practical consequences for the formation of egalitarian/ participatory groups. Since egalitarianism, and its associations with sisterhood, collectivism and cooperation as typical female virtues, are still elements of newer feminist theories, I will not restrict myself to the discussion of arguments made by radical feminists during the 70s alone. Rather I will also examine more recent works of feminist theorists in order to deal with these apparent inconsistencies. The problem I am talking about becomes more visible if we compare the

following two positions. Radical feminists of the 70s often claimed that no real cognitive or emotional differences exist between men and women, and that apparent differences are due to diverse gender-socialization and permanent inequality in opportunity. Yet, radical feminists also maintained that women are more peaceful, egalitarian and concerned with others. Newer branches of feminism such as 'cultural feminism' and also 'difference feminism' have further developed this idea of specific female qualities.' The questions that arise here are: 1) how can women and men be alike (equal?) and different at the same time; and 2) given that women's specific qualities are a product of socialization, how can these qualities be kept alive, since feminism strives to destroy those structures which actually generated those qualities? These questions influence feminists' everyday life and the dilemma becomes especially visible when feminists have to make practical decisions in larger organizations. The organizational concepts of radical feminism (an egalitarian, power sharing approach focusing on the human needs of those working in the

' Cultural feminism is by some authors depicted as a continuation of radical feminism. But there are some elements in cultural feminism that clearly set it apart from radical feminist theories. Radical feminism explained male dominance over women mainly through historical and sociological factors. But basically women and men were seen as very much alike. Cultural feminism instead tended to explain male/female differences through biology. Therefore cultural feminism saw the only chance for women to liberate themselves from male domination by excluding men as far as possible from their lives. The search for a distinctive 'female culture' gave this branch the name. Difference feminism acknowledges structural constraints for both sexes, but claims that women can offer alternative forms of living because of their extensive, yet by society devaluated experience of building supportive relationships in the traditionally female realm.

organization rather than on organizational demands) stood and still stand in strong opposition to the current organization philosophy (above all, an organization has to be efficient, otherwise it will either lose out to its competitors; or if it is funded by the public, it wastes the money of the tax payer. Efficiency is maintained best in an organization with strict lines of authority between superiors and subordinates). In a society where the hierarchical organization has been accepted as a "natural" form of organization, feminist egalitarian organizations come under a lot of pressure. How can feminists make their organizations survive without becoming traitors of the feminist values? The discussion of general feminist principles should make us aware of the difficulties radical feminists encountered when they tried to realize their ideal type of feminist organization.

The third chapter then will turn to an overview of recurrent problems in egalitarian feminist organizations. I will try to determine how faithful feminist groups were to their original organizational attitudes, why they departed from some principles and what organizational problems feminist groups had to deal with most often. Two organizations serve as illustrative examples. The groups have already been analyzed as singular organizations elsewhere, but not in a comparative framework. My purpose is to analyze some of the most recurrent problems in participatory feminist organizations. To decide whether these problems occurred because or despite of the feminist theoretical background and how feminist theories adjusted to those problems will be the main task for the final conclusions.

CHAPTER ONE: SOCIETY WITHOUT HIERARCHY

"The grounds for resistance, as I see it, are in the typical experience of women, whose lives constitute a submerged voice within the overall discourse of bureaucratic society. The traditional experience of women in our society sheds light on bureaucracy in two ways - by revealing persistent patterns of dominance and subordination in bureaucracy that parallel power relations between men and women and by suggesting a different way of conceiving of the individual and the collective that reflects the caretaking and nurturant experiences embedded in women's role."¹⁰

1.1. THE FEMINISM OF THE EARLY 70S

The idea of a society where people live freely - where rules are accepted out of free will and rulers have vanished from the face of earth, where community comes first and individuality comes second - has been a dream of woman- and mankind. Various groups throughout history, inspired by religious faith or ideologies, have time and again made the attempt to build such a utopia.

Feminist theorists are certainly not the first ones to become fascinated with this subject. Yet, in this country's recent history they have been one of the most visible groups to make a serious attempt to think through the principles of a hierarchy-free community. Not all feminist groups condemned structured organizations; in fact one of the most powerful organizations of the women's movement used standard hierarchical structures. However, other women's liberation groups saw a specific threat in any kind of non-egalitarian relationship, and especially in established hierarchical structures. In the coming passage, I will

¹⁰ Ferguson, 1984, preface p.X

portray the two predominant branches of the women's movement which represented the hierarchy-accepting and the hierarchy-condemning positions of feminists in the early 70s. I will then proceed, in a second part, to scrutinize two newer strands of feminism: 'cultural feminism' and 'difference feminism' and their attitude towards egalitarian principles. They both have originated from radical feminism, but in the course of their development they have differentiated considerably in some fundamental assumptions of radical feminism.

1.1.1. WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION

The women's movement was never a monolithic bloc where all members pursued the same goals by the same means. Yet, most feminists agreed that in this society rules were made by men and they took only men's perspectives into account. Women were treated as an invisible and negligible force and their opinions did not count. All feminists believed that this was wrong. But beyond this point, feminists disagreed about the reasons for women's oppression, the goals that should be strived for, and the strategies to be followed.

At the beginning of the 70s, two different branches had crystallized in the women's movement. They had partly overlapping membership, but were without great sympathy for each other¹¹. The first section rallied around and was represented by NOW (National Organization for Women). I will call this group in further discussion the

¹¹ Cassell, 1977, p.109

"women's rights" faction¹². Because interpretation always depends on the position of the observer it is impossible to characterize a group in an objective way. Taking a rather traditional point of view, even women's rights organizations appear to be rather radical. Yet, from a feminist standpoint the women's rights organizations have been described as "pragmatic, [with] traditional bureaucratic structures, with elected officers, boards of directors, bylaws, membership rules, and so forth."¹³ Such organizations did not attempt to overthrow the whole system but to modify it so that it offered equal opportunities for women and men. The strategies for pursuing these goals were rather conventional, and therefore also acceptable to a broader non-feminist public. However, the behavior of the women's rights faction was a source of major criticism from the "other" part of the movement.

The second branch of the movement called themselves the "radicals" or "women's liberation"¹⁴ groups. The groups falling under this label had declared war on all hierarchically structured relationships and worked

¹² As did Hole and Levine, 1971

¹³ Cassell, 1977, p.3

¹⁴ I'm borrowing this typology from Hole and Levine, 1971
Freeman disagrees with this typology and the division of the movement into a realistic goal-oriented women's rights branch and the revolutionary, utopian women's liberation branch. She feels that both factions are as revolutionary, only there is a difference in style and structure due to different interests. While the women's rights party (which she calls the "older branch") is primarily interested in political and economic goal achievement, the women's liberation part (the "younger branch") is devoted to a self-finding process and the membership in a small group is part of the experience (Freeman, 1975, pp.44-102).

towards a societal revolution. Their final goal was a society in which the primary principle was one of "communitas"¹⁵ as opposed to individualism and hierarchical structures. Women's liberation groups did not have a central organ, which could speak for the whole movement or organize and coordinate information flow. The structure of this part of the movement resembled a network with many intersections but no recognizable center. Thousands of groups coexisted in the country, although quite often without any connection or only very loose ones; exchange of information occurred only on a random basis. The groups were autonomous and, in contrast to the women's rights movement, not so much outward, but inward oriented. Most liberation groups got started as consciousness-raising groups, basically working with the same means as a support group.

While it appears that each of the two different branches had a very low appreciation of the value of the other one, various authors insist that both forms had their place and intrinsic value for the women's movement.¹⁶ Instead of a competitive function, as perceived by many active members of the two groups, less involved observers felt that the two sections fulfilled a complementary function. Freeman describes women's liberation as a grassroots think-tank where new ideas emerged; however, often these thoughts were still in an unfermented stage and not transformed into pursuable political demands. By picking up many of the

¹⁵ Cassell, 1977, p.154

¹⁶ Freeman, 1975; Cassell, 1977

topics discussed in liberation circles, and transforming those thoughts into concrete political demands, many ideas of the radical branch were adopted, although in a watered-down version, and became cornerstones of women's rights politics.

1.1.2. ROOTS OF THE MOVEMENT

As many authors have remarked, the women's movement had its ups and downs over the last 150 years. Rossi identifies three distinctive peaks of organized activity for women's rights: one as early as 1850, the next one around 1910/1920 and finally the most recent one, beginning in the mid-sixties.¹⁷

In the 1960s feminism emerged again when a powerful wave of unrest swept through the younger population of the United States. A generation in their teens and twenties was unified in their anxiety against a war taking place in the Far East, their resentment against the conservative establishment and their support of the civil rights' movement.¹⁸

¹⁷ Rossi, 1982, pp.7-9

¹⁸ The cultural openness in the late 60's encouraged all kinds of communities to experiment with alternative forms of life. Rural communes, crafts cooperations or other forms of collectives were sought to replace common working and family relationships. A primary concern was to prove that alternative ways of life were possible. Collective activities were considered preferable to individualistic ones since they fostered a harmonious spirit rather than competitive hostility. "These values were widespread during the antiwar era and they constituted the foundations upon which a number of institutional innovations were built." Kathrin Newman, "Incipient Bureaucracy: The Development of Hierarchies in Egalitarian Organizations", p.145, in: Britan and Cohen, eds., 1980

The roots of feminist activism reach back into these opposition movements.¹⁹ During this period, women were learning the skills of organizing political action groups. And yet, they were often repelled by the "machismo" of their alleged brothers in arms. In the late 60s women attempted to integrate feminist issues into the civil rights' movement and the New Left groups, but they suffered mostly harsh rejections. Quite contradictory to the goals these leftist groups were promoting for other sectors of the population (i.e. freedom, justice and equality for blacks and the working class), women were persistently denied the right to make the same claim. Even in revolutionary cells women were not treated as equals and were much more likely to work as secretaries than as insurgents; leftist politics too were a domain for men only.²⁰ The situation was more than paradoxical; women worked for another group's equal rights, but hadn't yet acquired those rights themselves. The perception of and anger about this rather unequal treatment culminated in an explosion of small feminist groups. Many women retreated from the various male dominated groups in order to form women-only groups where they could articulate their needs and demands.²¹ Male exclusion from these newly founded groups was a significant aspect of the developing feminist ideology.

