A Job Full of Conflicts

The experiences of women child protection social workers in New Zealand

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Abstract

This qualitative study researched the experiences of ten women who worked as care and protection social workers in the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service in New Zealand. Although there is an extensive literature on social work theory and practice, little has been recorded internationally or in New Zealand about the experiences of women social workers throughout the span of their working lives. This thesis sought to redress that imbalance.

The participants had a minimum of three years and a combined total of eighty-three years, working in the agency. They were interviewed about their general work experiences, the way they practised social work, the effects of the work on them, the influence of feminist ideas on their work and about identifying as lesbian or as heterosexual in their workplaces.

The participants' general work experiences were analysed within the framework of a theory about women's career choice and work behaviour. Their social work practice was analysed against a number of sets of practice principles in the feminist social work literature. A chapter was devoted to exploring the experiences of lesbian social workers.

The participants found their work satisfying and challenging but also stressful. This stress was greatly compounded by changes to the organisation's management practices which had arisen from the State sector reforms. These had generated an environment in which it was impossible to practise social work thoroughly and safely. The social workers' enthusiasm and hope was being sapped by the organisation's obsession with outputs, administration, and data collection.

Guidelines for the future of statutory child protection services in New Zealand were developed, based on the participants' experiences.

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

An Introduction

> "... the practitioners themselves seem to have been caught up in the enthusiasm ... not only keeping up with the pace of reform but outpacing their managers, their 'hope' driving them on to make 'personal suggestions'. They take initiatives, develop ideas, and begin to conceive of new and varied forms of therapies and ways of helping to reconstruct these lives. This seems to enable them to find meaning in labour that was invariably emotionally gruelling and always contentious. While the nature of their own subjective experience would always be difficult to assess, these practitioners were no mere organizational dupes or lackeys of a bourgeois state, but social actors actively constructing the foundations of modern forms of knowledge, of therapeutic and cultural practice: in short, a professional culture that would take child protection into the twentieth century. And they seemed to do this because they had some vision of the work as a whole and its value to the emerging liberal social order and community of which it was a central part" (Harry Ferguson, 1990:135).

This picture of early child protection workers relates to another country in a different century, late nineteenth century England, and is drawn from accounts of casework within the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children). As part of a "systematic legal and social child protection practice in response to ... a major problem of child abuse" (Ferguson, 1990:121), NSPCC officers investigated complaints of child ill-treatment and neglect, gathered evidence from neighbours and other welfare workers, removed children to 'safety' through the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Acts and attempted to punish and then rehabilitate erring parents. Their activities would not be out of place within a description of the contemporary child protection social worker's[1] role.

The workers themselves were very different from those in my world of social

[1] The terms "social worker", "care and protection social worker" and "child protection social worker" are used interchangably in this study to refer to social workers employed in the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service who work in the area of child care and protection.

work. They were my predecessors as paid child protection social workers, but also men in uniform, Inspectors from the NSPCC, who were largely recruited from the Services, with "proven abilities to respect and carry out orders" (Ferguson, 1990:133). Despite our differences, across the years and distance, their hopes and struggles to find meaning in social work are recognisable. The stories of their efforts, the contradictions of practice and the curt rebuffs from management are familiar. Many of their questions, and the doubts which lingered when cases were finally closed, have been my own.

Ferguson made the case that child protection social work is a century old, not merely the product of the post-war welfare state, and that intense recent interest in child abuse results in this history being forgotten. To take child abuse seriously today, he wrote, we must validate the past and seek the history of child protection practice.

This thesis is a herstory and records the experiences of women child protection social workers in New Zealand, before they become our forgotten past. The topic has been of interest to me for a variety of reasons. Social work, and a brief period as a counsellor, in statutory and voluntary agencies has been my occupation for eighteen years, a passion as well as a livelihood. Most of that time has been spent in child protection work within a statutory organisation, which is now called the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service (CYPFS). The delights of the work have been abundant and the frustrations of working in a government department, overwhelming. My experience has been that women are discriminated against in every area of welfare services, as clients and as workers, and that struggling for change from within existing institutions achieves little other than tinkering with patriarchal structures. This has often led to a feeling of bewilderment about my reasons for continuing to work in an occupation which is, on the face of it, so unrewarding, within an agency where so much is amiss. In the past five years I have seen children's rights to safety becoming secondary to the requirements of the Public Finance Act and women workers losing ground. A curiosity to understand my own working life was motivation for this research.

Irritation was also a motivator. Social work is, and always has been, primarily a women's profession but little has been written by women about the experiences of women practitioners. Most of the literature on women in bureaucratic organisations records and theorises the experiences of managers, not women who struggle for change from the bottom of a hierarchy. Books and social work journals concentrate on theory and have, on the whole, been written by academics, most of whom are male. Feminists who write from the outside of organisations tend to be critical of those who work within, and references to social workers are seldom positive. I wanted to counter this with voices of women who had worked in child protection from a feminist value base while the welfare state declined around them, then strive to understand their experiences.

Talking with other women about why we do what we do, and trying to understand the experiences of women in social work agencies became something of an obsession after I returned to part time study in 1993. The more I thought about it, the more it puzzled and interested me. Why did women get into social work and why did they stay? What would women who had survived in the job for years say about this? What were the really significant experiences in their working lives? Why did so many lesbians work in the care and protection field and did our experiences differ from those of heterosexual women social workers? Did other women with years of experience in child protection work think it was possible to do feminist social work in a statutory agency and what did "doing feminist social work" mean for them in practice?

My interest in the relationship between feminism and social work and in researching women's working lives was heightened by my experiences during 1994-5. In that year I acted as manager of a large social work office. I was able to develop ideas and explore some ways in which the erosion of morale could be stemmed by introducing different management practices, based on a feminist approach. The structure which eventuated seemed more humane and non-hierarchical; less crushing and more supportive. I wondered how other women

had experienced the organisation. By the end of the year I had decided that the working lives of care and protection social workers would be my research topic.

As I carried out this study I was propelled by anxiety about what is happening to social work and social workers. The effects of repeated restructuring in social work agencies, the impact of New Public Management[2] increasing workloads, dwindling resources, and greater exposure to violence, have made the job more difficult. During most of the past seven years I have been supervising care and protection social workers and had become acutely aware of this. Continuous change within CYPFS, often for no comprehensible reason, seemed to be damaging social workers' morale. The organisation had increasing difficulty retaining experienced staff. Alongside this, sickness and stress levels seemed to be rising and I observed a pattern of young, enthusiastic, intelligent new social workers, most of them women, becoming burdened with complex work too soon and leaving within two years, despondent, and worn out. The way the organisation spoiled their energy and hope enraged me. Statutory social workers have been distracted from work with children to become administrators, budget managers, computer operators and gatherers of meaningless data, to meet the needs of the organisation. Social work skills and quality of work are now of secondary importance.

This should not be so. Working with a problem as complex as child abuse requires complex skills and the work is enormously stressful. Imagine, for instance, what a social worker must know and be able to do, for her to deal with the following:

- A telephone call from a hospital in which a doctor states that a child has been taken into the accident and emergency department with bruising and a broken bone. The child seems frightened, the parents' explanation does not fit with the injuries and they are about to remove the child from the hospital.

[2] The central features of New Public Management are a stress on management skills in preference to technical or professional skills; a reliance on quantifiable output measures and performance targets; new reporting, monitoring and accountability systems; the separation of commercial from non-commercial functions and policy advice from policy implementation; a preference for private ownership,contracting out, and contestability in public service provision; the imitation of some private sector management practices; a preference for monetary incentive; and a stress on cost-cutting, efficiency and cutback management. (Boston, 1991 in Boston and others, 1991: 9)

- Information from a school principal reporting that a child has told a teacher her father has been sexually abusing her.
- Information about children who are physically and emotionally neglected, humiliated, whose behaviour is out of control, or who are from homes where poverty, poor health, racism or isolation have eroded the parents' hope, to the extent that they have given up.

A social worker's failure to intervene well can result in death or further harm to the child, or intrusion which achieves little and damages those involved. Every referral involves balancing children's rights against adults' rights, and weighing family privacy against the role of the state. In the course of their work, social workers see the courage and resilience of ordinary people leading heroic lives. They are also exposed to unforgettable miseries and awareness that for many children, all that can be offered is too little, too late. These difficulties, inherent in the nature of child protection social work, are compounded by organisational mismanagement and vilification of social workers in the media. Failures are made very public and good work usually remains invisible.

I interviewed ten pakeha women who had worked in care and protection social work in the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service for more than three years. After the material from the individual interviews was analysed I wrote to the participants about how I had done this and what I had found. I then met with the participants in two groups, one of lesbian and one of heterosexual women, to discuss my findings and generate conclusions based on our collective ideas. Information from the group discussions which was about lesbian identity and the differences between lesbian and heterosexual social workers was incorporated into chapter seven, on the lesbian social workers' experiences. The other data from the group discussions forms chapter eight.

This research is based on a small, purposive sample of pakeha women living in an urban area who are experts in their area of work. They have in total 83 years' experience working in a statutory child protection agency, but their experiences and

opinions cannot be generalised to all other women working in the organisation. Maori and Pacific Island women and women working in rural areas will have very different stories and priorities.

My research perspective and methodology were feminist and based on the idea that research should be used to understand and improve women's lives. I used methods which were appropriate to the questions I asked, the information which I sought, and to my audience.

Feminist research seeks to identify the forces which maintain women's subordination to men. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the variety and differences of women's experiences and perceptions (Brenda Smith & Carolyn Noble-Spruell, 1986; Marilyn Frye, 1983; Frye, 1992; Liz Stanley & Sue Wise, 1990; Shulamit Reinharz, 1992). The relationship between researcher and researched is subject to scrutiny because of the potential for exploitation (Stanley & Wise, 1990; Ann Oakley, 1981; Janet Finch, 1984 & 1986). Feminist research invites the researcher to state her biases openly, admit her mistakes, acknowledge difference and to explore the silences and gaps in her research, (Wise, 1987:72; Maria Mies, 1983; Joan Cummerton, 1986; Sue Wilkinson & Celia Kitzinger, 1996).

Because my areas of interest were broad and my research covered a number of different aspects of the participants' experience and practice, the literature review was incorporated into each chapter. This enabled me to link history, feminist theory, social work theory and the subject of lesbian identity more closely to the social workers' experiences and to illustrate theory with examples from the participants' work. My search of the literature covered the development of social work as a paid profession. The development of child welfare legislation and services in New Zealand were covered in more depth. I considered several theories of work choice and career development and analysed the social workers experiences within the framework of a model of career choice and work behaviour devised by Helen Astin (Astin, 1985). I surveyed the feminist social work literature and compared the experiences of the participants against guidelines for feminist

practice which had been laid out by the authors of these texts (Nan Van Den Bergh & Lynn Cooper, 1986; Mary Nash, 1989; Lena Dominelli and Eileen McLeod, 1989; Wise, 1990; Marie McNay, 1992; Van Den Bergh, 1995; Helen Land, 1995). The experiences of the lesbian social workers were analysed under four themes and I considered some contrasts between the experiences of the lesbian and heterosexual social workers.

The information from the individual interviews was analysed using a process of content analysis. Sue Middleton's description of her research process was useful in working out the details of how to go about this (Middleton, 1993). I also referred to the coding and categorisation procedures used in grounded theory in order to make the process of analysis as systematic as I could (Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory offers techniques which a researcher can use to guard against misinterpreting data because of the inevitable "biases, prejudices, and stereotypical perspectives" which she brings to the analytical situation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:7).

The social workers' experiences divided into two main themes: emotional and spiritual responses to the work, and issues to do with social structures and the organisation. The nature of the organisation was reported by all the women I interviewed as the biggest source of stress in their working lives. Its goals and policies seemed no longer to be conducive to good social work practice and they felt frustrated with their employing agency. This greatly compounded the stresses innate in care and protection social work. Women spoke about feeling uncared for and unvalued by the organisation and they disagreed with policies which were aimed at cutting public spending rather than creating a just society. This was incompatible with their reasons for entering and remaining in social work. The social workers analysed the organisation from a feminist perspective and had no illusions about what was happening to social services organisations in New Zealand. The lesbian social workers all wished to work in an environment where they could be open about their sexual identity. All had experienced discrimination, often subtly expressed, in the course of their employment and they

had no confidence that the organisation would protect them against discrimination by clients.

Each social worker I interviewed had found ways of preserving her integrity and her feminist values while working within a statutory organisation. Their stamina, skills and commitment to child protection work were astonishing. Working in teams with other women sustained them and they enjoyed the variety and continuous challenges which came with the work. Women were also losing hope and on the brink of despair. They felt that government policies and practices which have become part of state sector management since the State Sector Act 1988, and the Public Finance Act 1989 were passed had eroded their agency's social work service, possibly beyond repair.