By the time women were calling for a new movement, many of them

¹⁹ Cassell, 1977

²⁰ Compare Freeman, 1974, p.57

²¹ Compare Freeman, 1974, p.57

had years of experience as organizers of political action groups and knew how to mobilize people.²² Unlike NOW, which started as a "top-down national organization, lacking a mass base", the women's liberation movement truly began as a revolt of political grassroots activists who had not been allowed to participate in the political activities of their original group in a meaningful and egalitarian way.²³ Women needed a more receptive setting in which to articulate their frustrations. It seemed only logical to form small groups of like-minded women, in order to talk their situations over. These groups were called consciousness-raising groups or rap-groups. The meetings found an tremendous echo in the scene of white middleclass women which until then had been little radicalized.²⁴

Despite the tremendous success of the CR-groups, the women's liberation movement did not seek to channel the flow of members in order to become a nationally organized force. They wanted to keep a low profile in terms of organization. This anxiety regarding larger organizations was mainly the result of earlier experiences in previously mentioned movements. There, women had often found that hierarchical structures reenforced the male domination within the group. Consequently, radical feminist groups tried to avoid all kinds of formal hierarchies in their organizational activities. This tendency against centralizing tasks and responsibility was facilitated by the purpose and size of the groups.

²² *ibid.*, p.61

²³ Freeman, 1974, p.50

²⁴ Sealander and Smith, 1986

They adopted a classical anarchist form of organization: the cells had only a small number of members and an egalitarian decision-making structure.²⁵ They concentrated mostly on consciousness raising programs or other local projects.²⁶ Coming from the left wing of the political realm, those groups did not want reform but rather basic structural changes in economic, social and political matters.

Many NOW members, having a different professional background, disliked the political attitude of the women's liberation activists. Conversely, the radical groups decried the organizational structure of NOW as elitist. However, over the years the positions of the two camps became more flexible and thereby benefitted the entire movement. Says Rossi: "The infusion of younger women with background experience in consciousness-raising groups helped to radicalize the liberal goals and tactics of the local chapters and national boards of NOW, and growing political experience helped the radicals to modify their earlier rigid emphasis on participatory democracy, yet retain their healthy stress on minimal bureaucratic hierarchization in the women's liberation movement."²⁷

²⁵ Mansbridge, in Fischer and Sirianni, 1984, pp.472

²⁶ Rossi, 1982

²⁷ Rossi, 1982, p.17

1.1.3. DIVERSIFICATION OF THE THEORIES / FEMINISM OF THE 80S

The life cycles of most social movements seem inevitably to follow a wavelike pattern. The feminist movement is no exception. The 70s were the time for mass rallies, public attention and consciousness-raising. Many label those years as the peak of the movement's life cycle. The decade of the 80s certainly has brought less media attention to feminist demands. The grassroots activism lost its enthusiasm, and many groups disappeared from public sight. Nonetheless, the development and refinement of feminist theories has become an acknowledged field of academic study.

Developing in the late 70s, the theory of "cultural feminism", began to draw away attention from early radical feminism. Some scientists count cultural feminism simply as a continuation of radical feminist thought. I do not agree with that notion. The faction of cultural feminists promoted a theory that departed substantially from the earlier notions of radical feminists. The radical feminists of the early 70s believed that men and women are more similar than different and that the existing differences are imposed by society. And although they maintained that every man as an individual is likely to be an oppressor, radical feminists also were careful to identify the male role rather than maleness as the problem.²⁸ Men were only the enemy insofar as they behaved according to their role. As Anne Koedt explained: "Thus the biological male is the oppressor not

²⁸ Echols, "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang", in Snitow, eds, 1983

by the virtue of his male biology, but by virtue of his rationalizing his supremacy on the basis of that biological difference."²⁹ Echols refers to Koedt's remark when she states:

"This distinction, so significant in its implications, has become buried with the rise of cultural feminism. By interpreting masculinity as immutable, the cultural feminist analysis assumes that men are the enemy by virtue of their maleness rather than the power a patriarchal system lends them."³⁰

Echols identifies cultural feminist writings by their denigration of masculinity rather than male roles and by their commitment to preserve rather than diminish gender differences. Despite their rejection of simplistic biological reductionism, many cultural feminist authors connect female biology with the essence of female being. Adrienne Rich, one of the most known exponents of cultural feminism wrote:

"I have come to believe... that female biology - the diffuse intense radiating out from our clitoris, breast, uterus, ... the lunar cycles of menstruation, the gestation and fruition of life which can take place in the female body- has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate."³¹

Thus for most cultural feminists female spirituality cannot be disconnected from the female body, and thus anatomy becomes the most important source of the female difference. However, although cultural feminists drew a sharp line between female and male traits, they did not all refer explicitly to biological reasons as an explanation. Echols

²⁹ Koedt, 1973, p.249

³⁰ Echols, in: Snitow, eds., 1983, p.443

³¹ Rich, 1977, p.21

characterizes the position of cultural feminism as rather ambiguous and writes: "At best there has been a curiously cavalier disregard for whether these differences are biological or cultural in origin."³² And Alcoff underlines that in view of the arguments made by Rich, Daly, Griffin, etc. "it is difficult to render [those] views.. into a coherent whole without supplying a missing premise that there is an innate female essence."³³

Cultural feminism had only few things to say about feminist forms of organization. To a large degree it adopted the ideas of egalitarianism and consensual decision-making as appropriate fundamentals of feminist organizations. In any case, since cultural feminists advocated a theory that portrayed women as more pacific and community-oriented than men, all-female organizations were thought to be free of suppression. Not so much the form of the organization but the fact that men would be present was the concern of cultural feminists.

The rather ambiguous stand of cultural feminism on sexual determinism has been heavily criticized by various feminist scholars. They deplore this feminist position for its dangerous closeness to old patriarchal ideals of femininity, and following from that, its separation of the male and female worlds. It provoked and renewed a discussion among feminists about the purpose and long term goals of feminism. In the 80's a newer feminist theory emerged from this

³² Echols, in: Snitow, 1983, p.441

³³ Alcoff, 1988, p.412

discussion that basically built upon radical feminists' ideals of a more equal and less authoritarian society. Ferguson highlights the feelings of this latest feminist strand toward cultural feminism:

"To attribute women's distinct worldview to some special creative power associated with the female biology is simply to conjure up the old Aristotelian mystification in modern disguise. It is not biology per se, but the web of significance within which biology is embedded and from which it takes its meaning that makes gender differences intelligible. The persistent reappearance of the tired old nature/nurture arguments is getting boring; arguments from biology simply cannot be used to explain arrangements that are historically and cross-culturally variant, as are gender arrangements. Claims to extract morality somehow from biology whether they are made by the so-called "difference feminists" or by more straight-forward reactionaries are equally unacceptable."³⁴

Feminist scholars such as Ferguson, Elshtain, Gilligan and Ruddick strive to tap into the pool of historically and socially accumulated female knowledge about human relationships. They have come to accept women's experiences as different from men and yet as valuable. Those feminists see women's century-long seclusion from the public realm not only as a deprivation of possibilities, but also as the reason for a rather unique female culture. While they admit that women as a group suffered from severe limitations in their possible development, they nonetheless emphasize that the rigid barriers provoked women to practice skills and foster talents quite different from those required for men. And although these traits were cultivated because women were restricted in the development of other talents, those traits have nonetheless a positive, intrinsic value. The society, so goes their message, is very much in need of incorporation of these qualities into other realms than the private one

³⁴ Ferguson, 1984, p.28

of the family.

For the sake of clarity, I will call this branch of feminism "difference feminism".³⁵ I am well aware that Ferguson, whom I think is one of the most prominent representatives of difference feminism, equates cultural and difference feminism. However, since I feel that the content is more important than the label, and Elshtain gave a definition of difference feminism that certainly fits Ferguson's position, I will override Ferguson's objections here. Elshtain defines "difference feminism" as follows:

"[it] questioned the move towards full assimilation of female identity with public male identity and argued that to see women's traditional roles and activities as wholly oppressive was itself oppressive to women, denying them historic subjectivity and moral agency."³⁶

Representatives of difference feminism feel that oppression is not gender specific and search for solutions that unite, not separate female and male worlds of experience. However they do not seek an equality

³⁵ Ferguson uses the term "difference feminism" for what I described as "cultural feminism". There is a considerable chaos in terms of labeling feminist theories and identifying the main representatives of these theories. However, various authors (Alcoff, Echols, Segal) agreed on the following authors as the main representatives of cultural feminism : Adrienne Rich, Mary Daly, Susan Griffin, Robin Morgan, Dale Spender e.al. Jaggar identifies the same authors (esp. Griffin) as radical feminists. However she also states that this branch of radical feminists accepted a form of biological determinism.

Difference feminism, as I define it, accepts the existence of typical male and female worlds of experience; however, they do not relate gender-dependent behavior to biological factors, rather see them as the result of socially inforced long-term sex segregation.

³⁶ Elshtain, 1982, p.50

such as proposed by liberal feminism, which basically means that more women will play in a game where the rules are set by men. Instead they want the public realm to accept and incorporate more of those values which have guided women's lives for generations. The reintroduction of female values as an option for all individuals is necessary because, "although men benefit from institutionalized power and privilege, they too are subjected to cultural expectations of masculinity that affect their emotions, identities and social roles."³⁷

It is thus that feminist theories in the 80's broke loose from being an ideology for women only. Instead they try to provide a critical social theory by applying a distinctive female perspective to the problems of this society.

Again, difference feminist theories begin with the premise that women's and men's position in society are the result of social, not natural biological factors. A hierarchical system of social relations in conjunction with deep-rooted modes of gender socialization has created and maintains a role division for both sexes. Though not all men benefit equally from the hierarchical system, it shapes the relation between and among men and women in the private and public realm of life.³⁸ The alternative roles have led to different perceptions and evaluations of societal norms. The differing perspectives, derived from the role segregation each sex has been cast in, have become equated with sex characteristics, although in

³⁷ Pleck and Brannon, 1978, as cited in: Anderson, 1988, p.8

³⁸ Anderson, 1988

reality, they are conditioned by situation. The general situation until now has been such that men dominated all fields of public life. In the historical development of societal values the male perspective thus became the rule. In organizational matters, there is the emphasis on individualism and competitiveness, and a hierarchical system that is meant to utilize these two traits in order to fully exhaust each person's skills for the benefit of the entire organization. Yet in practice, as has been shown, a high price has to be paid for the mechanical effectiveness of such authoritarian structuring. The purely functional organization demands an high amount of discipline, reliability and conformity. In practice this often transforms itself into dysfunctional rigidity, ritualistic conformity and the transformation of rules into absolutes. It results in the rejection of those who do not either actually or symbolically meet the bureaucratic norms.³⁹ Taking this critic of hierarchical structures as the starting point, difference feminism tries to develop an alternative concept of organization that does not impose the old scheme of dominance and subordination on its organization members. Instead they propose an anti-hierarchical notion "that aims at healing the breach between private and public life and rejects bureaucratic organizational forms in favor of a different vision of individual and collective life."⁴⁰ This notion draws its arguments, insights and hopes for realization from the belief that women's experiences during their relegation to the private realm can have