My study is organised as follows: My research perspective and methodology are described. This is followed by an overview of the development of social work as a paid occupation, the development of child protection legislation and services in New Zealand, and the role of statutory child protection social workers. My research findings are then discussed. This is done in four sections, each of which includes a review of relevant literature. The first two sections cover the social workers' general work experiences in two themes, experiences which were emotionally and spiritually significant, and those to do with social structures and the organisation. The third section is about feminist social work and explores my particular interest in the influence of feminist values on the participants' social work practice. Section four is on the experience of identifying as lesbian at work. Next, I cover the group discussions which I held with the women participants. I conclude with some guidelines for the future of statutory child protection social work services in New Zealand, which I developed from the literature and from my research findings.

CHAPTER 2

Perspective and Methodology

> Developing theory of this sort is something like reading the varying patterns of the weather off a weathered landscape. The observations one makes on the ground are not used as data, in any strict sense of the word, so much as they give one *clues*. One proceeds more by something like an aesthetic sense of pattern or theme than by classical scientific method. Depending on what one has already figured out, a single detail of an anecdote from one woman's experience may be exactly as fertile a clue as a carefully gotten and fully documented statistical result of a study of a thousand women ..." (Marilyn Frye, 1983: xii).

Introduction

This work was a re/search for clues to understand the experiences of women social workers. I used a feminist theoretical perspective and feminist research methods. By this, I mean that my approach was based on a belief that women's interests are universally subordinated to those of men through social, political and economic systems. Feminism is a range of theories and a political movement which aims to understand and alter the power relations between women and men.

The choice of methodology was grounded in my own world view: feminism has provided the only framework to understand the world which has made sense in my own life. Feminist research methods provided a way of working as a researcher which fitted my subject matter and goals. I wanted to interview women with feminist ideals in a respectful way which valued them as experts, and to involve them in constructing the meanings of their work experiences. It was important to me that women who gave up their time to participate would, at best, enjoy being involved. At the very least, I did not want to exploit their willingness to talk with me, waste their time or produce a report which used inaccessible language and terms which were unfamiliar. The texts on feminist research

emphasised the need to keep participants' interests uppermost and constantly reminded me of my priorities.

Shulamit Reinharz's text on feminist research methods drew my attention to the use of impersonal and "masculinist" surnames and influenced the style with which I referred to the work of other people (Reinharz, 1992). Throughout this report an author's first name, if known to me, is used in the first reference to the work of that author. A sense of entitlement to put myself in the text, I owe to Alison Jones's writing about her educational research in a girls' secondary school (Jones, 1992). I too thought I knew that objectivity and neutrality were myths, but finding a personal voice was vastly more difficult than I had anticipated. At some level I had continued to equate "real" research with the impersonal reporting of "facts" and an absence of contradictions. These writers' suggestions and examples about experimenting with style gave me the confidence to try and co-author a chapter of my thesis with the research participants.

I now outline my understanding of various research perspectives. I next describe my choice of research methods, and the interview process which I used. The meanings of these terms are discussed and defined. The process of data analysis is then explained. Discussion about ethics follows. Finally, I introduce the participants.

Theoretical Perspective and Methodology

The terms "perspective" and "paradigm" are used interchangeably in much of the research literature to mean a world view, a "way of breaking down the complexity of the real world" (Sotirios Sarantakos, 1993:30), and a set of propositions to explain that perception. Sarantakos divided social science research into three major perspectives: positivism, interpretive social science and critical theory, while acknowledging that there is no common agreement about this. Each of the three perspectives contains diversity as well as similarities and there are overlaps between the three views.

"Methodology" is also defined in the literature in a number of ways, some versions being analogous to definitions of "research models". Other, more abstract definitions, offer. research principles related closely to a distinct paradigm. Two main methodological approaches, quantitative methodology and qualitative methodology, result from these definitions. There is disagreement about whether feminist methodology is, or is not, distinct from qualitative methodology.

The following section summarises the perspectives and methodologies which have traditionally been used in social science research, then explores what is meant by "feminist research".

The positivistic perspective

Positivism is the oldest and historically dominant perspective, linked to the work of A. Le Comte (1798-1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and expanded by many other theorists. It is the perspective popularly thought of as "scientific" in which knowledge is claimed to be factual and value-free, objective, unbiased and deductive. Reality, as positivism defines it, is anything which may be observed through the senses. It is predictable, independent of human consciousness and governed by unchangeable natural laws. Positivism argues for one reality and one truth. Within a positivistic perspective, humans are considered to be rational individuals without free will, governed by fixed natural laws. Behaviour is learned through observation and is governed by external causes. The purpose of positivist research is to uncover facts and predict events.

The interpretive perspective

The most prominent social scientist whose work lies within the interpretive category is Max Weber (1864-1920). The foundation of this perspective is a belief that reality is not based on universal laws, but is subjective and socially constructed through interaction between human beings. Reality, in this perspective, is thought to be experienced internally as people attempt to make sense of their lives. Social

science research carried out within an interpretive framework aims to interpret and understand the subjective meaning of human behaviour.

The critical perspective

The critical perspective in social science originated with the work of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and covers conflict theory, critical sociology, Marxism and feminism (Sarantakos, 1993:34). Critical theory views humans as creative and adjustable but also as restricted, oppressed and exploited by social factors and "their fellow men". This may not be experienced consciously and the illusion that this oppression is acceptable is termed "false consciousness". Critical theorists contend that false consciousness stunts the realisation of human potential.

The critical theorist's perception of science lies between positivism and interpretive social science; between determinism and humanism. Critical social science is an engaged science, meaning that it assumes involvement and activism on the part of the researcher and theoretician. Research within the critical perspective aims to explore a multi-faceted reality and has an emancipatory intent.

Feminist theory lies within the critical tradition. It is "... a body of knowledge which offers critical explanations of women's subordination ... the explanation does not seek to reinforce or legitimate, but rather attempts to undermine, expose or challenge, women's subordination. It also tends to operate at some level of abstraction, using analytical categories which move beyond the individual case ... feminist theory offers some kind of analysis and explanation of how and why women have less power than men, and how this imbalance could be challenged and transformed" (Jacky Stacey, 1993:49-50).

Quantitative research methodology is based on a positivist or neo positivist perspective and is the methodological approach most commonly used in research within the physical sciences (Sarantakos, 1993:40). It is deductive, claims to be value free and is focused on the gathering of facts.

Qualitative research is more diverse both in form and theoretical base. The central principles of this have been summarised as openness in all aspects and geared towards exploration. The qualitative approach to research is based on a process of communication between researcher and respondent. It is process-oriented, in that the purpose of research is considered to be to identify the process of constructing reality, patterns of meaning and actions. Every symbol or meaning is considered to be a reflexion of the context in which it developed (Sarantakos, 1993:50). Clear and accurate explanations to respondents are required. Research is flexible and is based on guidelines rather than rules (Sarantakos, 1993:49). Other theorists have pointed out that the use of qualitative research does not, in itself, guarantee that important aspects of women's lives will be revealed (Toby Epstein Jayaratne & Abigail Stewart, 1991:96).

Research design is variously described as "design", "model", "conceptual framework", or "map" and involves researchers in specifying "in some way how, where, when and under what conditions they will collect and analyse their data" (Sarantakos, 1993:98).

Research methods are the tools of research, determined by the major elements of the methodology in which they are embedded. In a sense, they are not linked to theory. The same method, interviews for instance, can be used in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The style of interviewing, however, is affected by the chosen methodology.

I drew on an number of methods and used these qualitatively: interviewing and group discussion, analysis of the content of interviews, some aspects of the life history method and some comparison between the experiences of two groups of women.

Feminist Research

"Feminist theory" and "feminist theoretical perspective" have a range of meanings. Some feminists argue that "theory" is better described as "theorizing by a feminist" (Rose Coser, 1989:200-207). Another view is that theory is necessary for women to be able to analyse and make sense of their experiences and identify the forces which maintain women's subordination to men. This theory must, however, acknowledge the variety and differences of women's experiences and perceptions (Frye, 1983:xi), (Frye, 1992:71).

There is also debate about the term "feminist methodology". Most (male) social scientists consider feminist research to lie within the context of the two established methodologies. Others term it an " "emergent methodology", leaving its real position in the social sciences to be established in the future" (Sarantakos, 1993:58). Many feminist social scientists oppose this definition and lay claim to a distinct feminist methodology which should use any and every means available to investigate the condition of women (Stanley, 1990b:12), (Stanley & Wise, 1990:37-39). Jayaratne & Stewart (1991) discussed the definitional difficulties of "qualitative", "quantitative", "method" and "methodology" and suggested the use of Sandra Harding's distinctions among the terms. Harding defined "methodology" as a theory of how to conduct research and how theory is applied.

Feminist research grew out of disillusionment with positivism as the dominant social science theory (Smith & Noble-Spruell, 1986:134). This had led to women being objectified and excluded from written history and scientific enquiry. Not only did women lack political, economic and interpersonal power but "scientific" knowledge had focused on men, studied issues of concern for men and had excluded the lives and work of women. Feminist criticism of traditional research has been a long-standing feature of attempts by women to change the status quo (Reinharz, 1992:12). The objections to traditional research have been summarised to include: the selection of sexist and elitist research topics, biased research designs which included the selection of only male subjects, an exploitative relationship

between researcher and subject, the illusion of objectivity, the simplistic and superficial nature of research data, improper interpretation and overgeneralisation of findings and inadequate data dissemination and utilisation (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991).

The omission of women's experiences from social science was initially addressed by the inclusion of many topics previously thought not to be suitable for research. Housework, childbirth, mothering and women's work began to be investigated by women social scientists. For radical feminists this was seen as a gap-filling exercise, merely serving to marginalise women further. What was required, they believed, was a focus on gender and the perspectives of women, a more fundamental analysis of existing social science frameworks, and a rigorous questioning about what actually counts as knowledge and who controls it (Stanley & Wise, 1990:38). A more radical analysis has paid attention to problems in the use of qualitative methods by feminist researchers and has challenged the assumption that the use of a qualitative methodology is necessarily non-hierarchical and prevents a researcher from exploiting and manipulating research subjects (Stanley, 1990a).

Common to all feminist research is the valuing of women and women's perspectives both as researchers and as respondents (Smith & Noble-Spruell, 1986:139&146). There is a concern with ethics and insistence that the relationship between the researcher and the researched must be co-operative and non-exploitative. The work of women social scientists which has been most influential in shaping my own ideas about feminist research is discussed briefly below.

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise summarised and analysed a range of views about what was meant by "feminist research" (Stanley, 1990a). Feminist theory they defined as being derived from experience analytically entered into by enquiring feminists, continually subject to revision and accessible to everyone. Stanley and Wise stressed that "feminism" should be present in conscious ways within the research process, in research behaviour and in written research reports. Feminist research should be committed to changing the oppression of women. They argued strongly

against feminist social scientists positioning themselves as experts on and over other women's experiences. The work of Stanley and Wise explored "silences" and the exclusion of black and lesbian standpoints within feminist research. Other feminist writers, such as Joan Cummerton, commented on the importance of silences and on differences between the experiences of the researcher and the research participants (Cummerton, 1986). These, it was suggested, can be used positively to expand dialogue and create knowledge which is unexpected and unpredictable. Representing "the Other", and questioning who is entitled to speak, on behalf of whom, is topical in very recent writing on feminist research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996).

The methods used by Maria Mies in her feminist action research with a group of women, reviewed and extended many of the ideas for feminist research proposed by others. Although the nature of Mies's research is quite different from my own, her guidelines were useful in clarifying my thinking about how to proceed. Mies proposed that the researcher openly state her biases, that she must be committed to changing the status quo, and that women must talk together about their experiences and generalise from this in order to understand the social causes of individual deprivation (Smith & Noble-Spruell, 1986). My interest in using group discussions to critique and add to, or change, any conclusions I reached after analysing the individual interviews was sparked by reading about the work of researchers, such as Mies, who had used action methods.

Patti Lather examined what it means to do empirical research in an unjust world and the implications of searching for an emancipatory approach (Lather, 1986). The central task for researchers committed to critiquing and changing the status quo is, Lather argued, the issue of empirical accountability. By this she meant the need to offer grounds for accepting a researcher's description and analysis and the search for ways of establishing the trustworthiness of data (Lather, 1986:439-40). Three issues discussed by Lather influenced my research design: reciprocity, dialectical theory building and validity.

Reciprocity, which implies a mutual negotiation of meaning and power, operates at two points: between researcher and researched and between data and theory. Lather suggested that researchers should consciously use their work to help participants understand and change their situations. An intent in my research design was that interpretation of the data and the construction of meaning should be a process which involved all participants.

Lather recommended a number of ways in which theory could be developed within the researcher's framework, without that framework becoming "the container into which the data must be poured" (Lather, 1986:447). These suggestions included the active involvement of participants in constructing and validating meaning, a focus on contradictions which provide entry points for a process of critiquing ideology, and the importance of the participants' reactions to the results of the research. I found these useful, not only as guidelines to incorporate into my research design, but as part of my learning about how to think about the purpose of research.

Feminist research methods

Any method can be "feminist" as this is determined not by the methods themselves but by the perspective. There is a measure of agreement among feminist writers that research needs to be *for* women and creative in method. Feminist researchers acknowledge that in practice research is a much more idiosyncratic, varied and chaotic process than one would ever expect from reading social research textbooks. Anything that works can be acceptable, providing it is ethical, and there is scope for innovation, such as collective authorship. This does not imply that rigour is absent and reliability and validity are considered to be unimportant. Patti Lather is one of many feminist writers who have offered ideas about how to achieve validity and protect our work "from our passions and our limitations". Lather's ideas included extending the concept of triangulation to include multiple data sources, methods and theoretical schemes, and questioning the theoretical tradition within which a researcher operates.

The interview method

As a tool of social research, interviewing is an everyday behaviour used in a planned, structured and purposeful way. The degree of structure required depends on the topic, purpose, resources, methodological standards and preferences and the information sought. There are a large number of interview types with much overlap between them. Used well in qualitative research, interviewing can be difficult, time consuming and demanding of both interviewer and respondent. There are also many advantages. The method is flexible. A high response rate is achievable because of the presence of the interviewer and the opportunity to discuss participation. A capacity to correct misunderstandings and opportunities to observe and record non-verbal behaviour are inherent in the method, as is control over the date, time, environment and the ways in which the information is obtained and recorded. The involvement of known participants gives scope for using longer and more complex questions (Sarantakos, 1993:188).

The interview method in feminist research

Stories told by women to women interviewers are widely used within feminist research as a method of recording and making visible the lives of women hidden from history. I found the work of Ann Oakley (1981), Janet Finch (1984), Sue Wise (1987) and Sue Middleton (1993) especially useful in gaining an understanding of concerns about the use of interview methods in traditional research, the range of narrative interview methods used in feminist studies and the ethical issues which must be addressed. Common to all four writers is a focus on the involvement of the researcher in the research process, the use of informal methods and a non-exploitative relationship with the participants. Ann Oakley's experiences of researching led her to reject the traditional approach which presumes a predominantly masculine model of sociology and society. The paradigm in traditional texts is, she challenged, based on understanding the interviewer either as a gatherer of data on passive subjects or as a psychoanalyst whose relationship to the interviewee is hierarchical. "Proper" and "improper" interviewing have paralleled widespread gender stereotyping of females as subordinate and males as

dominant. Oakley made the case that, when feminists interview women, the use of prescribed practice is morally indefensible. In most cases, she argued, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest her or his own personal identity in the relationship. In her own research Oakley took an approach which was very different from the guidelines in sociology texts. She answered questions, developed friendships with interviewees and considered her work as an essential way of giving the subjective situation of women greater visibility. The interviewer's role became a gatherer of data for those whose lives were being researched.

Janet Finch's research involved interviewing clergy wives, a group to which she belonged at the time of her study. Her writing was of interest because I was also doing "insider research" with women whose lives were linked to my own through our occupation and friendships. With five of the participants I had in common a lesbian identity. Finch's concerns about the readiness with which women will talk to a women researcher and the exploitative potential of being trusted gave me food for thought. The reasons for such ready trust are, she suggested, that women are more used than men to accepting intrusion into their lives through questioning. The settings in which qualitative research is often conducted (in Finch's case, the women's own homes) promote trust. Interviews carried out in participants' homes can take on the character of an intimate conversation and women's consignment to the privatised, domestic sphere makes it more likely that they will talk to a sympathetic listener.

Finch noted that interviewees may reveal very private information in return for flimsy guarantees of confidentiality. Information, given readily, may be used ultimately against the collective interests of women. This was a dilemma for me in carrying out this study. I worried about the consequences of drawing attention to the work practices and attitudes of women social workers whose values clash with the ideology promoted by the organisation. Could any of the information be

used against the interests of social workers as a group, against feminists in the organisation or to disadvantage and discriminate against lesbians? I needed to remind myself of Audre Lorde's words, "My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you" (Lorde, 1984:41). I also discussed these questions with the participants during group discussions.

Sue Wise argued against generalising Oakley's solutions to the problems of objectification and exploitation within the research process. She asserted that reciprocity and intimacy are problematic with women whose status is different from the researcher, or whose views differ, or where there is a lack of mutual liking. Sharing the same structural relationship to society and being similarly oppressed does not remove the power imbalance inherent in the research relationship. The accepted solutions to this problem of power, shared sisterhood and careful use of methods, are, Wise insisted, a romantic myth and a misreading of the features of qualitative methodology. Her solution was to acknowledge that it is impossible to avoid inequality in the research relationship because it is constituted within an inherently hierarchical framework. Feminist researchers must, therefore, learn to work within this hierarchical relationship and deal with power wisely.

Sue Middleton, writing in New Zealand, described in detail her interviewing methods used in a three year doctoral research project (Middleton, 1993). She paid attention to ethical and political issues such as confidentiality and the difficulties of writing in a way which did not alienate women from their own stories while at the same time meeting the requirements of academic conventions. I drew on Middleton's descriptions of actual interviews to design my use of the interview method and develop ideas about how to categorise the data. My intention became to ask broader questions and to be more reticent as an interviewer but to try and achieve the same sense of passionate interest and participation which Middleton's transcripts convey.

Use of the interview method in this study

Two types of interviews were used in this study: semi-standardised, open (without response categories), personal (face to face), single interviews (questioning one person at a time) and semi-structured group interviews. I drew on the narrative approach because the topic of my research involved the whole social work careers of women.

The interview questions (Appendix 3) explored the experiences of the participants in five broad areas:

- Their practice style and the influence of feminist ideas on their social work practice.
- The experiences during the time of their employment which the participants thought had most shaped their working lives.
- The effects on the participants of doing care and protection social work.
- Issues to do with being lesbian or heterosexual.
- What each participant felt had most enabled her to stay in social work or what had caused her to leave.

These were preceded by introductory questions about the choice of social work as an occupation, the jobs women had held, and the length of time they had worked in each position.

I asked the first woman I interviewed, Gabe, who was a friend, for feedback about what it had felt like to be on the receiving end of my questioning and what she thought I had missed. Her response led me to make some changes in the question sheet which I used with the other nine social workers. For example, in Gabe's interview I had asked, "How did you get into social work?" and missed hearing about relevant work experience. We discussed how else this could have been worded:

> Marnie: If the question was, "How do you think you became the sort of person who ended up in social work?"
> Gabe: I probably would have started further back because I worked running support groups for single mums and adolescent mothers and their babies and their children, which I did very, very much from a feminist perspective but called it community work. Yet I never mentioned that as a beginning so it might have been quite useful for you to have said "Give me a quick potted work history. What jobs have you done?"
> Marnie: What if I'd said, "*How* do you think you became the sort of person who ended up in social work?" What would you have answered?
> Gabe: I think I was probably pretty well socialised as a female to do a caring kind of job. Social work wasn't an option was it in my day. You didn't leave school and become a social worker ... you left school and you became a nurse or a teacher.

In later interviews I asked participants, "When and how did you become a social worker?" and explored the process more fully. I also included a final question asking if there was anything else important about her time in social work that the woman felt I had not covered in the interview. Some social workers used this question to elaborate on things they had said earlier while others thought they had covered pretty well everything in earlier answers.

In the year before I began my thesis I had talked to a number of colleagues about possibly making social workers' experiences my research topic. All the women to whom I mentioned my interest made responses like, "Well you could definitely interview me!" Several women asked me later when I would be starting my research and reminded me that they were willing to participate.

I began my research by writing to ten of these women with information about my project and a consent form (Appendices 1 & 2). Each woman still wished to be involved. I then arranged interview times to suit the participants. Several of these times needed reorganising to fit in with unexpected demands of the women's family and work responsibilities. It suited four women to be interviewed in their own homes and six at my home, in the evening or during the weekend. The time each interview took varied from one and a half to three and a half hours. They

took place during a very wet mid-winter and often women drove to the interview long distances and across the city at the end of their working day, in foul conditions and through peak evening traffic. I was extremely grateful for their willingness to participate, their time, energy, humour and the wisdom they shared with me.

All interviews were audio-taped. I listened to each tape after the interview was completed and noted anything that was indistinct while the discussion was still fresh in my mind. The tapes were then transcribed. Three were transcribed by a woman I employed to do this, and her time was paid for with a grant I had received from the Massey University Graduate Research Fund. The transcriber signed a statement of confidentiality (Appendix 4). The transcriber was, unexpectedly, unavailable to work on the other tapes. I therefore transcribed the other seven myself which was time consuming but meant that I became very familiar with the material and very confident of the accuracy of transcription. All the tapes were transcribed verbatim and as I worked I became aware of differences in rhythm, intonation patterns and use of language peculiar to each woman. The transcription reflected this as accurately as possible.

I transferred the three interviews which had not been transcribed by myself off the transcriber's disc onto my own computer, corrected errors, and then printed out all ten interviews, each in a different font. I made several copies and sent each woman a transcript of her interview with a covering letter (Appendix 5). None of the women wanted to add to or correct the information she had given. I then began the data analysis.

Data analysis

My ideas about how to go about analysing data from lengthy interviews were formed by talking to other women doing similar projects, by Sue Middleton's very detailed description of her method (Middleton, 1993:71-4) and by information in the research literature which I read. I used a form of content analysis. Sarantakos's description of this method referred to content analysis as a systematic approach,

used in both quantitative and qualitative research. It is, in qualitative work, not a distinct step, but is related to the elements of the research process. Sarantakos summarised the content analysis process as, identification of the units of analysis (transcripts of interviews for example) followed by identification and evaluation of the items which seem theoretically important, meaningful and relate to the central question of the study (Sarantakos, 1993:210-216). The steps I took to code and categorise over 300 pages of data were also influenced by the approach used in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This involves systematic coding, guidelines for categorisation, comparison of the data at all levels until saturation is complete and memo writing which is expected to follow certain rules.

I divided all the material in the interview transcripts into seven themes based on my first impressions and put these into folders. These were left for several weeks while I concentrated on other things. I then went through the transcripts on the computer and separated the data in a different way, into positive and negative experiences, which I copied into computer folders and printed out.

I also went through another paper copy of all the transcripts with coloured felt tip pens and separated each interview into three themes: things to do with personal and emotional survival, with gaining pleasure from the work, and which related to a sense of making a contribution in the world. Some phrases and sentences related to two or three themes. I then compared the three ways I had divided up the data and noted any discrepancies between them. I decided to write the data up into three different chapters of the thesis: general work experiences, social work practice which reflected feminist values, and issues relating to sexual identity.

I identified 127 different sorts of work experiences which the participants had spoken about and transferred these to a very large sheet of white paper. Through comparing them I drew them into 14 sub-categories and later into two broad themes. The data on feminist values and on sexual identity was treated similarly. I coded it, formed sub-categories and then drew these into themes. I wrote notes to

myself throughout this process to track my ideas about how to make sense of the material.

After I had written a preliminary draft of the research chapters, I sent each social worker a summary of the information gathered in individual interviews and my preliminary analysis. This letter is reproduced in chapter eight. I included a consent form for the group discussion (Appendix 6), and a print out of all the quotations from the woman's individual interview which I was considering using in the thesis. I requested permission to use them. Two women asked me not to use one small excerpt from their interviews because the information was not accurate. Two queried two small sentences and doubted that they had actually said what I alleged they had said. When I checked the original transcripts and tapes, both quotes were accurate.

Most women asked me to edit out some of their use of expressions like "you know", "I mean", and "sort of" on the grounds that it looked as if they were inarticulate. This I did, although I was reluctant to delete these hesitations and repetitions. They were part of each women's individual rhythm of speech and way of expressing herself which I had enjoyed listening to on tape.

Use of the group discussion method

I had been keen from the outset of this project to make it as collaborative as possible and to try and arrange group discussions with the social workers I interviewed. Discussion in groups can provide a forum for further development of the researcher's and the research participants' views and understandings. It can provide an opportunity for exploration of the findings and a chance for those involved to have further input before the piece of work reaches its final written form (Sarantakos, 1993:248-253).

Every participant was willing to participate in a group discussion. Two groups were held, one involving heterosexual women, one the group of lesbians. Nine of

the ten women were able to be involved. The group discussions evolved into dinner parties, initially for practical reasons. The most suitable venue was my home. The only way I could get six people close enough to a tape recorder for the discussion to be audible was to seat us around a table and weekday evenings were the most suitable time for the participants. I obviously needed to feed people.