³⁹ Silver, 1988, pp.15

⁴⁰ Ferguson, 1984, p.5

productive use in the public domain. According to those difference feminist theorists, "although women's standpoint is marked by oppression, in which it originated, it not only survives its origins, but takes on new political usefulness, when transformed by feminist consciousness."⁴¹ Based on the experiences of women in their function as mothers, difference feminism thus develops the concept of 'transformative power' or 'empowerment'. It is a concept that differs considerably from the power-abhorring notion of radical feminism. Seeing that for example the distribution of power between mother and child usually is far from being equal, and yet most mothers abstain from dominating or exploiting their child, difference feminism comes to the conclusion that power does not only have a negative side. Instead, if strength is used in the service of teaching and educating the child and with the best for the child in mind, the relationship between mother and child is one where "power over another is gradually transformed by both the powerholder and the being over whom power is exercised into autonomy and (ideally) mutual respect."⁴²

This alternative conception of power facilitates the vision of a collective organization where power is not absolutely equally distributed (as it is the case in radical feminist concepts). Differences in strength are not neglected; however, power relations are always seen as transitional and those in more powerful positions are expected to empower

⁴¹ Ruddick, in *moral development*, p.237

⁴² Hartsock, as cited in Wartenberg, 1988, p.306

others by sharing their knowledge and teaching their skills. Thus, in a difference feminist view, organization membership should be characterized in terms of attachment, rather than in terms of equality. "[This] changes the way human connection is imagined, so that the images or metaphors of relationships shift from hierarchy [as in patriarchy] or balance [as in radical feminism] to network or web."⁴³

⁴³ Gilligan, in: Kittay and Meyers, eds., 1987, p.22-23

CHAPTER TWO: POSITIONS AND PRINCIPLES

"The equality-principle often collides with the concept of individuality, what is seen as an equity rule by some is perceived as an unfair restriction of individual growth and opportunity by others."⁴⁴

In this chapter I will first develop the radical feminist argument in regard to their vehement opposition to hierarchical structures. After defining the term 'hierarchy', the argument focuses on the radical feminists perceptions of the suppressive and misogynous mechanisms inherent and fostered by hierarchical organizations. This theoretical position was derived from and confirmed by women's personal experiences of institutionalized sexist behavior in hierarchical organizations. As a reaction, radical feminism began to advocate an egalitarian and participatory form of organization.

Before I begin with the discussion of the radical feminists positions on hierarchy, some clarifications of the term 'hierarchy' as used in feminist language are in order. There is no evident difference in how the expression "hierarchy" is understood by feminist and non-feminist authors. The feminist author Abernethy defined the term as follows: "Hierarchy is a group of persons arranged in order of rank, class, etc. It is this principle of ranking with its implications of subordination and dominance and the corollary, control of others that appear to be its

⁴⁴ Sirianni, in: Fischer and Sirianni, 1984, p.491

central element."⁴⁵ This is a rather conventional definition. Central to the radical feminist position however was the broad range of relationships depicted as hierarchical (e.g. teacher/student or physician/patient⁴⁶). Hierarchy was seen as the organizational form of patriarchy, and the extension of the private exploitation of women by men into the public realm. The feminist author Hartsock offered a further dimension to this definition with her description of the goals of the feminist search for alternatives other than hierarchical structures: "As our sense of self develops, we should be able to experiment more with different forms of organizations and to understand how changes in organizational structure increase our ability to control the structures which now control us."⁴⁷

2.1. THE ANTI-HIERARCHICAL POSITION OF RADICAL FEMINISM

As Rossi has pointed out, the liberation movement consisted of a multitude of small groups operating on a local level. Consequently there were no official guidelines or ideologies which represented the core of radical feminist thinking. However, most radical feminist groups agreed that the male notion of supremacy was the source and basis of women's subordinate status in life. Past and present societies were seen as patriarchies where men institutionalized positions of power over women

⁴⁵ Abernethy, Virginia, "Female Hierarchy: An Evolutionary Perspective", in: Tiger and Fowler, eds., 1978, p.126

⁴⁶ Compare Cassell, 1977, p.156

⁴⁷ Hartsock, in: Bunch, eds., 1981, p.10

via social structures. Radical feminists felt that the sex-role system predated capitalism and would not necessarily disappear with the victory of socialism. At the core of female oppression were the social institutions that secured sex-role polarization. Since the social institutions were man-made, men were seen as the "class" (=sex) enemy.⁴⁸ In order to free women from the continuous oppression these patriarchal structures had to be crushed. Banks summarizes the radical feminist position:

"Patriarchy, the oppression of women by men, is seen as an instrument of domination and independently of the economic systems, man himself is the exploiter."⁴⁹ This direct accusation of "man" was mitigated by the belief that he was not oppressive by nature, but that he too had grown into a culturally defined role and was able to change if he wanted or was forced to do so.

Radical feminism felt that the reign of patriarchy was not restricted to the private life of men and women, but found that public life was structured in very much the same separating ways. The hierarchical order of private and public institutions were just an extension of the role distribution between the sexes. Hierarchical organizations enforced the same dominant/subservient pattern among their employers/employees or manager/lower level staff as observed in traditional male/female relationships. In general, the order giving role was reserved for men, the order taking positions were filled by women. Radical feminists

⁴⁸ Hole and Levine, 1971

⁴⁹ Banks, 1980, p.229

therefore claimed that hierarchical structures were oppressive structures, with an inbuilt bias against female traits.⁵⁰

I want to turn now to the specific analysis that supports such a general position. When radical feminists claimed that hierarchies were suppressive and this suppressiveness was especially directed against women, they were directing attention to the fact that people are conditioned by structures and likewise the structures are shaped by the same people. Yet, in the microcosm of the hierarchical organization the two elements are unevenly divided. The lower people rank in the organization, the more their right to influence or change the environment becomes diminished. They become functional objects, and their actions are dominated by structural constraints. This absence of choice is not accidental in hierarchical structures, but the planned and desired characteristic of the hierarchical organization. On the other hand, persons in higher positions gain more personal autonomy and can shape working structures more to their own ideas. People in top ranks have the possibility of influencing the entire organization structure. For them choices are not preselected - on the contrary, people in top positions rather have to fear the abundance of possibilities.

As a reaction to that overflowing amount of information and decisions to be made based on these informations, in other words, as a response to the uncontrollable external environment, top managers try to establish a security net in their immediate working surrounding. One tool

⁵⁰ Hole and Levine, 1971

to achieve this is the conscious, but often also unconscious, selection of coworkers in accordance with some homogeneity criteria.⁵¹ The catch now is that those in higher positions enforce structures that again secure the selection of fitting candidates for upper ranks of the organization.

When the feminist movement began its battle for women's rights in the sixties and seventies, the organizational culture of privately and publicly owned institutions was dominated by men and embodied standards reflecting male characteristics. Women were in a no-win situation. When they applied for higher positions in any kind of organizations, the hierarchical system put them at a distinctive disadvantage - even if they were not deliberately discriminated against. Radical feminists suggested that in hierarchical organizations:

1) the structure itself is biased and favors specific characteristics, socially enhanced in men not in women; and

2) people inhabiting the structures utilize the structure to keep the group homogeneous.

2.1.1. THE BIASED STRUCTURE

Evidently, all organizational structures incorporate and reflect the dominant ideology of the society they are created by. Historically the segregation of tasks according to sex assigned the public realm to men. Therefore most large organizations are designed in a way to utilize male

⁵¹ Rothschild-Whitt, 1979, p.513 cites Perrow (1976) who listed three types of social control mechanisms in bureaucracies: direct supervision, standardized rules and selection of homogeneity.

qualities best.

Historically, management theories have emphasized 'masculine' attributes in order to describe the functioning of an organization. The hierarchical structures developed by management theorists reflect the desired characteristics of those populating the top of the organizational pyramid. The structure of the organization was sought to enforce characteristics that were equivalent with good, male leadership. The philosophy of 'masculine ethic' in management science is nicely summed up in the following comment, describing the elements enhanced by scientific management: "a tough-minded approach to problems, analytical abilities to abstract and plan, a capacity to set aside personal, emotional considerations in the interest of task accomplishment and a cognitive superiority in problem-solving and decision-making."⁵² In one of his psychological portraits of differences between male and female behavior, Talcott Parsons uses almost identical words to describe the profile of a typical male person.⁵³

2.1.2. INSTITUTIONALIZATING BIAS

Let me turn now to the second part of the argument, that people inhabiting the structures utilize them to form a homogeneous group. This argument highlights why the radical feminists did not believe that a 50%

⁵² Kanter, 1977, p.23

⁵³ Parsons, 1954

hiring share for women in open positions would automatically lead to a change of values or structures in the corporate organization. In order to achieve the incorporation of female values into the organization a conscious effort of those with structure shaping power is necessary. However, as I have already argued, those at the top prefer homogeneity to diversity. I will try to explain and illustrate this.

Hierarchical structures are said to have two major purposes: they are meant to improve efficiency and also effectiveness. While the first goal leads to a functional division of work and specialization, the second one aims at the art of making the right decisions. This has a high priority in the eyes of the executive management, because a misjudgment in a major decision can be 'life threatening' for the company or more likely, career-threatening for the manager. In order to reduce this risk for the organization, the authoritarian philosophy of hierarchical organization recommends replacing personal discretion with prescribed procedures as much as possible. Thus, on the lower levels of hierarchical organizations the risk of false decisions is nullified by reducing the work task into a mere process of repetitive routines. In the middle section of the pyramid the management is seemingly involved in the decision-making process. However, the decisions are routinized and follow a prescribed and narrow standard of procedures. Only at the top level are people mostly free from routinized work and have the power to make decisions according to their personal judgement. But along with this freedom, top management also carries the greatest personal risk and weight of being

fully responsible.

Since the top layer in the organization is the one where decisions concerning structure and corporate values are made, I will now concentrate on the highest ranks in hierarchical organizations. My argument goes that this is the place where personal prejudice is transformed into a corporate culture. This culture finds its expression in a fictitious ideal of a candidate, and all real candidates are measured against the ideal. Structural barriers are enforced that will help to produce candidates appropriate for the role prescribed by the top management. The most troubling point about this insight is that the prejudice of elite members often is unconscious and not deliberate. Thus the transformation of their preference structure into organizational structures is unacknowledged. Moreover, those who make it to the top see the structures also as fair and non-biased.