Taking two days off work to shop and cook became both a pleasure and a way of thanking women for their involvement. I noticed that women who were mothers of small children seemed especially pleased to be "looked after" and both evenings mingled serious talk with a lot of laughter. The discussions were taped and the relevant sections of over eight hours of conversation were transcribed by myself. Both groups discussed sexual identity, the lesbian women at length and the heterosexual women briefly. Some of this information was incorporated into chapter seven. The other material from the group discussions forms chapter eight.

Two participants asked to read the whole thesis in draft and gave me feedback.

Ethical issues

My research was subject to Massey University's Code of Ethical Conduct for Research and Teaching Involving Human Subjects and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. The major principles contained in the code are informed consent, confidentiality, minimising of harm, truthfulness and social sensitivity. Students and staff carrying out research are expected to abide by general ethical principles such as justice, confidentiality and respect for others, as well as to be aware of cultural sensitivities and power relationships.

I was an "insider" in this research, in that child protection social work is my own field of work and the participants were known to me. This is a valid technique (Helen Roberts, 1981) but there are ethical difficulties inherent in the approach. In my application to the Ethics Committee it was necessary to cover in detail some issues of confidentiality, the process by which women were recruited to participate

in the study and the risk of harm to the participants. The issue of myself as a lesbian conducting research with heterosexual women and facilitating both group discussions was also covered. I was asked by the Ethics Committee to make a number of changes to the consent forms before final approval to proceed was given.

Although the social workers to whom I had first spoken seemed pleased about the choice of topic and keen to be involved, I tried to be alert to the potential for exploitation inherent in asking to interview women I knew. I provided full information about the topic and research methods involved and allowed time before any final agreement to participate was given. I took great care to keep the participants' identity confidential and to obtain separate written consent before arranging the group discussions.

My aim was to treat the participants with respect as experts on care and protection social work and to let their voices be heard. I was interested in accounts of how other feminist social science researchers had worked and thought about ethics. I read this literature as widely as I could before writing my thesis proposal.

Ethical and political issues in feminist research

General ethical issues such as confidentiality and informed consent are all of concern to feminist researchers but discussion of ethical considerations has been extended to include analysis of the research relationship as a power relationship (Daly, 1978; Cook & Fonow, 1986; Webber, 1985). Many accounts described the real ethical dilemmas involved in doing feminist research (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984; Hanmer & Leonard, 1984; Roberts, 1984; Wise, 1987). The discussion about ethics in the work of these feminist authors included a critique of sexism in sociology, analyses of the objectification of women in research, use of language, the pros and cons of publication and media coverage.

I found Sue Wise's writing particularly relevant because she wrote from a background in statutory social work (Wise, 1987, 1988 & 1990). Wise described a variety of means which feminists have used to overcome a perceived power

imbalance as both ideological and practical. These included rejection of quantitative research methods. The adoption of "answers" like these, Wise argued, merely raises further ethical questions for feminist researchers. In her work on ethical issues Wise strove to air the assumptions used in debates about feminist ethics and to argue that an ethical dilemma is simultaneously a moral and political dilemma. There are no ready solutions to these ethical problems, only a developing framework within which discussion can take place.

For feminist researchers, these dilemmas present themselves at every stage of the research process because feminist research is based on acute awareness of the potential for exploitation of participants and possible misuse of the data to the participants' disadvantage. These dilemmas are not exclusive to feminist researchers. They are also present for Maori, Pacific Island and lesbian researchers and for any "insider" from a disadvantaged group whose theoretical perspective is based on awareness of issues of power.

Wise described the dilemmas which were present in her own research, which included case studies, written and published (with names and family details altered) after she had left employment in an English Social Services Department. Among these were issues of consent, confidentiality, publication, telling "lies" in that information was altered to disguise identity, and consideration about the audience for whom research is done. Some of the examples she cited were directly relevant to my own plans, such as finding the boundary between "research subject" and "friend", the potential for exploitation in research where the researcher and the researched like and identify with each other, and the risk of treating participants as a homogenous group in a way that masked differences. I share Sue Wise's conclusion that one cannot expect complete answers from ethical guidelines. Their usefulness lies primarily in alerting feminist researchers to areas which require careful thought.

The participants

The names of the participants are, of course, pseudonyms, which were chosen by the social workers. The ten pakeha women I interviewed had a minimum of 3 years involvement in care and protection social work in CYPFS. Three women had worked for 5 years and the others for 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 14 and 15 years. Their combined years of experience working as social workers for CYPFS totalled 83. This experience included generic social work under the 1974 Children and Young Persons Act, training jobs, and supervising teams of social workers. None of the women had worked as youth justice social workers since the 1989 Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act was passed. Three women had prior experience in paid or voluntary community work.

I asked each woman when she had first become aware of social work as a possible occupation and when and how she became a social worker. The answers, which I will use to introduce the participants, formed three overlapping themes each of which contained a wealth of other clues about the reasons for women's entry into social work. The three themes were: choice of social work as a first career, entry into social work after being employed in a similar occupation, and "just falling into it":

> Marnie: When and how did you become a social worker - can you tell me about the process?
>
> A first career :
>
> Leah: I was always going to be a teacher when I was growing up. I'd always known that I was going to be in the helping professions so it wasn't a choice. My whole family is. I guess I went away from teaching seeing what my adolescent peers were like and decided to pursue welfare.
>
> Ivana: It was either suggested to me at a careers thing or suggested to me by the counsellor at school and he obviously thought I was some sort of helpful type and suggested that I might like to do it (laughs). That sounded quite good because it's terribly nice when you're young to be told that you're a nice helpful person. I've often minded that

and that I'd been a more selfish type rather than wanting to be nice and helpful.

Shannon: I think when I was at school I went and did a sort of a career guidance thing. I hadn't really been interested in working in social work and did one of those personality type testing things and they suggested that I worked with people.

Margaret: When I was four ... there was a woman down the road ... and I asked my mother what she did and she said that she was a social worker and I asked what social workers did and she said "Oh she takes children away from parents that aren't kind to them and finds other homes for them and then she teaches the girls to go and buy their clothes and budget their money". I thought that was a nice thing to do and probably vastly coloured by the fact that I liked Mrs H. ... I said "Oh when I grow up I'm going to be a social worker".
Marnie: I like that story (laughs)
Margaret: (laughs) Oh dear, yes, but I had a great forgetting period in between.
Marnie: When you went through school as a teenager, was that still what you planned to do?
Margaret: I was really interested in criminal psychology and I thought I'd like to be a psychologist or a lawyer. My father put me off lawyers totally. He said, "Go and read "Bleak House", they're the scum of the earth and they're parasites on society etc. so don't you dare become a lawyer". At least that was the message. He didn't actually say "Don't you become a lawyer ...". So that counted out law and I don't know why I never got into doing psychology. I think I just lacked careers advice really.

<u>Moving from similar work:</u>

Diana: I thought "Oh I just want to work with people who've got some kind of special need or are diverting from the normal kind of run-of-the-mill child or young person". That had frustrated me in education, the whole kind of inflexibility of it, and syllabus, and because I'd had a hand picked class in the first year. They were all very mature, intelligent and I got a little bit bored with it really.

Helen: At that time I was running a family home and a foster parent was going into hospital and the social worker ... came to me with this little boy Michael who, had I think half his hair missing on his head, cigarette burns, iron burns, on his feet. He was a real mess and just working with him really made me think about care and protection issues and that was something that I'd like to get into ... It was one of the reasons, well primary reason really, why I thought that I'd rather work with children on a one-to-one basis as opposed to in the classroom again.

Poppy: I guess that I have been interested for many years ... I did a lot of community work especially in the area of women's health and teaching women's health ... a lot of situations that had connections but all in the community.

Falling into it:

Phyllis: Well I originally did a BA. I had no knowledge of what social work was. I had absolutely no information and no particular interest in it but I was looking for a job and somehow I fell into it.

Gabe: Oh I just fell into social work. I mean, there was no career desire, no career move.

Ruby: I didn't think that what I wanted to be was a social worker, necessarily. I saw it as a means to an end of getting some kind of educational qualifications ... I just ended up being a care and protection social worker, so it was sort of osmotic.

These were women I had known and respected as colleagues whose social work practice was skilled and ethical. Some were friends and I had known all the lesbians through our shared involvement in an Equal Employment Opportunities group. I made an assumption in choosing these women that they were feminists, who would have interesting things to say about the relationship between their personal and political beliefs and the way they practised social work. Five women were lesbians and five heterosexual although I was to learn that the use of "feminist" and "heterosexual" was problematic for several women.

Seven of the women had social work qualifications and another was completing the final year of her course after five years in employment as a social worker. Three of these completed qualifications were at Masters level, one a Bachelor's degree in social studies, and three women had completed Diploma courses in social work. The two women who did not have a professional social work qualification had degrees in sociology and in education.

The women had in common their ethnicity and years of experience as social workers but ranged in age from late 20s to late 40s. Three women had resigned from CYPFS but two were still working in the social work field. The participants

had a diversity of life experiences and living arrangements and six of the women had children.

My decision to ask only pakeha women if they wished to participate in the study was influenced by discussion papers prepared by Evelyn Stokes (1985) and Linda Smith (1986) on research as it affects Maori people. They argued that the ability to understand and to draw conclusions during research is linked to the researcher's ability to take full account of the cultural perspectives of the informants. My skills in this area are confined to a pakeha perspective and I chose women of European descent, which is my own cultural heritage.

The following six chapters contain the experiences of ten women social workers who participated in this study, and my voice as the researcher and as a social worker. It is not "the truth" about care and protection social work in New Zealand's Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service, but strands of truth from eleven women's working lives and an invitation to the reader to engage in dialogue. Other social workers may have different stories to tell.

CHAPTER 3

The Participants in Context

Introduction

The chapter begins with the development of social work as a paid occupation. Consideration of the legislation which relates to the care and protection of children and young people follows. The organisation where all the participants in this study were employed, the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service, is then described and the role of care and protection social workers within that agency is defined. In order to generate an understanding of the climate in which the participants worked, I conclude the chapter by elaborating on some points made by Malcolm Payne about issues which most influence social work (Payne, 1991).

The story of social work

There is no one, agreed, definition of "social work". The term covers a range of activities, carried out in most societies, which aim to alleviate suffering, provide for those in need and maintain social institutions. Social work is, as Malcolm Payne, a British social worker educator noted, an occupation "intimately bound up in social policies and ideologies concerned with the support of several social institutions of which family and community have been selected as the most important" (Payne, 1991:33). Despite the diversity of definitions and practices, there is enough shared understanding for a language, a literature and an International Association of Social Workers to exist (Payne, 1991:1).

I found attempting to unravel the story of my profession's development both frustrating and fascinating. The written record is the story of an elite only: women with leisure and money to contribute. As Eve Brook and Ann Davis observed "the

casual ignoring of lower-grade workers and clients in their biographies and other accounts is frustrating for anyone trying to see how and why the profession developed the way it did" (Brook & Davis, 1985:6). Most of the literature is based on Western philosophies and assumptions. As Payne pointed out, it implies that beliefs and techniques which were applicable in Britain and America, could be transferred to very different cultures (Payne, 1991:4). Until recently, social work in New Zealand has failed to acknowledge indigenous beliefs and practices. Maori philosophies of care, and ideas about the relationship between the individual and wider kinship networks are absent from records of the profession prior to the past two decades. More recently, some agency policies, social work practices, and legislation have begun to recognise the values of the indigenous culture and other ways of caring for those in need. These changes are now being reflected in social work journals and texts.

The fascinations were finding women's stories and ideas about the development of social work which intrigued me, in unlikely places. An account of residential social work and government homes for girls in New Zealand was sandwiched between "Lesbians through the Decades" and "Moral Panic in the Hutt Valley", in a history of New Zealand women since they won the vote (Sandra Coney, 1993:172-173). A book review by Virginia Woolf, contained the suggestion that charitable organisations developed differently in England and America because English and American women's organising skills were not alike and there were different societal ideas about suffering (Woolf, 1905, in Woolf, 1992:8). My threads of understanding are drawn into a brief description of the development of social work and social service agencies.

Social work arose as an identifiable occupation during the 19th century, initially in Britain, then in the United States. A co-incidence of circumstances in mid-19th century England led to this. Margaret Tennant (1993) suggested that the growth in organised charities was related to the growth of religious evangelism. Under the influence of this movement, women's special compassion and moral authority were seen to have a biblical sanction. A number of other influences were outlined

by Elizabeth Wilson (1977). She argued that, in England, there were concerns that a perceived gap between rich and poor was widening dangerously, generating fear of a class war. Alongside this, some awareness about poverty and mass suffering had developed, accompanied by a desire to help the poor through benevolent deeds. In addition, working-class women were widely believed, by those in the middle and upper classes, to be so inadequate as wives and mothers that something needed to be done to improve the quality of their children's care. To address these issues charitable organisations were gradually established, which attracted the involvement of "surplus middle-class spinsters" (Wilson, 1977:43), women who in another age with other options might have chosen a lesbian identity. Beatrice Webb's comment on a plan of Octavia Hill to attract "stronger and finer" women into welfare work gives us a glimpse at some of these early welfare workers:

> " ... it is no use shutting one's eyes to the fact that there is an increasing number of women to whom a matrimonial career is shut, and who seek a masculine reward for masculine qualities. There is in these women something exceedingly pathetic, and I would do anything to open careers to them in which their somewhat abnormal but useful qualities would get their own reward ... I think these strong women have a great future before them in the solution of social questions" (Wilson, 1977:113).

Specific legislation to protection children from cruelty and neglect in England began in 1889, with the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, although child cruelty had been considered as aberrant and was punished by the state for at least the preceding hundred years (Ferguson, 1990:126). Many writers have noted that the character of child protection was shaped from the outset through "an interplay between the locality, ethnicity, class, and gender" (Ferguson, 1990:127; Wilson, 1977), and that child protection focused on the failings of the "dangerous" labouring classes. Ferguson commented that social reformers and agency clientele in the late nineteenth century barely knew each other "except through the cultural mediation of social workers" (Ferguson, 1990:127), an observation which is still applicable today.

The origins of social work in the United States were somewhat different from the British pattern and may reflect the "... peculiar nature of American charity, which is not satisfied with relieving suffering, but must find out and, if possible, eliminate the cause of it", noted by Virginia Woolf (Woolf, 1992:9). Angeline Barretta-Herman has traced these origins to the Settlement House Movement, "a social change movement aimed at the amelioration of the poverty and unemployment made prevalent in the cycles of economic recession associated with early twentieth century industrialization" (Barretta-Herman, 1993:33).

The American child saving movement began earlier than its English counterpart, following media accounts of child maltreatment. In 1873, the crime reporter for the New York News Association was present in the Supreme Court when a child, Mary Ellen, was brought in "carried in a horse blanket", by the director of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). She had been discovered by a social worker who was visiting nearby, "beaten and tortured". Lacking legal authority to act, the social worker appealed to the SPCA who brought the case to the court (Suzanne McDevitt, 1996:261). Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children were born from this, and similar, episodes.

In America and in England social work became increasingly feminised and, although often administered by men, child care agencies were increasingly staffed by women (Ann Hartman & Diane Vinokur-Kaplan, 1987:115). Casework as the dominant social work method, developed out of the interviewing and recording practices used by welfare workers in both countries.

Social work in New Zealand developed, as it did in England, out of the work of religious and charitable organisations, although state involvement in welfare provision for colonists' children had early beginnings. The need for assistance arose because the large, working-class settler population had few resources to cope with death or hardship. In the towns, urbanisation of the colonists led to increasing numbers of destitute and criminal children. The impact of the gold rushes and, later, the 1880s recession exacerbated the need for welfare provision.

"Gradually church orphanages, 'refuges' for prostitutes, private and public industrial schools for uncontrolled children and a patchy system of charitable aid administered largely through hospitals grew up" (Graham in Oliver & Williams, 1981:137).

Early New Zealand welfare workers founded, and worked in, a number of voluntary and statutory organisations. These included women's groups like the Auckland Ladies, and the Onehunga Ladies Benevolent Societies, founded in 1857 and 1863 by the wives of men who were prominent in public life. Both societies were formed to provide non-institutional aid to women and children and committee members personally visited needy families to offer assistance to the "deserving poor" (Tennant, 1993:109). The undeserving and abandoned were left to whatever charity churches might offer. Presbyterians established social services in the four main cities, run by professional welfare workers (Olssen in Oliver & Williams, 1981:263). Several Catholic orders ran homes for the elderly poor and sick. A home for incurables, a soup kitchen, a creche, kindergarten and a home for unwanted children were founded by an individual, Suzanne (Mother Mary Joseph) Aubert who was a Catholic nun (Olssen in Oliver & Williams, 1981:276). The Protestant Sisterhoods were also actively involved in social work and maintained links with secular organisations such as the Society for Protection of Women and Children, which had been formed in 1893 "to agitate for the improvement of statute laws with a view to the more effective protection of women and children" (Tennant, 1993:112).

Despite the growth of voluntary organisations, there was insufficient accumulated wealth for charitable organisations to flourish. Gradually, and with reluctance on the part of many politicians, statutory welfare services developed via legislation, beginning with the Hospitals and Charitable Institutions Act 1885 (Tennant, 1993:10). These services provided paid employment for a range of welfare workers. The role of unpaid women declined as larger and less distinctly female organisations grew. As Margaret Tennant noted, "women increasingly operated within the confines of male structures" (Tennant, 1993:114). By 1926 when the

census included "social worker" for the first time, 68 women worked in this occupation, or as "welfare workers".

During the twentieth century, large non-statutory organisations also arose to meet the specific needs of disadvantaged groups. Among these were agencies whose origins lay in concern, often driven by parents, at the lack of services. The Crippled Children's Society was founded in 1935 and the New Zealand Society for the Intellectually Handicapped began in 1949 (Tennant, 1993:114-5).

Welfare services specifically targeted at Maori were also established by statute, to serve the needs of a population whose traditional ways were mutilated by colonisation and increasing urbanisation. The Maori Social and Economic Advancement Act 1945 provided for the appointment of Maori Welfare Officers, whose work centred round issues of the community and the marae (Coney, 1993:132). The Maori Women's Welfare League, established in 1951, emerged from this work and focussed more on the needs of women, children and the family. Housing conditions became a particular concern of the League.

In New Zealand welfare workers are now employed in a variety of statutory and voluntary organisations. Not all describe what they do as "social work" and some dislike the term because it is associated with the pursuit of professional status and employment in government agencies. "Community work", "youth work" and a more general descriptor "welfare work" are also used.

The Code of Ethics of the International Association of Social Workers contains principles to which all welfare workers, whatever their label, subscribe. These acknowledge the dual focus of social work: individual needs and social justice. They define social workers' responsibilities to clients, wider communities, agencies and organisations, colleagues and self. There are also principles for ethical research and publications (New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 1993).

All the participants in this study were social workers and all worked within one organisation, the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service (CYPFS). I now locate these ten women social workers within their working world by describing the development of the legislation which they implement and the organisation within which they work.

Legislation relating to the care and protection of children and young people

State involvement in the care, protection and control of children in New Zealand developed through a series of national statutes dating back to the early days of colonisation. As early as 1857 an Education Ordinance, issued by Governor Grey, provided land and money to churches to provide education and residential care for orphans. Five major pieces of legislation addressing the care and protection of children were then passed between 1867 and 1989. Each reflected the social climate of the day and built on what went before. The 1989 Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act replaced the four main earlier laws and now frames the work of social workers within CYPFS. The five laws are outlined briefly and chronologically:

The Neglected and Criminal Children Act 1867 authorised superintendents of the provinces to establish industrial schools and reformatories. Police courts were authorised by this Act to deal with children under the age of 15 years who were neglected, found begging, wandering, living in a detrimental environment, or who were convicted of an offence. "Deal with" could mean committal to an industrial school for up to seven years. These institutions were ineffectively controlled and created public scandals because of harsh methods of discipline which included public flogging. They also became very overcrowded. For instance, at the end of 1894 there were 1,555 names on the books of the four government and three private industrial schools. 593 of these children were actually living in the schools, 402 boarded out, 408 were at service and 116 on probation with friends (New Zealand Official Yearbook, 1895:297).

The second significant piece of legislation, The Infant Life Protection Act 1896 provided for the registration and inspection of foster homes in an attempt to curb the practice of "baby-farming". Mothers without support who were unable to care for their children were resorting to paid foster care. This was often of very low quality. The Act resulted from the trial and sentencing of the only New Zealand women hanged for murder, Minnie Dean, who had killed a number of children in her foster-care. Responsibility for overseeing foster homes was transferred from the Police Department to the Department of Education in 1907 through an amendment to the Infant Life Protection Act.

Escalating public concern about conditions in the industrial schools and the lack of provision for children led to a third and comprehensive law, The Child Welfare Act 1925. The objective was to "make better provision with respect to the maintenance, care and control of children who are specially under the protection of the state; and to provide generally for the protection and training of indigent, neglected or delinquent children". Child Welfare Officers and police were empowered to take legal action against parents on the grounds that their children were delinquent, not under proper control, indigent, neglected or living in an environment detrimental to their physical or moral well-being. The presumption was that court action was helpful but it resulted in children being committed to state institutions for misdemeanours which, had they been adults, would have incurred fines or, at worst, minor prison sentences (Judith Bassett, 1983:10).

The recipients of these early welfare measures were almost exclusively settlers' children but as the Maori population became more urbanised, Maori children too came to the attention of the state welfare system. Traditional Maori child rearing methods, eroded by the impact of the education system and separation from traditional networks of child care, were replaced by a reliance on the colonists' often severe methods of physical punishment (Patricia Burns, 1983:15; Te Rangi Hiroa, 1950:358-359; John Rangihau, 1981:165-6). The greater freedoms allowed Maori children were misunderstood, defined by welfare officials as neglect and very large numbers of Maori children were drawn into the welfare net. Many

became institutionalised and severed from their families, a trend which was not reversed until the 1980s.

After many amendments, the 1925 Child Welfare Act was replaced by The Children and Young Persons Act 1974. This provided "for preventive and social work services for children and young persons whose needs for care, protection or control are not being met by parental or family care and who are at risk of becoming deprived, neglected, disturbed or ill-treated or offenders against the law". The Act was explicitly preventive but inadequately resourced. Children who required protection and care and children who committed crimes were dealt with in the same court. As a result, much "help" was experienced as coercive (Bassett, 1983:28). Many young people were remanded into Social Welfare custody by the court and held in institutions which mixed children in need of care with young offenders. Disproportionately high numbers of these children were Maori. Consternation about this, most passionately expressed by Maori, led to action within and outside the Department of Social Welfare.

In 1982 a report on the treatment of Maori residents in Social Welfare institutions heightened awareness of some of the consequences of the 1974 Act (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 1982). A subsequent report was critical of practices and procedures relating to the care and control of children in Auckland Social Welfare institutions (Johnston, 1982). Within the Department of Social Welfare, a group of nine pakeha women employees, working from a feminist and anti-racist perspective, met for nearly two years and prepared a report on institutional racism within their organisation. This stated that the department "reflects a relentlessly Pakeha view of society, which oppressively and systematically discriminates against the interests of consumers and staff who are Maori and Pacific Island" (DSW, 1984:1). Recommendations were presented in order to eliminate institutional racism. A second report appeared in 1985, the work of the Maori Advisory Unit in the Department of Social Welfare, also on the topic of institutional racism (Rangihau, 1988:16). Both these reports were critical of departmental policies and practices. They fuelled debate outside and within the

Department, particularly among social workers, many of who were examining their own beliefs and practices in the light of a developing awareness of racism.

In response, the Minister of Social Welfare appointed a Committee in July 1985, chaired by a greatly respected kaumatua, John Rangihau. The terms of reference were, "to advise the Minister of Social Welfare on the most appropriate means to achieve the goal of an approach which would meet the needs of Maori in policy, planning and service delivery in the Department of Social Welfare" (Rangihau, 1988). The Committee reported in July 1986. The thirteen recommendations, contained in *Puao-Te-Ata-Tu* (Rangihau, 1988) were both broad and specific. Strategies were proposed to attack all forms of cultural racism in New Zealand, and address issues of accountability, social work practice with Maori, funding, recruitment, training, and co-ordination between government departments. A specific recommendation was made that the 1974 Children and Young Persons Act be reviewed to curb the alienation of Maori children from whanau, hapu and iwi. This added impetus to other demands for the Act's revision which had first been formulated in 1976 by an Interdepartmental Review Committee on Health, Education and Social Welfare. Debate about the need for review, and the process by which this should be achieved, continued until the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act (CYP&F Act) passed into law in 1989.

The organisation with statutory responsibility to implement the CYP&F Act is the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service (CYPFS). The participants in my thesis research were all employed there, in care and protection social work.

Current child welfare legislation which defines the tasks of social workers within CYPFS

Responsibilities for social workers are contained in five separate Acts within Family Law: the Adoption Act 1955, Guardianship Act 1968, Family Proceedings Act 1980, the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 and the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act, 1989 (amended in 1994 and 1996). The Domestic

Violence Act 1996 contains no direct responsibilities for social workers, but may increase their work loads. It is anticipated that there will be an increase in reports made by the Police to CYPFS on the grounds of domestic violence involving children.