An excellent example of how bias is transformed into structural barriers are performance evaluation procedures. Feminists and bureaucrats in hierarchical organizations have been arguing about what causes constantly lower evaluation results for women than for men. Is it that women do not perform as well, and the evaluation reports are objective? Or is it that those doing the reports are negatively biased for one thing; and secondly, are the organizational procedures shaped in a way that they hamper female ways of dealing with a task. Only recently the existence of a constant, negative bias against female leaders has been underscored by a study of Butler and Geis. In their experiment they

found that competent, assertive women provoked more negative, nonverbal reactions (facial expressions) than male leaders. In an earlier test they discovered that "evaluators rated male and female leaders' performances embedded in cues of approval from coworkers (smiles and head nods) higher than the identical performances surrounded by cues of disapproval (frowns and tightening of the mouth) . . . The nonverbal cues appear to create an affective social consensus that biases competence evaluations."⁵⁴ From the results of their studies one has to conclude that bias strongly influences the evaluation of female candidates. Moreover, since performance-evaluation procedures are one important instrument for directing corporation policies, the expected stance of the ruling elite towards women is of crucial importance. Real organizational change depends on their taking conscious steps towards dismantling subtle, but effective barriers against female candidates. However, there are strong motivations against doing this. The psychology of the top management and their desire for unity has been scrutinized by Kanter. She provides insights on why the ruling elite actively seeks a rather homogenous group to work with.

2.1.3. PSYCHOLOGY OF THE PERSONS AT THE TOP

Decisions in the higher ranks of an organization are usually made on the basis of calculated risks. Most people do not enjoy taking risks, in fact they will invest quite some time and money to minimize the potential

⁵⁴ Butler and Geis, 1990, pp.48

danger of a faulty decision. In the perception of a top executive life can turn into a endless chain of hazardous decisions, challenging his aptitude to succeed. In her study of organizational life, Kanter observed a strong feeling of instability at the chief executive level of a larger corporation.

Says Kanter:

"The uncertainty up the ranks puts trust and homogeneity at a premium. The lack of structure in top jobs makes it very important for decision makers to work together closely in at least the harmony of shared understanding and a degree of mutual trust."⁵⁵

Kanter's view sheds some new light on the tendency of bureaucrats to select people in accordance with specific group characteristics. It ensures that the new members will "fit in". Kanter used the term "homosexual reproduction" to describe the methods of selection of new candidates for higher executive offices. It appears that at the top layers of hierarchical organizations a system of kindred souls is sought to offer security. Naturally, mutual understanding is fostered by shared values, and homogeneity of the group is more easily acquired by surrounding oneself with persons of similar backgrounds and experiences.

"I came to realize how I had been making decisions based on subconscious stereotypes...I tended to favor human behavior like mine: aggressive, a little bit of the football player. When I said to myself: 'Who do I need for a tough job?'- I tended to look for a tough white man."⁵⁶

Thus, it seems that men tend to promote men for the simple reason that they know each other better. They feel that "his" behavior is predictable

⁵⁵ Kanter, 1977, p.53

⁵⁶ Interview with an executive manager of DuPont, Inc., as cited in: "Hard Choices in Black and White", The Washington Post, March 8, 1990, p. A22

and familiar, while "hers" is not. The predictability of the male character is an distinctive asset. Due to the very scarcity of women at the top executive level, many men have never had contact with women on other than a social level. However, the sex of a candidate is not the only criterion for exclusion. Race, social and ethnic background, even age can become a reason to be excluded from the elite circle, if the circle perceives these characteristics as severe deviations from the norm. The complaint of a young manager is exemplary: " Do all companies have an ethnic flavor? Our top men all seem to be Scotch-Irish."³⁷

It appears that managers react to an environment with high demands and high risks in a seemingly rational way: they reduce possible sources of disharmony by looking for familiar, like-minded personalities. They strive to minimize the potential of disturbance, disagreements and misunderstandings by excluding unfamiliar types of personalities. The harmony however is bought at the cost of few variety in corporate life. Unanimity in the elite circle is reached not through dialogue but close-minded selection of a standardized personality.

"The cultural traditions of DuPont are conservative, analytical, white and protestant...For staid, conservative DuPont, the epitome of the white, male engineering model, this [the active encouragement of blacks and white women] was an unprecedented deviation from tradition, a watershed event in what many DuPonters have since described as a cultural revolution."³⁸

The consequences of this demand for homogeneity are easy to

³⁷ Kanter, 1977, p.54

³⁸ "Hard Choices", The Washington Post, March 8, 1990, p. A22

pinpoint. They put women and ethnic minorities at a distinct disadvantage, because the organizational elite demands a uniformity they cannot acquire. And it puts them also at an disadvantage because the seemingly neutral structures do not give them the chance to prove their capabilities to the full extent.

Summarizing the essence of this discussion, I argued that individual prejudice and structural bias are intertwined in an circuitous relationship in hierarchical organizations. I made the point that hierarchical structures are historically biased against women because usually women had no part in shaping the structures. Secondly, I stated that people, working/living in an hierarchical organization, are influenced through the structures and that structures help shape the perception of self and others in a significant way. People with a "deviant" culture are hindered by prescribed procedures from developing their potential. Furthermore, independent of their actual success in adapting to the structural factors, women are handicapped by the prescribed image of the ruling elite. Anticipating the non-approval of the upper level, coworkers and superiors convey a negative perception about the individual's capacities. The reaction of the individual is a feeling of failure and lessened commitment. The prophecy becomes self-fulfilling.

This theoretical reasoning against the inbuilt misogynous bias in hierarchical organizations reflects, I believe, to a large degree the position of recent difference feminism. It reflects how feminism has deepened in various accounts its understanding of the cooperation

between societal bias against women and the subtle efficiency of structural resistance against changes. The continuous repetition of archetype gender-identified roles through hierarchical structures are hereby criticized most. The practice of male assertiveness, combined with the expectation of female docility still produce a predominantly male elite and a predominantly female support base in most hierarchical organizations. Difference feminism does not focus so much on man as the eternal oppressor in the organization but on the mutually reinforcing processes of gender socialization and hierarchy. It assumes however, that certain experiences, typically embedded in a female course of life, such as taking care of others for example, can offer valuable clues of how to form organizations without institutionalizing the domination of the many by the few. In agreement with this thought Ferguson warned nevertheless that although women's traditional experiences and qualities can provide an alternative look at organizational problems, one has to distinguish carefully between "aspect of [women's] experience that has its own integrity and offers its own achievements"⁵⁹ from the definition of femininity provided by the patriarchal order.

However, at the beginning of the feminist movement, in the late 60s and 70s, the antipathy against authoritarian structures was mostly provoked by open discrimination. Radical feminist's aversion against hierarchical institutions was a very personal one; nourished, reinforced and kept alive by the every-day experience of open discrimination. Since

⁵⁹ Ferguson, 1984, pp.166-167

hierarchical organizations dominated the public world and had incorporated the patriarchal and misogynous attitude of an entire society, radical feminists often felt personally attacked. Hence, the vehement reaction of many radical feminists was not so much born as the result of logical reasoning, but more a desperate rebellion against the gigantic forces they were up against. I think this psychological condition of immediate personal concern was one reason why many radical feminists became so dogmatic about egalitarian organizations. Their emphasis on radical egalitarianism ought to be seen as a feminist challenge, directed at the offending attitudes prevalent in traditionally structured organizations. By realizing egalitarian, non-suppressive forms of organizations, radical feminists wanted to prove that a feminist culture could provide a social form of organization that was not an extension of suppressive, patriarchal norms, but a genuine alternative form of living and working together.

CHAPTER THREE: CHANGING FEMINIST ORGANIZATIONS

"Feminism is a visionary politics which declares that theory is only as good as its practice. To become theoretically sophisticated about how gender and racial hierarchies structure both knowledge and institutions imposes upon us the responsibility to act in the world to dismantle institutionalized inequities."⁶⁰

I will begin this chapter with the analysis of behavior and responses to the appearance of leadership structures in CR-groups and small action groups. My argument will be that certain leadership structures emerged in CR-groups, regardless of the strength of the ideological commitment of the group members. Groups that denied this development and strived for absolute equality of power and influence among group members would in the end splinter into smaller and smaller factions. Their underlying assumption of identical member abilities and interests would not hold up to the realities of diverse goals and talents. In accordance with Mansbridge I will argue that persons might have, in a certain area, overlapping interests.⁶¹ The interests however, never become identical. Yet, a smaller group of people with well-defined goals might pursue their common interests successfully on a consensual policy making basis.

As I will try to show other, less radical, CR-groups found a way to accept the unequal power distribution in their groups under the premises of common goals and the idea of trust. These groups relied on the belief

⁶⁰ Kolodny, 1988, p.461

⁶¹ Mansbridge, 1980

that, because they were friends and, as friends, strived for the same goals, it was not necessary to have an absolutely equal power distribution. The fact that those groups had an informal leadership structure was accepted because the leaders were assumed to act in a benevolent way. In their more pragmatically oriented egalitarianism the term 'leadership' took on a meaning different from the classical one. In their case study of a participatory (not feminist) clinic, Srivasta and Cooperrider had a member define her/his leadership role:

"I have one firm belief as a chairperson. The chairperson serves only one basic and good purpose. It is to utilize their knowledge and skill and political acumen to incite and charge other younger member with political and professional growth and development. I use every ounce of my energy to see to it that they develop. ..If a department chairperson doesn't have this goal in mind, then they shouldn't be the chairperson."⁶²

I will call this modification of the radical egalitarian principles a pragmatic egalitarian model. I will use it first to help analyse the acceptance of leadership and unequal power distribution in CR-groups, and then in an examination of two larger task- or service-oriented organizations: the Dayton Women's Center and a Health Collective in New England. My purpose will be to trace how far each of these two organizations came with their commitment to egalitarian principles. How did they cope with the difficulties of managing a larger organization and stay faithful to consensual policy making. What kind of organizational and theoretical adaptations emerged as a response to inner and outer conflicts. How did these two organizations deal with the emergence of

⁶² Srivasta and Cooperrider, 1986, p.706

leadership structures? From the analysis and comparison of the two organizations I will try to come to some conclusion about the necessary basic agreements among the members of an organizations with consensual decision-making that aim at keeping the egalitarian concept functioning.

3.1. THE MAINTENANCE OF EGALITARIANISM

The operating principles of women's liberation groups were based on the ideal of egalitarianism. It meant in practice consensual decision-making by the entire group, a ban on leadership, and the abolition of individual exercise of power. Radical feminist groups criticized the authoritarian and basically discriminatory structures of most public and private organizations and were determined to avoid the implementation of similar hierarchical structures in their own organizations. Most feminist groups were only partly successful in these attempts. Newman looked at factors enhancing the growth of hierarchical structures in egalitarian (but not necessarily feminist) organizations⁶³. She found two factors important for the maintenance of egalitarian principles. According to her study: 1) egalitarian structures were in jeopardy, when parts of the group met more often than the group as a whole, and

2) when the group depended financially on the funding of public or private hierarchical institutions.