Proceedings under Family Law are heard in Family Courts, established in 1980 to provide a non-adversarial, informal and private environment for family matters to be resolved.

The social workers in this study were required to complete custody reports as a provision of the Guardianship Act but this was a small proportion of their work. All other work fell within Part II of the CYP&F Act, which relates to the care and protection of children and young persons.

The Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989

This was based on the idea that children and young people in need of care, protection and control are the responsibility of families, not the state. Children are also assumed to have a right to be protected from harm and, wherever possible, to participate in making decisions about their own futures. Six general principles at the beginning of the Act attempt to express and balance these assumptions They are as follows:

- Wherever possible a child or young person's family, whanau, hapu, iwi and family group should participate in the making of decisions affecting that child and have their views regarded.
- The relationship between child and family should be maintained and strengthened.
- Consideration must be given as to how a decision will affect a child or young person, and the stability of the family.
- Consideration should be given to the child's wishes.
- Endeavours should be made to obtain the support of the child and of adults involved in the child's life when powers under the Act are exercised.

- Decisions affecting a child should be made and implemented within time frames appropriate to a child's sense of time.

The care and protection of children and young people, and dealing with young offenders against the law, were covered in separate sections of the Act. Legal proceedings were separated into two distinct courts, the Family Court (care and protection) and the Youth Court (young offenders).

One of the achievements of the CYP&F Act was that it incorporated into legislation, for the first time, a broader definition of "family" than that of the traditional Western nuclear family. The organisation was required to ensure that, wherever possible, "all policies adopted by the Department [of Social Welfare], and all services provided, recognise the social, economic and cultural values of all cultural and ethnic groups; have particular regard for the values, culture, and beliefs of the Maori people; and support the role of families, whanau, hapu, iwi and family group (Section 7 (2) (c) (i, ii & iii). The Family Group Conference created a statutory process to ensure that decisions about children and young people could not be made without the involvement of family, whanau or family group. The Act stipulated that they must be consulted about the date, time, place and venue of a Conference and who should attend. "All reasonable steps" must be taken to ensure that family members have all the information and advice they require to make decisions about the future of their children.

The CYP&F Act is innovative legislation. In my experience, although many social workers were anxious about the changes they would be required to make to their familiar ways of practising, the new law was generally welcomed by the profession. Many social workers had already been trying to work in ways which were consistent with an anti-racist stance and more inclusive of wider family, but had felt restricted by fears of breaching confidentiality (Paula Wallis, 1989). The new Act made involving families a requirement and family decision making processes, the norm.

What had not been anticipated by social workers, myself included, was that the legislation was consistent with New Right policies and could be used to justify state withdrawal from welfare provision. Clues were there, but we failed to recognise them. For example, the report of a governmental working party involved in drafting the legislation, shows hints of the demands that would later be placed on "the community":

> "International trends in service delivery reveal a shift from a previously "paternalistic" model ... to a model which is "participatory" and involves the consumers in determining and seeking solutions to their own social problems. Emphasis is given to local development and delivery of services, which as well as protecting and supporting vulnerable groups, also aims to ensure that dependency is not fostered ..." (Renouf and others, 1987:19-20).

The object of the Act is to assist "parents, families, whanau, hapu, iwi and family groups to discharge their responsibilities to prevent their children and young persons suffering harm, ill-treatment, abuse, neglect or deprivation" (S 4(b)). Funding has not been provided to enable the object of the Act to be met. At present CYPFS is required, along with other state organisations, to cut its budget by 1.5% per annum. Principles that whanau, hapu, iwi and family groups should participate in decision making have now been interpreted in the organisation's most recent strategic plan as: "All families are meeting their care, control and support responsibilities" (DSW, 1995:3). The notion of "participation" has been reframed into an expectation that families take responsibility, without reliance on state funds.

I now turn again from the present day back to the early twentieth century and discuss the origins and structure of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service. This is, or was, the employing organisation of the women who participated in this study.

The development of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service

The origins of the organisation lie in the 1925 Child Welfare Act, which created a unit of the Department of Education, the Child Welfare Branch. Positions and specific responsibilities were created for Child Welfare workers. The Branch was headed by John Beck as the first Superintendent of Child Welfare who had formerly been in charge of the industrial schools. An advocate of their abolition, he had long been active in trying to find more humane ways of caring for children.

The work of Child Welfare staff was rigidly demarcated. Child Welfare Officers, women, were responsible for girls and boys under the age of ten; Boy's Welfare Officers worked with boys over ten. Although "there was always a tinge of concern amongst the recruiters that it would be seen as less than masculine" (Dugald McDonald, 1994), this resulted in a higher number of males in an occupation which, in the United States and Britain, was dominated by women at all levels until the 1970s. It has also been suggested by McDonald, a former New Zealand social worker and now academic, that the Child Welfare staff were public servants first and social workers second. Certainly there was no formal education in social work available in New Zealand until 1949, when a School of Social Science was established at Victoria University, Wellington. Neither was there any coordinated in-service training provided. The preference was to recruit mature women and men who "learned on the job" (McDonald, 1994:76).

The Child Welfare Branch had a change of name to Child Welfare Division in 1948 and ceased to exist from 1972. In April of that year a new Department of Social Welfare was created, which combined the staff and functions of the small Child Welfare Division and the much larger Department of Social Security and War Pensions. As McDonald noted "Some of the utterances of the day spoke of Child Welfare and Social Security forming the "nucleus" of what would ultimately become a comprehensive social work department. This development never became a reality" (McDonald, 1994:viii). What did eventuate as the result of this

unhappy marriage between ill-suited partners, was disastrous for social work. The social work values of the minority became marginal within the larger organisation and women social work managers were replaced by males from a background in benefits and pensions work. A separation of the Department of Social Welfare into "business units" occurred in 1991, but the pattern of appointing managers with no background in, or understanding of social work continued. Yet another name change was made in 1996 to the present name of the organisation: Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service.

The care and protection social worker's role in CYPFS

Social workers carry out duties under the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989. Along with members of the Police, they are the only persons able to receive reports of child abuse and neglect. Section 15 of the CYP&F Act imparts this responsibility: "Any person who believes that any child or young person has been, or is likely to be, harmed (whether physically, emotionally, or sexually), ill-treated, abused, neglected, or deprived may report the matter to a Social Worker or a member of the Police". Social workers investigate reports made under section 15 and make assessments of children's present and future safety on the basis of information they obtain. They are able to execute Place of Safety Warrants and take children into state custody, refer cases for Family Group Conferences and initiate a range of other interventions under the Act. They have responsibility for children and young people placed by the court in the custody and guardianship of the Director-General of Social Welfare and are required to report to the court about these children every six or twelve months, depending on the age of the child. Much of the work involves social work in less formal ways with children and their families where assistance, but not legal action, is required.

Some issues and conflicts in social work

The first woman I interviewed for this piece of work, (Gabe) described social work as "a job full of conflicts". It was a phrase which stayed with me throughout the

following nine months of reading, research and writing and it eventually became part of the thesis title. References to, and examples of, these conflicts riddled the other interview transcripts and I began to think of statutory social work as the most conflicted of all the professions in a western-style democracy. This is the focus of the final section.

Malcolm Payne (1991:14) summarised many features which have influenced the development of social work into four categories. The first was the impact of changing social forces. These included changing social needs, the development and requirements of related occupations and political and legislative change. The second was the effect of changing political and public perceptions of social and individual needs. These differing perceptions interact and impact on ideas and decisions about how services should be organised to meet needs. Media coverage of social work, for example, creates public perceptions about what social workers do and should do, which in turn condition agency policies and social work practices. The third feature considered by Payne was the nature of organisations which employ social workers. The development and the practices of social work within an agency, he argued, are influenced by the status of the profession within the organisation. Is the agency statutory or independent? Is social work the dominant occupation (as in CYPFS), or is it marginal (as it is within hospital services in New Zealand)? Finally, actual or potential conflict between social groups and institutions involved in social work has an influence. This may result in struggles for control of social work theory and practice and has certainly been a part of social work in New Zealand. Issues relating to race and culture have led to debates about who should practice and teach social work, and with whom.

Payne argued that these features condition the role and tasks of social workers. This conditioning intensifies during periods of rapid social change and alterations in management personnel and style. Cuts in social service budgets accelerate change.

All of the above features can be found in the development of New Zealand social work. A changing management style, rapid changes in management personnel, altered political perceptions of social and individual needs which legislation has reflected and a decline in the status of social work within CYPFS have all impacted on the working lives of the women in this study.

Payne's observations relate to social work in general. Three issues in New Zealand society which have contributed to the complexities of statutory social work in this country are now considered: the conflicted position of welfare services and social work within the state, changes to the New Zealand state sector and to welfare provision by the state and, changing definitions of children's rights and child abuse.

The role of social work in the welfare state

"Welfare state" has diverse meanings which include notions of collective responsibility for social justice, access to health care, education and housing, and freedom from poverty. Hans Falck, in an article which explored the ambiguities and ambivalence of social welfare in European - based societies, including the United States, suggested that the way social welfare is viewed is dependent on culturally determined beliefs (Falck, 1996). He argued that societies are organised round either an exchange model or a societal self-help model. Countries such as Germany require "nothing from the recipient of public help by way of moral payment for assistance rendered. Such help is part of the entitlements of citizenship, is expected by the citizenry as a matter of right, and is, at least in part, defended in terms of the good of both the person and society at large" (Falck, 1996:154). This is contrasted with the exchange model upon which the United States welfare system is based, which confronts welfare recipients with moral imperatives. They are expected to demonstrate true need, to show that no other assets exist and to behave in ways which are consistent with conservative values. Clients must prove that they are doing all that can be done to find work. Falck described these expectations as categories of exchange based on the values of the

giver, whether private or state, never in recognition of the norms and values of the client. "Implicit is that, by the observance of the giver's values, the client raises his or her moral standing, though it can only be fully restored or repaired by retreating from the position of being needy while seeking public help" (Falck, 1996:157).

Social work plays a central role in social welfare. Falck argued that in countries where welfare recipients are held in public contempt, the public matches its rejection of the poor with its rejection of social workers. They are criticised for not alleviating or even eliminating the need for services. In a country such as the United States it is:

> "extraordinarily difficult ... for taxpayers to accept the fact that a non-working person should have welfare payments as a human right, without necessary reciprocity, that is, without earning them. This fact alone suffices to explain the constant conflict between the social work profession, its well thought out ideas about the nature of social justice and how to attain some approximation of it, and the much more conservative majority of Americans regardless of class, education and "enlightenment" that insists there be conditions on receiving public help. These conditions are moral ones: work, traditional family life and the inadmissibility of pregnancy without marriage" (Falck, 1996:156).

Social workers in societies with welfare provision based on an exchange model are caught, Falck believed, between the tensions of given social welfare laws and their personal and professional values.

The same tensions and ambiguities can be found in New Zealand. Angeline Barretta-Herman described the nature of the relationship between social work and the state as employer as consistently contentious (Barretta-Herman, 1993). Wilding argued that social work had not been granted power by the state to become fully established as a profession because it threatened dominant state interests. The dual focus of social work: a commitment to social justice and social action, and the addressing of private troubles through individual change, meant that social work could be seen as challenging the social and economic order (Wilding, 1982).

Social work can also be seen as a manipulative and conservative form of social control which colludes with dominant interests. This is the position taken by radical social work theorists and it has led to criticism of the growth of professionalism on the grounds that this deflects social work from a commitment to social action (Barretta-Herman, 1993). In one of the first detailed critiques of the welfare state from a feminist perspective Elizabeth Wilson described statutory social work as playing a highly ideological role with an emphasis of the maintenance of a traditional family form and women's role, against their interests (Wilson, 1977). The ideology of the nuclear family as the norm, "organized and run by the wife-mother and centred on the proper care and training of children" (Olssen in Oliver & Williams, 1981:259), was the basis of the welfare state in New Zealand. This emphasis continued, despite changes in legislation. Although until the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989 contained a broader definition of "family", there was still a presumption that the care of children would be provided by the unpaid labour of women family members or in "the community" and that social workers would be instrumental in promoting this.

From Marxist perspectives, social workers have been seen as agents of class control as well as agents of change through their ability to assist clients gain knowledge and power and thereby undermine capitalism (Rojek, 1986; Bailey & Brake, 1975 & 1980; Corrigan & Leonard, 1978). Dominelli and McLeod argued that the policing role of statutory work is intensified by a climate of blame, such as exists in New Zealand at the moment, in which social service agencies and individual social workers are pilloried for failing to detect and prevent instances of child abuse (Dominelli & McLeod, 1986:111). The response at all levels is to concentrate on the narrowly defined child protection practices of the agency and discard whatever little potential existed for community development and social action.