Newman's remarks indicate that the maintenance of egalitarian structures is not entirely related to the ideological background of the

⁶³ Newman, in: Britan and Cohen, 1980

groups but at least to a certain degree to environmental constraints that have to be faced. Thus, the tendency toward less egalitarian structures can emerge both from inside the organization - because egalitarian principles prove to be unworkable due to diverging interests - and from the outside - because the environment enforces a structural adaptation. Newman summarized the latter point as follows: "Those that were able to remain independent of external funding sources were also able to remain egalitarian in their authority structure."⁴⁴ For the sake of a clearer analysis I will try to keep these phenomena separated, although obviously in reality those forces cannot be neatly kept apart.

In Newman's opinion the identification of a leadership core was equivalent to the proof that the group had forgone its egalitarian ideals. The elite status emerged from the distinction between those that received a salary and worked full time and the volunteers who only worked on a part time basis and received no money. It was not the money or full-time commitment per se that made a person, in Newman's opinion, belong to the elite, but the fact that these people shared more information and developed policies without the feedback or the consent of other less closely connected members of the group.

Though I agree with Newman that such groups are no longer strictly egalitarian, I have one objection against labeling all groups with a leadership structure hierarchical. The idea behind this labeling stems

⁴⁴ Newman, in: Britan and Cohen, 1980, p.160

basically from Mansbridge's notion of a unitary democracy⁴³. Mansbridge distinguished between adversary and unitary democracies, and argued that in situations where people have basically common interests a unitary democracy, defined as a decision making by consensus and not by majority vote, has many advantages for the group. Where common interests are strong I think the emergence of leadership structures is not necessarily equivalent to the emergence of authoritarian hierarchy, where decisions are made at the top and are followed by the lower layers of the organization. Instead, one might envision a participatory model, where leadership positions are seen as catalytic tools to enable all members of the organization to develop their potential to the fullest. The decisive power remains with the entity of the collective. Authority is temporarily mandated from the group to some persons with specific skills. However, this authority of the "designated" coordinators stems from the acceptance of the group that their skills can improve the entire organization. The competence of those leaders resembles that of a coordinator, who brings out the best in the individual collective member and combines the different skills of members to the benefit of the organization as a whole. But the competence of coordinators ends where critical decisions are to be made. These decisions remain in the hands of the entire group. The pragmatic concept can accept salient positions under a "first among equals" premise, that is, where a person is singled out by the others and receives a mandated responsibility for a certain field because of her

⁴³ Mansbridge, 1980

excellence in this field. However, this does not detract from the final authority of the collective and does not lead to privileges for those in salient positions.

In order to measure the "degree" to which the women's organizations departed from the early definition and demand of radical egalitarianism, my starting-point will be the consciousness-raising groups of radical feminists. In these groups radical egalitarianism played a most important part as the cornerstone of feminist organization theories. I will begin this chapter with a discussion of the beliefs and the circumstances that allowed feminists in rap-groups to believe that radical egalitarianism was a workable concept. The comparison with more task-oriented feminist groups ought to illustrate the reasons for the development of more pragmatic models in feminist organization theories.

3.1.1. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING GROUPS AND SMALL ACTION GROUPS

CR-groups were fairly small, usually not more than 10-15 people.⁶⁶ Interaction was easily managed at a face-to-face level. The purpose of the groups was the building and enlargement of a feminist consciousness. The groups intended to facilitate personal change by relating individual experiences and social issues. Although there were thousands of groups working on the same issue, there was not much regular interaction between the groups. Basically, every group was left to itself to search for its own way of consciousness-raising. There were no established

⁶⁶ Cassell, 1977

connections that would link the various groups together. But then, the goals of these groups did not call for organized actions either. All that rap-groups needed in order to achieve a sense of accomplishment was an occasion to debate women's problems, exchange opinions and find mutual understanding. Until women started joining CR-groups, many had blamed themselves for feelings of inadequate performance. Those meetings provided a real "other" to blame, that is to say the suppressive, male oriented society. Apart from discussing and revealing discriminatory structures in every woman's life, CR-groups were not pressured to become active on issues other than the change of its members' consciousness. CR-groups met once or twice a week to talk. The need to organize was minimal. Time constraints, another common factor for the introduction of separated responsibilities, did not play a major role for CR-groups. They had no time-restrictions, the amount of time spent with the rap-group depended entirely on the personal circumstances of each group member. Thus, discussions were not bound to come to a resolution, because there was no immediate necessity to act, no deadline to be met. Consciousness-raising groups could afford the luxury of discussing an issue until unanimity was reached. This amount of time spent on intense discussions produced a kind of group experience that was extraordinary. The CR-meetings achieved a somewhat mystical dimension in the eyes of the participants; they were seen as totally different from meetings women had in other settings. Not surprisingly then, Cassell described the "intoxicating" experiences of sisterhood and the development of close

relationships between members of such groups. However, this enthusiastic feeling of belonging and trust in the group is not a specifically feminist or for that matter female characteristic. Similar feelings have been described by members of religious groups, or by people who found themselves with a few others in extreme situations, or even by therapy groups. Another factor that bonded CR-group members even closer, was the protective and supportive response of the group when members had to face confrontational situations and hostility from outside. The perception of men as the common enemy enhanced trust and friendship among group members.

Beyond scrutinizing women's position in society the groups were in no position to take effective steps in order to correct what they thought was wrong. The CR-groups turned sometimes into small action groups: demonstrations, sit-ins and other rather short-term commitments were part of their protest instruments. But the external constraints which are often held responsible for the emergence of hierarchical structures, namely complexity of the tasks, time pressure, number of people involved and need of expertise and long-term planning, did not apply to consciousness-raising groups. CR-groups were for the most part like a larger group of friends and they were structured as such.

Despite these rather ideal conditions for the development of a leaderless group-structure, in most groups (i.e. all CR-groups known to me) informal leadership emerged almost inevitably, although this fact was not always acknowledged by group members. Personal characteristics

such as experience, professional background, higher verbal abilities, and above all the support of a friendship network made some women take on leadership responsibilities. Nonetheless these women tended to avoid giving the impression of leadership aspiration. Cassell observed that many groups actually believed in their achievement of a totally egalitarian group. In contrast, observers found that all groups generated if not formal, then informal leadership structures. Even the most radical groups were not able to eradicate the fact that some people had more influence than others. Carefully chosen procedures could not prevent the growth of differences in status among group members.⁶⁷

Cassell observed in her study that group meetings were usually arranged in a circle, the agenda was made up by passing around a sheet of paper and everybody could write a topic on the paper, chairpersons were supposed to volunteer (but never did, many women were reluctant to chair the meeting). With the example of the chairwomen, Cassell illustrates the informal existence of leadership structures:

"Certain women consistently took the responsibility of persuading other women to chair. Chairing the weekly meeting required control, flexibility, and political skill. A too controlling chair was criticized for being authoritarian, a laissez-faire one heard complaints about an

⁶⁷ The disc-system and the lot system, rotating the chairing of the meeting, open agenda, etc., were such common devices. The disc-system meant that every person received a fixed amount of cards and every time she spoke she had to hand in one of the cards. This should level the amount of speaking time for all women at a meeting. The lot-system simply meant that all tasks were categorized, manual work, creative work, repetitive work administrative work, etc. Every woman was to do work in each category. This prevented that some women had only the 'good' work, while others were stuck with the chores.

overlong and chaotic meeting."⁶⁴

Problems of radical egalitarianism became more salient when some tasks had to be accomplished by the CR- or action groups. Since no one could be ordered to work on a particular project, the initiator had to convince volunteers to participate. An absence of these "mobilizing" women usually was the death sentence for the project: "...the group became social and less instrumental, ...a leaderless group might become increasingly inactive and might even stop functioning."⁶⁵

If CR-groups are judged in terms of developing absolute egalitarian structures, they were successful only to a very limited degree. Only if one accepts a rather watered-down definition of equality, that is, defines it in terms of opportunity for participation, CR-groups were egalitarian. But this definition is light-years away from the ambitious concept of egalitarianism as it was promoted by radical feminist theories. According to the original concept all individuals were believed to have an equal amount of potential. Discrepancies in performance between individuals, but especially between women and men, were thought only to reflect the systematic creation of dissimilarities in socialization. Leadership roles and hierarchy were seen as part of the socialization system that strived to maintain the existence of specialized knowledge and skill barriers. The artificial superiority of leaders compared to subordinates deliberately blocked the development of the follower's potential. Consequently radical

⁶⁴ Cassell, 1977, p.124

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p.128

feminists tried to liberate themselves from the constraining bonds of hierarchical structures by eradicating leadership roles, so that every woman could discover and utilize her own talents.

However, this principle of equal participation and absolute consensus collided with the fact that some women displayed more individual strength and had more appeal than others, and whether they strived for it or not, acquired a certain leadership position. Women who practiced and displayed such superior skills and abilities threatened the egalitarian basis of feminist groups. These strong women were often falsely accused of being elitist and power-hungry. Radical egalitarianism took a very contradictory stand on the topic of women's self-development. On the one side it encouraged women to become stronger, self-reliant and independent from men. However, if women with these qualities acquired a salient position in feminist organizations, they were attacked for their elitism. This conflict was usually aggravated when groups took egalitarianism to its extremes. Driven to its ultimate meaning, radical egalitarianism became an ethic so radical that even differences in personality, temperament and appeal were perceived as hierarchical. But taking the concept that far had a self-destructive effect. Thus, Hole and Levine attributed the decline of one radical feminist action group, "The Feminists", to its absolute commitment to the doctrine of radical equality. The Feminists declined "through a rigid adherence to its own propositions".⁷⁰ Their rules of organization were based on the assumption

⁷⁰ Hole and Levine, 1971, p.146

of an absolute unity of interest of all group members and, following from that, an insistence on unanimity in all decisions. In a group that assumed absolute agreement as a premise (because, by definition of radical feminist self-understanding, women were united in their fight against oppression), conflicting opinions could not be accepted. The fight against the suppression of women was supposed to eliminate all class and race differences that might have had the potential for conflict. According to this reasoning differing opinions could not stem from real differences in judgement but only from questionable motives. The exclusion of members under the accusation of following selfish interest - being elitist - was an often used tool in radical egalitarian groups to discipline members and suppress deviating opinions.

This intolerance of different opinions disclosed the existence of a thin line in radical feminist groups where egalitarian principles changed into a fascistoid endeavor for uniformity. If the principles originally aimed at eliminating inequality, they degenerated into rules to suppress individuality. The rigid principles forced those with differing opinions to leave the group. As one former member of the Feminists remarked: "The principle of equality [became] distorted into an anti-individualist mania."⁷¹

⁷¹ As cited in: Hole and Levine, 1971, p.147

3.1.2. EQUAL IN VALUE BUT NOT IDENTICAL

Many consciousness-raising groups, although committed to the ideal of egalitarianism, did not find it necessary to carry the principle to its limits. They adopted a variation of egalitarianism, which I have called the pragmatic model. Many feminist groups found for themselves a compromise that allowed them to accept the unequal distribution of power to a certain extent. Women with leadership qualities were allowed to lead as long as they did not distinguish between their own and the groups' interests. The argument that enabled less radical feminists to defend the fact that some women had more influence in the group than others was based on the same idea that drove other radical feminists into the intolerance for differing opinions. The starting-point was again the core belief that all women have basically the same interests, that is women's liberation. But now it was no longer assumed as well that women were all identical in their abilities. Differences in power distribution could be accepted under the impression that women with more influence would automatically represent the less powerful women as well. Under this condition - a common interest in the same goal - women did not need to insist on equal power distribution. The acceptance of informal leadership however required not only the belief in the common cause but also an element of trust. As long as the group members trusted the leading circle not to act against the interests of the entire group, and as long as the unofficial leadership structures were embedded in a net of friendship, the dominating influence of a few was not perceived as offensive or

suppressive.

So in my opinion two types of egalitarianism could be observed in the various feminist groups around the mid 70's. The first type undertook a rather frightening attempt to equalize women, while the other type would indulge in a mixture of self-deception and pragmatism by accepting a disguised leadership structure.⁷² Cassell reports of her CR-group that many members were convinced that their group was absolutely true to radical egalitarian principles. They didn't perceive differences in activism or influence as a distinction between leaders and followers.⁷³ This underlines again that leadership in feminist CR-groups had a meaning different from authoritarian leadership. It is sustained by Cassell's notion that all CR-groups relied heavily on 'mobilizing' women, but did not accept them as commanding leaders.⁷⁴

Summarizing, one can say that most CR-groups de facto developed an informal hierarchy. They usually had an activist elite guiding the group. Where in theory these feminist groups were still striving for an absolute equality of power and status among their members, in practice they had settled for a less demanding principle of "those who care most, have the most to say".

⁷² Hole and Levine, 1971

⁷³ Cassell, 1977; Newman, in: Britan and Cohen, 1980, pp.143

⁷⁴ Cassell, 1977, p.127

3.2. SERVICE GROUPS

I will turn now to the examination of two feminist organizations in order to scrutinize their ways of combining egalitarian principles with the production of some good. I call these "service" groups as opposed to action groups or CR-groups, because they produce and provide goods not only for their own benefit but also a larger community. The two organizations are the Dayton Women's Center and the Women's Health Collective in New England. Both groups were highly committed to egalitarian principles when they began their work. While the Health Collective grew over the years into a professional and settled organization, the Dayton Women's Center had to close its doors after a working period of ten years. Unlike the Health Collective, where no deep running power struggles were reported, the feminist organization in Dayton experienced "personal and ideological conflicts, declining activism and small membership, as well as recurrent financial crises."⁷⁵ As I have pointed out in the analysis of CR-groups, egalitarian principles caused many problems for these groups though they had only a few tasks on the agenda. It also became apparent that egalitarian ideals were often abused as a disciplinary tool and often led to factionalism and the splintering of the groups. These problems are likely to become more aggravated under the pressure of obligations and liabilities as experienced by the service groups. The need to perform and to meet various expectations exposes even more clearly some of the basic problems that egalitarian

⁷⁵ Sealander and Smith, 1986, p.329

organizations are prone to.

I will keep the overall description of the life cycle of the two groups somewhat sketchy. Instead, I try to focus on those reported structures which, I feel, are responsible for the problems and failures in the Women's Center, and the rather successful attempt of the Health Collective to translate egalitarian principles into a pragmatic organization.

3.2.1. DAYTON WOMEN'S CENTER

As Cassell states, once their rap-groups dissolved, many women did not pursue any further active role in other feminist organizations. But others also sought to apply their new insights and practice those ideas they had only theorized about in the rap-groups. According to Sealander and Smith, the feminist movement arrived in Dayton in 1969 with the foundation of the first consciousness-raising group. In Dayton the movement leaned strongly toward the radical feminism of the women's liberation wing. CR-groups selected their members by random, drawing from a pool of interested women. This was supposed to underscore the feminists' belief that all women were sisters. Out of the cluster of CR-groups the Dayton Women's Liberation organization was formed. In 1973, this organization was granted various funds by private and public organizations to open and operate the Dayton Women's Center. The collective responsible for the management of the center consciously adopted anti-hierarchical politics. The women's center collective made decisions only unanimously, and rotated leadership positions among its

members. The politics developed by the collective were to be implemented by a staff of four paid workers. By 1975, the women's center offered programs and facilities for "classes, counseling and feminist therapy and activities and discussion groups."⁷⁶ It provided all kinds of legal advice, and in 1975 opened an extremely popular day care-center. It was, as one former collective member declared "a smorgasbord of services", offered to all women in Dayton and "during its seven year history approximately two thousand Dayton women a year helped themselves."⁷⁷ Although the women center was highly successful in its operations and found a large women clientele, the group of women actually running the place remained very small.

In the collective, two camps were often fighting for the future direction of the women's center, a socialist and a radical feminist wing. Bitter conflicts erupted when radical feminists felt that the socialist feminists "abused" women's center facilities for their political work. Furthermore, a gap existed between the thousands of women who used and visited the center - but did not participate in the decision-making - and the staff and the collective. The center's visitors profited from the supply of new services, and thus filled the role of customers and supporters at the same time. Staff members were paid, full-time workers, and although they had the most direct contact with the women customers, they had no authority to make important decisions. The women who made

⁷⁶ Sealander and Smith, 1986, p.329

⁷⁷ Sealander and Smith, 1986, p.327

up the collective, on the other hand, were only engaged part-time, but had the authority to make crucial decisions for the women's center. The collective made the contacts with the City Council and other public institutions which were the women's center's major money sources.

3.2.2. THE WOMEN'S HEALTH COLLECTIVE

The Women's Health Collective (WHC) began as a more professional group than the Dayton women's center. WHC began its work in 1972. The group wanted to provide high quality health care and distribute health related information for women and by women. One of the group's acknowledged goals from the very beginning was its collective striving for consensual power sharing. The WHC has undergone three major changes in its organizational culture. When the WHC started its operation in 1972, a community board was responsible for major policy decisions. A staff was expected to carry out the policy and make minor day to day decisions. After two years of operation, a first major reorganization occurred: the staff took over all responsibilities. Decisions were made on a consensual basis. The salary was the same for all staff members. The task responsibility rotated regularly and training programs were held to level out professional differences. Training programs were arranged to teach specialized tasks such as lab work, administrative skills and physician assistant skills.⁷⁸ During the period of 1974 - 1984 the collective reached its most egalitarian, least hierarchical stage. After

⁷⁸ Iannello, 1988, p.16

operating in this highly egalitarian mode for almost 10 years, the health collective considerably modified its structures in 1984: three coordinators took over the responsibility for the personnel, medical concerns and business management. The emergence of this formal differentiation reflected "a need to make business more efficient and a need to recognize through position and salary, the expertise of certain members."⁷⁸

Although these are certainly valid reasons in terms of securing the survival of the organization, they clearly touch the border line between participatory and hierarchical structure. Coordinator positions do not rotate any longer. The full staff still makes the crucial policy decisions at monthly meetings, but routine decisions fall now into the competence of the coordinators. The health collective was still operating in 1988.

3.3. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE COLLECTIVES

In Dayton there were two major sources of conflict in the women's center: differing positions in the decision-making collective and also conflicts between the collective and the staff. The women's center's structure resembled a three layer pyramid with the consumer/clients at the bottom of the organization. They were without institutionalized rights to participate in the decision making process. The staff functioned as mediators between clients and collective, but mainly as implementers of the collective's decision. Staff had relatively little authority, extending only to daily routine decisions. Finally, at the top of the decision making

⁷⁸ Iannello, 1988, p.16

pyramid was the collective. They were the group of women responsible for the development of long term policies in the women center. To see the customers as being at the bottom of the pyramid is somewhat misleading, because it suggests that they wanted to have more influence but could not obtain this. However there are no clues which indicate such a thing. Most likely many of the clients of the women's center did not want to become part of the center's politics and were satisfied to use the facilities without carrying the burden of responsibility. The fact that in most women's centers the number of customers by far exceeded the number of working activists highlights the fact that the feminist movement, just like any other social movement had difficulties overcoming "free rider" tactics. Kensinger addressed this problem in her analysis of a feminist NOW chapter. The organization was kept alive by only a few core activists: "all three interviewees noted that at most ten members were actively engaged at any one time in the chapter."⁸⁰ Kensinger therefore compared the core 10 activists to an oligarchic elite. But since the agenda setting discussions were open to all interested feminists and decisions were made on a consensual basis, the comparison with an oligarchic elite seems somewhat far fetched. In my opinion the behavior displayed here is another example for the pragmatic approach of egalitarian groups. Leadership roles and increasing influences often came with the exceptional work and time input of some members. Their enthusiasm and work carries along the less active and therefore less influential members.