Statutory social workers are caught between the two aspects of the social work role. Professional ethics make working for social justice imperative and agency requirements involve a focus on individual failing. An example of this is introduction of the term "aversive parenting", which is in vogue at present in

policy planning by the Social Policy Agency of the Department of Social Welfare (Barber & Scott, 1996). The term focuses exclusively on the behaviour of abusing parents and fails to acknowledge wider issues of stress, poverty, ill-health which contribute to child abuse. Agency procedures and regulations, the volume and stressful nature of the work and lack of funding for anything which does not fit within defined outputs, all lead to a very narrow sort of social work and worker disillusionment. Poppy, one of the social workers I interviewed, described this feeling as "frustration and being handcuffed".

Changes to the New Zealand welfare state

Jonathan Boston, a university lecturer in public policy has argued that New Zealand's welfare policy was based on a mixture of two models of welfare provision (Boston, 1992:5). He described these as a rights-based model and a residualist model which emphasised self-reliance and individual responsibility. The residualist model expects individuals to provide for most of their needs through the market, family, or voluntary agencies and charity.

In the 1980s and 1990s, New Zealand's social policy orientation has moved from a welfare state dominated by the rights-based model, to what has been termed a "welfare society" based on a residualist model and associated with the concept of welfare pluralism (Barretta-Herman, 1993 & 1994). Prior to the 1980s the government had been both funder and provider of social services. Welfare pluralism emphasises individual, family and local community responsibility and rejects state provision of universal services. Services provided by the state, in this model, are reduced to the minimum to provide what a Minister of Social Welfare in the National government described as, "'a modest safety net" (Shipley, 1991:13). Leah, one of the social workers in my study, worded it as "the lid put on anarchy and revolution".

Boston outlined the process by which the changes in New Zealand's welfare system were made (Boston, 1992). In response to a rise in unemployment and low

economic growth, the Treasury argued for a shift to a more residualist approach to welfare provision. The Fourth Labour Government, 1984 - 1990, responded with a greater degree of targeting but rejected substantial cuts in welfare spending. More major restructuring of the welfare state followed, initiated by the National Government after it gained power in 1990. At the same time private sector management practices were being introduced into public sector management. The State Sector Act 1988 altered the relationship between the heads of government departments and ministers of government, as well as industrial relations in the state sector. The Public Finance Act 1989 changed the financial context within which government departments operate. It brought more stringent reporting and accountability mechanisms and introduced the language of inputs, outputs, and outcomes.

Allen Schick, an American professor of public policy was commissioned by The New Zealand State Services Commission and The Treasury in 1995 to carry out an independent study of the New Zealand state sector management framework. He argued that management doctrine explains many of the innovations in the public sector but does not account for the emphasis on outputs and the recourse to contract-type arrangements. This "extraordinary reliance and the emphasis on specifying outputs" (Schick, 1996:17) lies, he believed, in a body of ideas known variously as new institutional economics, agency theory, and transaction cost economics. This is grounded on the idea that people act in their self-interest and "extends the study of self-interested behaviour beyond market transactions to situations where other values - loyalty, duty, contracts, and other obligations - might be thought paramount" (Schick, 1996:17). The consequences of public sector changes based on this idea have been, Schick thought, a weakening of collective interest, and diminution of public-regarding values and loyalty to the broader values of a Public Service.

The erosion of "public serving values", such as caring about the safety and well-being of children, had been noted earlier by other researchers. Leon Fulcher and Frank Ainsworth, both academics with a background in social work practice,

assessed the impact of reform in social services (Fulcher and Ainsworth, 1994). Zealous pursuit of practice ideology, combined with public sector economy had, they argued, dramatically reduced the availability of child welfare services in New Zealand. These practice ideologies were generated within the fields of disability, mental health, special education and criminal justice. Fulcher and Ainsworth named them as: normalisation, de-institutionalisation, mainstreaming, use of the least restrictive environment, minimal intervention and diversion programmes for young offenders. They argued that all these practice ideologies had had a significant positive impact on the provision of services and service reforms, to the benefit of most children (Fulcher & Ainsworth, 1994:3). Used as a justification for reform driven by monetarist economic policy, however, the result was a policy orientation of "laissez-faire and patriarchy" with adverse consequences for service provision (Fulcher and Ainsworth, 1994:2). As a component of the reduction in government welfare spending, "at risk" children were sacrificed to other social and economic priorities.

The impact of these changes in social services during the past twelve years has been particularly noticeable in the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service. Professor Ian Shirley drew attention to nine restructurings of the organisation in as many years (Fulcher & Ainsworth, 1994:7). Reports of child abuse have risen while resources have diminished, very large sums have been spent attempting to develop computerised recording systems to collect data and monitor accountability and the emphasis in social work service delivery has moved from service quality to measurable outputs.

Further changes to child protection services driven by pursuit of state withdrawal from the provision of welfare services are planned. The vision and strategic directions of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service are that by the year 2005 "all families are meeting their care, control and support responsibilities". The strategic goals are that "100% Maori children and young persons coming to notice are able to be dealt with by Iwi Social Services" and "100 % Pacific Islands children and young persons coming to notice are able to be dealt

with by Cultural Social Services" (DSW, 1995). There is no indication that adequate funding is, or will be, available to enable these services to develop. One can only conclude that CYPFS as an organisation has no future and that "at risk" children will continue to be sacrificed to economic and other priorities.

The third area of conflict within social work is central to the daily work of care and protection social workers:

Ideas about children's rights and what is meant by "child abuse"

In New Zealand the topic of child abuse arouses impassioned debate and generates much media attention but there is no consensus about how abuse should be prevented or addressed. There are, I think, three reasons for this. One is that it is a topic which interests almost everybody and to which we bring the hurts and powerlessness of our own childhoods and our different experiences of discipline and unjust treatment. This does not make for calm or rational debate.

The second is that it is not possible to discuss child protection policy without considering wider social issues, all contentious: the role of the state, the changing meaning of "family", issues of gender, racism and justice. Child protection becomes part of the debate about the nature and future of our society and the voice for children's rights remains unheard.

The third reason is that discussion about child abuse generates a passion born out of helplessness. As a society, we really do not know what to do, particularly about sexual abuse. On some level, most of us are aware that more fundamental changes are needed in the way we relate to each other, in the power balance between men and women, and that small changes in legislation, or creating a media furore to blame an individual parent (or the child protection service) when a child dies brings us no nearer to answers.

What is meant by "child abuse" differs between cultures and changes over time Many writers have pointed out that child abuse is a social construction (Gelles, 1975; Freeman, 1983; Gordon, 1986, 1988, & 1990; Reder and others, 1993). Neither cruelty to children nor awareness of its existence are new phenomena although physical child abuse was not widely acknowledged as a social problem until the 1960s. Early in that decade Henry Kempe, an American paediatrician, reported the results of his research into physical abuse to the American Pediatric Association (Kempe and others, 1962:17-24) and "discovered" the battered baby syndrome.

Sexual abuse was largely a hidden problem until the women's movement of the 1970s onwards enabled women to talk about their abusive experiences and be believed (Saphira, 1992:15-22). The recognition that emotional harm is also a form of abuse is even more recent and neither sexual nor emotional abuse were mentioned in child protection legislation until 1989. It is not possible to decide whether or not the incidence of abuse is increasing because definitions change and there is a poverty of accurate statistics (Ferguson and others, 1972:63-4; Bassett, 1983:67).

For example, in 1967 a nation-wide survey of child ill-treatment in New Zealand was undertaken to obtain as much information as possible about all cases of suspected or alleged child abuse coming to the attention of the Child Welfare Division of the New Zealand Department of Education in a full year (Ferguson and others, 1972). The criteria were made broad enough to include every case in which there was some suspicion of abuse. A total of 363 individual children were referred in the 419 incidents reported and in 255 cases, abuse was judged to have occurred. 182 of the 363 children were rated as "non-serious injury". The non-serious category included "extensive bruising and attempted strangulation", "swelling and bruising to forehead, right side of face and back of head. Some hair pulled out. Bruising to knee and leg", and other injuries of similar severity.

In the 1990s injuries of this nature are considered dangerous, lead to high intervention by social workers and abuse is reported more readily. Between 25,000

and 30,000 reports of alleged child abuse are now made each year to the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service (DSW, 1991,1992,1993 & 1994). The grey area in defining child abuse has moved and new issues are the subject of public debate - issues like "What is reasonable discipline?", "Where is the dividing line between abuse and acceptable cultural practices?", "Should children who are the subject of prolonged and acrimonious custody disputes be considered victims of emotional abuse?" and "Should infants of parents who have killed or seriously injured other children be the subject of court action at birth, or should they be "monitored" (and if so by whom), until there is evidence of abuse?". The debate around definitions of sexual abuse, how to intervene to assess sexual abuse allegations and what to do to protect children from possible further harm contributes to the difficulties of doing child protection social work because there are no simple answers.

Summary of the chapter

This chapter placed the participants in this study in context. I discussed briefly the development of social work as a paid occupation in two western societies, Britain and the United States, followed by, in more detail, the development of social services in New Zealand. I described the development of child protection legislation in New Zealand and the origins of the agency which is now named the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service. The participants in my research have all worked in this agency. A number of the many conflicts in an occupation which is full of conflicts were considered. The next four chapters cover the experiences of women child protection social workers as they have attempted to implement this legislation, in times of changing state sector management practices, changing ideas about child abuse, and while the welfare state declined around them.

CHAPTER 4

Work Experiences

> "Weaving tapestry can be likened to building a brick wall. One needs a foundation for the next brick ... Tapestries are woven sideways and upside down" (Victoria & Albert Museum, 1980: 30).

Introduction

This chapter, and chapter five, cover my research into the social workers' general work experiences. I asked each woman to describe what she remembered as the most significant experiences during her career; the effects on her of doing care and protection social work; and what had enabled her to stay in social work or led to her leaving.

I found that the social workers in this study derived most of their satisfaction from the nature of the work they were doing and from working in teams with other women. They believed in what they were doing and thought that protecting children from harm was valuable. The social workers also found statutory care and protection work stressful. It is an occupation which exposes workers to the richness and awfulness of life and to an awareness that some children's lives are damaged beyond help. There is little public understanding of what child protection social workers do and much uninformed criticism. Melanie Phillips, a journalist writing in a British national daily paper, *The Guardian* , following the publication in December 1987 of a report into the death of a child named Kimberley Carlile, spoke about child abuse as a euphemism, "a nice sanitised term; what we actually mean and should say, is buggery (sic), torture, murder. We recoil from these things and we expect social workers to remove them from our sight" (Phillips, 1987).

Dealing with child abuse was emotionally draining for every woman I interviewed. The social workers had found that stresses inherent in the work were greatly compounded by the nature of the organisation. Women spoke about being crushed, negated, undervalued, unprotected, and prevented from doing good social work because the agency was interested only in quantity of outputs, not quality of work. The inevitable frustrations of working in a government organisation had been escalated by the changes attributable to the introduction of new business practices into state sector human services organisations and repeated restructuring.

Understanding the social workers' experiences

My search for a way to understand the participants' responses to my questions led to reading in the field of occupational choice and work behaviour theory. I have analysed the social workers' experiences within a framework developed by Helen Astin in *The Meaning of Work in Women's Lives: A Sociopsychological Model of Career Choice and Work Behaviour* (Astin, 1985). This holds that most human behaviour is directed towards satisfying three basic needs: survival, pleasure and making a contribution in the world. Work is important to people because it has the capacity to satisfy these needs and an ideal career achieves balance in doing this.

I introduce some theories of women's work behaviour, followed by Astin's model. An analysis of the women's work experiences, within the framework of survival, pleasure and contribution follows. Some material from the feminist literature on women working in bureaucracies is drawn into this. This analysis continues into chapter seven which deals more specifically with the experiences of the lesbian social workers.

Some models of women's career choice and work behaviour

Astin reviewed the knowledge on women's career development, which her model extended. She listed these as consisting of:

- Theories which were preoccupied with the interface between work and family (for example, Rand & Miller, 1972; Richardson, 1981).
- Studies which reported gender differences in career aspirations and choices (for example, Astin & Myint, 1971; Farmer, 1976 & 1985; Brown, M., 1982).
- Material which went beyond the description of gender difference and attempted to explain the dynamics of different occupational preferences.

Astin cited Judith Long Laws' (1976) model which emphasised the importance of information in shaping motivation and resulting work aspiration. Another model, Linda Gottfredson's (1981) considered occupational aspirations on a construct of opportunities and barriers, based on variables of social class, intelligence and sex. Gail Hackett and Nancy Betz's (1981) model emphasised self-efficacy, ("the belief or conviction that one can successfully perform a given task or activity" (Astin, 1985:118)), a concept from psychologist Albert Bandura's work on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977).