⁸⁰ Kensinger, 1989, p.24

Those less involved depend on the knowledge and interest of the activists when it comes to planning and developing projects and events. As Kensinger reports, only the most active members came regularly to the meetings and were most likely the ones to bring up the topics for the agenda of the meeting. Yet, a principle of general participation and consensus ruled the decision-making process. Formal barriers against active participation were quite low. On the other hand, one must acknowledge that the smallish group of activists had informal possibilities of barring unwanted persons from the influential inner circle, if they wanted. They usually developed a tight net of friendship and thus controlled to a large degree who might gain access to the core of the organization.⁶¹

Clearly the problem in the Dayton's Women's Center did not originate in a lack of activists, but in a lack of fundamental agreement among the main activists about the purpose of the women's center. The three factions pursuing diverging interests were the two wings in the collective and the staff. Sealander and Smith comment: "Also complicating the task ... was the fact that neither Dayton Women Working [another feminist collective] nor the Women's center achieved a clear focus and sense of purpose."⁶² And they also find, that "the Women's Center, by

⁶¹ As Cassell describes in her book, the process of "freezing out" unwanted newcomers was quite effective as a social control of who gained access to the inner circle, if a new interested woman did not appeal to the governing elite, she remained isolated in group meetings. See Cassell, 1977, p.145

⁶² Sealander and Smith, 1986, p.336

1977 [was] torn by dissensions [and] had its problems of setting an agenda."⁸³ The disunity in the collective appears as a triangle of interests. "Some collective members thought the center should be more open socialist, other sought to downplay leftist politics."⁸⁴ The radical feminist wing wanted to emphasize lesbianism and independence from other political groups. The socialist feminists wanted to combine feminist work with the political work of other non-feminist, revolutionary cells. The staff again was mainly interested in the survival of the center and therefore was likely to opt for pragmatic solutions that would not offend the funding institutions. Earning a living at the center, they were more interested in securing the funding than in promoting theoretical positions. This accords with Newman's general observation that in groups where some members depended financially on the survival of the organization, their interest and that of non-paid group members usually deviated quite a bit. The constant shortage of funding put further pressure on the consensual decision making process and aggravated the tensions between full-time, paid staffers and non-paid volunteer activists.⁸⁵

As a result of the constant struggle over political and pragmatic goals in the Dayton Women's Center, the collective departed from its democratic and egalitarian principles quite a bit. Instead of an open

⁸³ Sealander and Smith, 1986, p.336

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Newman, in: Britan and Cohen, 1980

community, the group formed divisive circles that tried to take over the lead in the collective's politics. Moreover, exhausted by the constant conflicts erupting in the collective, many members withdrew from the group after a while. Members that expected to work for a feminist goal in an atmosphere of respect and mutual trust, felt that they could invest their energies in other, more rewarding projects.⁶⁶

In the Health Collective the danger did not come from too many different interests in the group, but from the outside pressure that forces the collective to be efficient and to adopt more and more hierarchical structures. This outside pressure stemmed mainly from the competitive environment of the Health Collective. As one collective member put it: "The Health Collective is a business that must deal with external hierarchies of the marketplace, of the medical as well as political worlds."⁶⁷ The Health Collective discovered soon that the number of persons involved in the service organization, the number of decisions to be made and the fact that decisions had to be made at a certain point in time, put limits on the usefulness of the "everybody decides about everything" rule. The service group learned what Sirianni called the influence of the "aspect of time on the choice of the organization form." Says Sirianni: "The scarcity of time is a fundamental aspect of all social organizations. All participation in decision-making processes costs time,

⁶⁶ Sealander and Smith, 1986, p.336

⁶⁷ Iannello, 1988, p.22

whether in meetings or in the acquisition of relevant knowledge and information." " This time, Sirianni explains, has to be valued in opportunity costs, i.e. the value of time spent for a meeting has to be weighted against the possible alternative achievements one could have realized in the same time period. The value of the participation of a member in a discussion depends on various factors, such as the enjoyment of participation, the importance of matters decided and the differences at stake in the alternatives, the likelihood that one's participation will affect the outcome and, finally, the competence of the participants. " At a certain point, the Health collective was not willing any longer to bear the high time-costs of a decision-making procedure where everybody had her say. The collective delegated authority towards those group members who were more involved with a specific task and had accumulated some knowledge on the subject.

When an organization arrives at a point where informal structures of varying authority and competence are acknowledged, an egalitarian organization stands at the cross-roads. Without a determined effort to develop strategies that will keep participatory commitment alive the organization drifts more and more towards a traditional hierarchical organization.

The Health Care Center survived considerably longer than most feminist organizations. As we have seen, the collective functioned for

" Sirianni, in: Fischer and Sirianni, eds., 1984, p.491

" *ibid.* ,

almost 10 years on a very egalitarian basis. The staff made all decisions and was also responsible for carrying out its politics. After 10 years, this organization structure was changed. The question is how did the group justify it? The new structure marks a break with radical egalitarian principles and the turn to less rigorous forms of participation. Whether this can be seen as progress towards an improved model of participatory organization or the beginning of hierarchy depends on a few critical elements.

As already discussed, from a radical egalitarian point of view, all structures admitting differences in power or influence were seen as hierarchical. And in this sense almost all organizations had hierarchical structures; whether these structures were formal or informal was of no importance, nor was it of any importance whether the competence was authorized by the entire collective or from the top down. However, as I have tried to lay out in the example of the less radical CR-groups, delegation and centralization of authority can be acceptable, not as radical egalitarian, but as pragmatic egalitarian concepts on the basis of two premises. The first one is the assumption that basically all women in the group pursue to a relatively large extent the same goals. The second is the assumption that the group cohesion is based on a concept of trust and mutual respect. On these premises the absolute equality of power distribution becomes obsolete, because the more influential women will pursue a course which is in the interest of all group members. Both conditions were widely fulfilled in the case of the Health Collective: the

clarity of goals was one of the most salient characteristics of the organizations and the wish to provide quality health care and to build structures in an alternative way "led to a foundation upon which consensus could be built."⁹⁰ Under these circumstances leadership can be seen differently. Unlike in hierarchical organizations where the distribution of power runs along vertical lines from top to bottom, the authority in the participatory collective is only delegated by the group and is to be understood as an acknowledgement of special skills and experience. The salient position is only to be maintained until the special knowledge is transferred from the single person to the entire group. The creation of special task positions, such as the coordinator posts at the health group, can be described as an informal system of representation, in which members who fill positions of greater responsibility represent the interest of the others. Nonetheless they remain accountable for their decisions to the group and ultimately it is the goal of the organization to render these special positions obsolete. Coordinators lack an authority to coerce others, as do superiors in hierarchical organizations. In a pragmatic egalitarian model nobody is to be ordered to do something. In the WHC women from the smaller subsections work together with the coordinator. The development of working plans is a cooperative effort between the coordinator and the subgroup. If the coordinator's ideas have a relatively great influence, then it is because the service unit acknowledges her superior expertise in a certain field. Since the group

⁹⁰ Iannello, 1988, p.28

has the possibility of opposing the proposals of the coordinator, a permanent effort has to be made to find generally acceptable solutions.

The recognition of differences in abilities and skills and the creation of positions to utilize these human resources is a distinctive departure from the former egalitarian position in the WHC. Yet the commitment to participatory processes is documented by the fact that positions with raised influence have only a temporary character: that is, after the person with the specific skills leaves the organization the position is abolished. Moreover in order to mitigate and fill the knowledge-gap between coordinators and women in the specialized groups, coordinators are expected to share as much knowledge and information as they can with the rest of the group.⁹¹

Coordinators have competence and authority to make daily routine decisions, yet their authority ends when decisions with the potential to change the character of the organization are to be made. This is another crucial instrument against the development of hierarchical structures. The qualitative division of decisions in the Women's Health Collective is an attempt to keep the participation of all members at the highest level by debating all crucial decisions with the entire staff, and at the same time prevent these meeting from becoming trivial. A distinction between critical decisions and daily routine decisions raises the degree of efficiency, and maintains a sense of importance for the entire-membership discussions.

⁹¹ Iannello, 1988, p.17

"In the health collective it is the coordinators and their respective committees who make decisions in relation to problems they are close to and have information about. It is recognized that routine decisions have the potential for becoming critical. In the event that they do, they are reconsidered by the entire group."²

3.3.1. CONCLUSIONS

The two service groups I have portrayed represent a departure from radical egalitarianism as an ideal type of organization toward a more pragmatic egalitarianism. This approach includes to a certain degree the use of hierarchical structures. The Dayton's women center and the Health care center both illustrate failures and success of feminist organizations in their struggle to come to terms with the conflict between equality and the demands of efficiency when it comes to the management of organizations. In the case of the Dayton's Women Center the attempt failed on some accounts. The lack of clarity in the goals proved to be one of the biggest burdens. The struggle in the Women's Center exemplifies the problems arising for many feminist, egalitarian organizations when the consensual principle has to cope with too many different interests in an organization. In Dayton the differing interests of the various participating factions were often not compatible. As a result, the consensual decision making processes did not work too well. The loyalty of collective members belonged mainly to their special faction and not to the Women's center. The power struggles, developing as a consequence of this lack in fundamental agreement were meant to protect a single

² Iannello, 1988, p.24

faction's interest. This was probably the most serious problem for the development of a pragmatic egalitarian concept in Dayton Women's Center. The distrust among collective members, the anxiety that one faction might gain some territory made it impossible to delegate smaller decisions, and the egalitarian principle of "everybody decides about everything" became merely an instrument for controlling the oppositional faction.

If one has to point out the critical difference between the Dayton Women's Center and the Health Collective, it is not that the Health Collective seemingly adopted more of an hierarchical structure, but that in the atmosphere of mutual agreement about goals and procedures the Health Collective was able to shift from a negative definition of power - being equivalent to domination -to a positive definition - empowerment. The pragmatic egalitarian system in the WHC has grown from shared values and overlapping interests. It replaces the 'leveling of differences' of radical egalitarian groups by a 'utilization of differences', meaning that the variety of skills is appreciated in the pragmatic model. In this egalitarian group model, leadership is only a means to enhance the human potential of all group members. And the leadership role is mandatorily tied to the group decision. The term 'leader' takes on the meaning of coordinator or representative. A coordinator might be free to decide about the means but he is not free to decide about the ends of the organization.

The Health Collective documents the shift in feminist theories from a fixation on strict egalitarianism in radical feminist theories towards a

more relaxed, less dogmatic approach to participation, that finds its reflection in the theories of difference feminism. However by redefining the meaning of leadership and authority, feminist organizations must continually face the difficulty of keeping the balance between participation and the pull towards bureaucratization.

CONCLUSIONS

"All organizing is ideological. There is no such thing as an ethically neutral, totally dispassionate or apolitical form of management that does not favor certain forms of social activity over others, certain social arrangements over others, and certain values over others."¹

Feminist groups have tried throughout the last two decades to live up to egalitarian principles in their organizational structures. The ways and means by which they pursued this goal were quite diverse, and so was the degree of their success. Feminist groups in the early 70s adopted a notion of egalitarianism that was quite radical in its consequences. Drawing from women's experiences in large, hierarchical organizations, radical feminists had learned to fear the powerful superior. From their point of view power always came in the form of domination, and women were usually the victims. Therefore, radical feminist groups forswore the use of power against each other, or the application of hierarchical structures in their own organizations. Strongly influenced by anarchism and New Left ideas of the 60s, many feminist activists wanted absolutely egalitarian, even structureless, organizations. Individualism among the members was neglected or suppressed in the search for a collective harmonious spirit. The group was expected to act like one single-minded body. Yet, whenever CR-groups or action groups formed under these propositions, sooner or later some form of leadership structure emerged. Because in radical feminists' thoughts leadership was

¹ Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1986, p.702

so closely connected to power abuse, the emergence of groups or persons with leadership status posed a great problem. The resulting tension was often solved by excluding some persons from the organization. Blaming their power proneness was a simple answer and offered assurance for the remaining members. The theoretical framework of egalitarianism and leaderlessness was not at fault, but the personality of some women. The flaws in their characters was what fomented elitism in feminist, egalitarian groups. Yet, the ongoing exclusion of dissident members could only temporarily disguise what was obvious to those who wanted to see it: there was no such thing like a leaderless group, not to speak of structureless organizations. The strategy of exclusion only led to the dissolution of the group, not to more equality. With these experiences in mind, many feminists began to question two assumptions of radical egalitarian organizations: that unequal power distribution was an absolute evil as such, and that all forms of leadership were equivalent with domination and exploitation. This reevaluation of feminist positions regarding the terms 'leadership' and 'power' was helped by the feminist reclaiming of, suppressed female history and experiences. This new interest in traditionally typical female tasks was quite a change of position in feminist thinking - because, in the rise of radical feminism in the early 70's, women's traditional roles and activities were decried by all feminists as wholly oppressive: "First-wave feminists as varied as Kate Millet, Betty Friedan, Juliet Mitchell, and Shulamith Firestone all shared at least one common task: to desanctify the family and demystify

motherhood...Far from being an idyllic haven in a heartless world, the family appeared to ... subordinate and oppress women on a daily basis."² Yet, in the course of time, many feminists opted for a reevaluation of this position. As Elshtain argues quite convincingly, "to see women's traditional roles and activities as wholly oppressive was itself oppressive to women, denying them historic subjectivity and moral agency".³ Thus women's experiences as teachers, caretakers, mothers have gained a new relevance for feminist studies. The analysis of mothering, stripped from a patriarchal mystification of motherhood, as well as from some distortions by radical feminism, helped especially in formulating a more complex feminist position towards power. This position is mainly represented through difference feminism. In difference feminism, the function of mothering has been thematized as a different mode of power relations. In this view, 'mothering' is a social practice that women have shaped for themselves, and through its application they have come to master a special type of power which is called the "transformative power".⁴ In this model of how feminist might apply power, two aspects are important: first, one person's power is does not grow by diminishing someone else's power and secondly this type of power actively strives for a balance of

² Wartenberg, 1988, p.303

³ Elshtain, 1982, p.50

⁴ The term "transformative power" has been coined by Thomas Wartenberg, in his article on 'The concept of power in Feminist Theory', 1988.

strength among the involved individuals. This notion sees an unequal distribution of power as a situational and temporary phenomena in the relationship between human beings. This "positive face of power"³ is illustrated by difference feminists in the mother-child relationship. In the course of raising, loving and educating a child, mothers exercise power over their child in many forms. But the power exercised is rarely meant to be dominating or controlling; instead it has a protective and encouraging function. By encouraging the child to try and develop its own strength, mothers strive to transform their child into a self-assured, independent adult. The day a mother begins to care for her child the relationship is submitted to transformation. The sole decision-making role of the mother is soon replaced by a mutual exchange of wants and needs, and though the mother's wishes will prevail in the early years more often than those of the child, the process of empowerment is irreversible. At a certain point of time the relationship will come to a maturity where exercise of power is no longer necessary, appropriate or even possible. The relationship has continuously changed from complete dependency (of the child) towards a balanced relationship, marked by mutual respect and responsibility.

Yet, Ferguson cautions against an unrestricted acceptance of this model. She says:

"In their authentic rather than degenerative forms, maternal thinking and acting offer a crucial pedagogic experience - that of temporary inequality, in which power of the mother is used to foster development in the child that rights the initial disparity and ends the

³ Wartenberg, 1988, p.302

need for power. But the fact that the mother-child relation is one of inequality, even though it is a necessary and temporary mode of inequality, makes it a poor model for larger relations of citizenships, which require equality among individuals and which are rooted in respect, not love."⁶

I agree with Ferguson that empowerment in the mother-child relationship has some deficiencies if applied to autonomous adults, because as Ferguson rightfully points out, we cannot expect non-related adults to empower each other for the sake of love. Still I think this theory will prove its usefulness. To mitigate Ferguson's critique for the moment, I will just make two comments. First, some elements of this transformative power theory do not relate to the special connection between mother of child. Furthermore, the use of transformative power is not restricted to mothering. It can be found in many relationships where a more powerful person uses her/his strength to raise the other individual to an equal level - not to keep her down (as in the ideal teacher-student relationship). But in any case, I think it is this strong element of teaching and being taught in return, inherent in the notion of transformative power, which is of eminent importance for its application among adults in an organizational context. Those adults are basically strangers and do not have any 'natural' bonds like mother and child do. How does feminism justify the application of transformative power in a public organization? In short, why would a person, working in a collective, rather exercise transformative power than dominating power?

If adults form an organization on the basis of democratic

⁶ Ferguson, 1984, p.171

collectivity, such as the Women's Health Collective, superiority of some members is by definition excluded. However, it can be accepted on the premise of transformative power. Then it becomes defined as an advisory form of superiority that has to convince by the force of arguments. This power comes in the form of excellence, in other words the power stems from knowledge and therefore can be shared. But again, why would a person want to share some knowledge that establishes her position of influence, and diminish her own importance for the organization by making herself replaceable? I will not try to argue that collectivists are just 'better' persons, because a) I do not believe that and b) they do not have to be. Instead I argue, that the collectivist structure of the organization withdraws to a very large degree any incentives that make a competitive hoarding of skills a reasonable strategy. In the collective, there are no upward oriented, 'better' jobs to compete for, instead there is job rotation and a combination of creativity and routine in every position. The possibility of working in various functions diminishes envy and mystification of other jobs. The wide array of opportunities in the collective is a definite asset for all collective members. And by sheer self-selection, I would think only those people join the collective who appreciate this variety. In order to maintain this openness, they must avoid the development of specialization. It is therefore in the vital interest of all group members that all participate in the empowerment process and thereby ensures the access to all tasks. Empowerment has a levelling function, however it serves as an instrument not to keep all

members down on the same low level, but to raise everybody to higher stages of development.

Thus, by putting a skill into the service of the collective, the entire organization will improve. By teaching others, the knowledge of a single member is not enshrined as a unique capacity, and unlike in traditional organizations, skills do not set a person apart and do not serve as a justification for the hierarchy of power. Instead, the more experienced person wants the organization to thrive because, ultimately, she will thrive with it. Therefore empowerment is not an altruistic act on the side of the 'teacher'. Rather it is a gift in expectation of recompensation. Under these premises both parties will accept the fact that power will be exercised, in a temporary framework. To summarize the argument made so far, the notion of transformative power in organizations is based on a concept of mutual exchange, with the relatedness of collective members at the heart of the matter.

This idea suggests that an egalitarian organization is better off, if it allows all its members to learn from each other. Theoretically, everybody can offer expertise, and get satisfaction when their influence makes a difference in the collective's success. In return, they are not narrowed down to their particular field of expertise. Instead, they can expand their own potential by learning from others. This mutual giving and taking will ultimately lead to a collective with holistically skilled individuals. They join forces because, as a collective and also as individuals, the combined effort will bring them further than a hierarchy-

induced competition for resources or positions ever could. However, the credibility of this concept depends heavily on one condition. The superior knowledge of the 'teacher', the 'expert' or 'coordinator' must not provide her with a decision-making power. Influence must rest on the ability to convince, make plausible arguments. The position as such should not lead to a distinction among collective members of superiors and subordinates. Transformative power must not affect the "value" of each member, or her right to challenge opinions. The fact that somebody has an extraordinary knowledge on a certain subject must not mean that her point of view achieves the weight of an order, that has to be followed. It must remain an opinion, that can be supported or opposed by all other collective members.

As long as collective members view themselves as partners, and partners with exceptional skills are seen as power resources, empowerment is practiced. As long as the possession of expertise does not imply the possession of special rights, the sharing of expertise leads to an expansion of power that includes all collectivists. Then the politics in the collective become more a matter of locating the group will and the advancement of the collective as a whole than a mere balance of interests or control over different groups.

Is this concept of transformative power as utopian as the radical egalitarianism of some feminist groups of the early 70's? In returning to the findings of my analysis I would like to think that the transformative use of power is already a piece of reality - and not only in the mother-

child relationship, but in many collectivist organizations.

The Health Collective has in my opinion found a way to combine the egalitarianism of radical feminism and the empowerment philosophy of difference feminism. They generated a pragmatic egalitarian model that utilizes its members' skills extensively and at the same time develops their potential within a flexible work situation. In order to combine a certain standard of efficiency with the imperative of general participation in the decision making process, the Health Collective draws a distinction between critical and routine decisions. This tactic is not without pitfalls, because the decision about what is critical and what routine rests in the hands of the coordinator. So the coordinator has a major responsibility towards the avoidance of hierarchical structures. However, the Health Collective uses two mechanisms or counter-controlling devices to keep bureaucratic-hierarchical outgrow in check. The first is that even routine decisions can be challenged by all group members. Routine decisions come in the form of recommendations in this feminist collective. If these decisions do not find the consent of collective members involved, they can demand a thorough discussion at the full assembly. Thus, one control function against the emergence of an hierarchical order lies within the ability of the collective members to have a check on decisions made by the coordinator. This confidence to question decisions made by a coordinator is the heritage of radical feminism and its stand for egalitarianism. From there comes the explicit denunciation of expertise as a justification for augmented power, and the basic belief that every opinion is of same

value. Accordingly these fragments of radical feminist thought generate the belief that authority can only rest with the collective, never with a single person within the collective.

The second mechanism working against power-abuse of the coordinator or the emergence of hierarchical structures lies within the nature of the coordinator herself and the incentive structure of the collective organization. One major asset coming forth by working in a collective is the wide variety of job opportunities available. Therefore it is not in the coordinators interest to narrow down the palette of possibilities by introducing more hierarchy. In the end she would limit her own potential. This way of thinking can be linked to the influence of difference feminism and its claim for empowerment. Thus, the two terms - 'egalitarianism' and 'empowerment' - the first one guiding the early feminist collectives, the later one being embraced by feminist theorists in the 80's, have come together to provide feminist collectives with a useful theoretical foundation. Like in hierarchical organizations they provide them with a corporate identity. It is an identity shaped by feminist consciousness-raising, but it has a realistic edge by acknowledging the existence of differences among people. Unlike egalitarianism which tried to suppress these deviations, the philosophy of empowerment ultimately sees them as an enrichment for the community and tries to employ them for the benefit of the community. But again this acceptance of difference is kept in balance with the claim for equality and egalitarianism, which argues against allowing differences in skills from becoming differences in

institutionalized status.

If this thesis has met only parts of its self-imposed challenge, then I would hope it is the underscoring of the feminist claim that hierarchy is not the only or most natural way of organizing human beings. Certainly it is not the best way to accommodate the human need for purpose and relatedness, at work and elsewhere.

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