Astin thought that the strength of Hackett and Betz's model was that it advanced our understanding of the importance of socialisation on women's work aspirations and behaviour. A weakness, Astin argued, is that the model perpetuated the idea that the occupations which women traditionally prefer are of "low" status in and of themselves (Astin, 1985:119). Astin suggested we ask *why* society places low value on the human service occupations traditionally chosen by women and challenged the interpretation that this arises from women's low self-efficacy. She suggested the opposite: that we could conclude women's work preferences are based on strong self efficacy expectations and that the choice to remain employed in human service work might be because women value performing the activities involved in this sort of occupation.

These ideas were consistent with the way the social workers in my study described the experiences which had shaped their careers. As long as the organisation provided them with the opportunity to do work they valued, they would remain. When they could no longer work in ways which were consistent with their own values and sense of self-worth, they had left or planned to do so. Astin's model provided me with a framework for understanding why for each woman, this threshold differed: some had a greater need to work to survive, some had greater confidence in their ability to find work elsewhere, passion for social work differed as did aspects of the work which gave them most satisfaction, but every woman had a "bottom-line" beyond which she would not be prepared to continue in the organisation.

Astin proposed that the basic reason for work, whether paid, voluntary or "family work", is shared by women and men, "but they make different choices because their early socialization experiences and structural opportunities are different" (Astin, 1985:118). Her model incorporated four constructs: motivation, expectations, sex-role socialisation and the structure of opportunity.

Astin argued that motivation for work behaviour exists to satisfy three basic needs, which are interactive : survival, pleasure and contribution. People work to earn income so that they can pay for the necessities of life - food and shelter. The concept "pleasure" is used to describe the intellectual and emotional pleasures which are gained from performing and completing tasks and achieving goals. "Contribution" is a sense of contributing to the well-being of others. This may be within one's own family or a larger entity and is much broader than traditional "helping". This need, as Astin defined it, may be met by paid work in traditional professions, producing goods and services or any form of work which a person considers benefits others.

Career choices are based on expectations concerning the availability of other work and their relative capacity to satisfy these three areas of need. These expectations have traditionally differed for women and men and are shaped by an individual's

experiences. Astin argued that to understand expectation, it is necessary to examine the socialisation process and the structure of opportunity.

Socialisation occurs through early experiences of family, childhood play, and school and work experiences. These inculcate the values of particular societies and cultures and shape work expectations. Astin described the gendered nature of this socialisation process, by referring to the work of a number of developmental psychologists. This work examined the child's world of play in which traditionally boys have been allowed greater freedom of body movement, to play outside, to engage with larger groups and to engage in competitive games. Girls' play has been more confined, indoors, and has emphasised nurturing and the world of make-believe. Early work experiences have traditionally also differed by gender and shaped future work expectations. "Boys deliver papers, girls baby sit" (Astin, 1985:122). Childhood and early work experiences have traditionally rewarded boys for aggressiveness and displays of leadership; girls for caring, thoughtfulness and compliance. The changing role of women in society, more varied experiences in childhood and wider work opportunities are, Astin noted, continuously altering the form of children's socialisation.

Expectation is also shaped by the perceived structure of opportunity. This construct encompassed changing trends in the institutions of family, education and work, such as longevity, declining birthrate, changes in family structure, changes in the distribution and availability of jobs, discrimination and the state of the economy. This can lead to opportunities which counter the effects of early socialisation and can offer changes of career choice. Changes in the structure of opportunity account for women's work behaviour being shaped and reshaped by changing social forces and dramatic changes in work aspirations and behaviour.

Analysing the social workers' experiences

The social workers' talked about their experiences of working life as positive and negative: the delights of the job which enabled basic needs for survival, pleasure

and contribution to be met, and the limitations and horrors which made this difficult to achieve.

I identified the delights into separate items, grouped these into categories and then into three themes: issues which were part of the social work task and innate in statutory care and protection work; issues to do with the social workers' colleagues; issues to do with the organisation. Of the 92 original separate items, 49 were contained in the theme "innate in statutory care and protection work", 28 in the theme "relating to colleagues" and 15 in the theme "organisation".

The limitations and horrors were treated in the same way. 35 items formed the theme of "innate in the work", 5 "relating to colleagues" and 66, "issues to do with the organisation". Seven items were counted twice. These related to stress and loss of hope which the social workers described as innate in the work but exacerbated by the nature of the organisation.

Although it was relatively easy to identify items of meaning, categorise these and then group them into discrete themes, I was left with a sense of having merely noticed separate threads and colours while watching tapestry weaving close to the loom. When I stepped back to view the completed work, everything interacted, larger patterns emerged and I could make some sense of the piece as a whole. The textured and richly shaded weft represented the social workers' emotional and spiritual responses to the job. Through these, they met their needs for survival, pleasure and contribution. Women spoke about what they liked about their work and they acknowledged their many skills. They had experienced congruence between their beliefs and their working lives. There had been real shreds of success, the satisfactions of managing complex cases well and the fascinations of what Phyllis called "privileged access to other people's lives". Strong bands of colour represented the delights of working with other like-minded women in teams and the support of women colleagues. There were pleasures in what Poppy called "experiencing myself as a working person". More sombre shades represented the stresses innate in statutory social work which had been

experienced: the deaths of children, witnessing cruelty, never being able to measure success or even being confident they were doing more good than harm. These were simply an integral part of the fabric.

The warp, the tapestry's foundation, was fragile and deteriorating rapidly. Occasional single solid threads represented the need to earn a living which employment in the organisation met, but these were barely sufficient to hold the piece together. Largely hidden beneath the vibrant bands and threads above, the rest of the warp represented social structures and the nature of the employing organisation. This threatened the women's survival in care and protection social work. They spoke about the failings of the organisation, its loss of vision and management practices which conflicted with the realities of the work. The once strong threads of the warp were rotting and it seemed possible that the entire tapestry might fall apart.

In the remainder of this chapter and in chapter five, the strands of this tapestry are separated to report the social workers' experiences. This is done under two themes: emotional and spiritual responses, and structural and organisational issues. The emotional and spiritual responses are discussed first; "Social Structures and The Organisation" follow in chapter five. Coverage of each theme follows the same format: the positive responses, such as the delights of working in teams with like-minded women are discussed first, then the negative experiences. Having children on social workers' caseloads die was the most extreme example of this. A section on stress and burnout bridges the two themes because this is a component of them both. Stress is an innate part of child protection social work. The job involves being a witness to children's injuries and miseries and one would have to have a heart of stone not to be upset by it. This stress is compounded by the negative public perception of statutory social workers. It leads to feelings of being misunderstood and unvalued. The nature of the organisation was reported by all the women I interviewed as the biggest source of stress in their working lives.

Work experiences which were emotionally and spiritually significant

Keeping on learning

All the social workers described the job as one in which they never stopped learning from fellow workers, from their clients and about themselves. The work had been challenging and they talked about "lots of personal learning" which included gaining insight into their own prejudices and weaknesses. Women spoke about having to acquire wide knowledge and skills to carry out the range of tasks which are part of care and protection work. These were both theoretical and practical. Policies and legislation had changed continuously and new skills were needed to deal with new problems. Several women spoke about having to develop whole new areas of expertise, which they had not learned on training courses, quite quickly because of work they were doing at the time. This happened when sexual abuse became more recognised in the 1980s and referrals to the Department of Social Welfare began to rise rapidly. It is the case now because social workers need to become better equipped to respond to referrals for emotional abuse and young people at risk of suicide. For Ivana, valuing the skills she had learned came with hindsight:

> It wasn't till I left that, I realised how skilled I was ... if you just can survive and deal with the huge range of people and deal with the organisation you are learning amazing skills. I think that is why social workers who do leave ... can be incredibly successful. I just had no idea of the level of communication skill ... If you can front up to someone and talk about their child being abused ... You suddenly realise what extraordinarily hard things that job expects of people. (Ivana)

Ruby's first response to my question about the experiences which had most shaped her career was to mention the skills and different ways of thinking about and managing cases she had learned from colleagues. She had also learned a great deal from her child clients:

> What I perceived as an adult about the impact of the abuse on the child wasn't necessarily correct ... I learned that children had different ways of

> coping and an ability to get on with things more so than the adults around them in crises. They had a lot to teach me about resilience and courage. (Ruby)

Several women felt their ability to parent their own children well had been enhanced by work experiences in which they saw the miserable lives of children to whom they could offer only a measure of help.

> I became very aware of when I was being an inadequate parent, so, I would apply the stuff that I was giving to parents and to mothers to my own life. It gave me a lot of insight into my own kids and being very aware of acknowledging their feelings and listening to them. (Ruby)

Succeeding against the odds

Having some sense of reward for doing successful work was the area of major difference between the seven women who had remained working in CYPFS and the three women who had left. Those who had resigned, in Astin's terms, no longer believed that they were making a contribution in the world. They spoke about their failures, how little they had achieved and wondered whether they had ever achieved anything. The women who had stayed in care and protection social work spoke about the pleasures of success: "lots and lots of positive client experiences"(Leah), "the surprises that I've had ... families have changed that I didn't think could or would (Shannon) and:

> The things that have stood out is that I have, particularly in cases that have been extremely difficult and complex ... I've been really pleased with what has been achieved, against all odds. That's been affirming of my abilities. (Poppy)

Women spoke about the importance of knowing they had been successful, even if this was only occasionally and the achievements were small. It seemed that without this, social workers became overwhelmed with a sense of futility and could not satisfy the need to gain pleasure and a sense of making a worthwhile

contribution to humanity. An absence of feeling successful contributed to a decision to leave.

Living your politics

Social work provided the participants with an opportunity to do work they believed in. It was congruent with their feminist beliefs and they used expressions like "being who I am" and "your politics is what you do". Protecting children was important and satisfied a need to try and make a difference in the world. The social work role could be used as a channel through which other women had access to resources and the power to make changes in their lives. Each woman talked, in different ways, about integrating her beliefs and values into her social work practice. Margaret's stamina for remaining in the work seemed grounded in her beliefs about children's rights and ideas about the sort of world she wanted for her own children:

> I think that children have the right to a safe and happy upbringing, as far as humanly possible to organise. They should be safe and the world will be a better place if children are raised in an atmosphere where they have stability and security and a good upbringing ... to be able to have an education, have choices in life. I think that if we don't do that we will discover our society is going down the tubes, essentially, because we'll have a greater and greater proportion of people who haven't learned to communicate and solve their problems through thinking and talking and who see that problem solving is by banging each other on the head. I don't want to live in that kind of world and I don't want my children to live in that kind of world, and so the little that I can do about it really, is by helping (laughs). If I can save a few here and there or send some of their parents off on parenting courses that will make enough difference for those children to be a little bit different with their children when the time comes maybe it will just alter the cycle that little bit. (Margaret)

Both Leah and Shannon spoke about the link between their personal beliefs and their work in a way which illustrated Astin's point about women's self-efficacy. They valued what they were doing. It was consistent with their ideas about social justice and what it meant to lead a meaningful working life:

> Doing child protection work is great, it's exciting, it's important, it's demanding ... I think I'm always going to be somebody for whom a job

> is not just a job, it is a career ... it's shaped me very much ... I see my whole world through those eyes. That's coloured my whole world. (Leah)

The example I have taken from Shannon's interview is more specific but makes the same point: child protection work may be stressful and at times distasteful, but it is important. Oprah Winfrey, herself a survivor of sexual abuse as a child, called it "life work" when she gave a key-note address at the 1992 conference of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. Shannon explained her motivation as:

> Just when you think you've had enough of sexual abuse, something will trigger me to carry on working with it ... I spoke with a women who'd recovered memories of sexual abuse, who'd had a horrific life since she was abused of acting out but not knowing why she did. That recovery process for her was so inspiring for me that I came back with a fresh look at it and a fresh understanding of why I am actually doing the work that I'm doing. It's really important. Sexual abuse and physical abuse is really damaging and harmful and it's not just another case of fingers up bottoms. It just gets my sense of social justice outraged and I want to carry on working. (Shannon)

Although for every social worker working *with* clients and attempting to empower other women was a priority, having statutory powers to protect children was valued. Removing children from parents under a Place of Safety Warrant was stressful and could cause heartache, but there were times when this course of action was the only safe option. If necessary, the social workers could act and enforce their beliefs in a child's right to safety:

> I think I quite like the power ... I suppose ultimately it means if all else fails then I have the power to do something for the sake of this child or this family, and that's quite a powerful position. (Poppy)

The use of statutory powers was not something I specifically pursued in this research and it would be an interesting topic for further study. "Living your politics" is, I think, one reason why social workers are not ambivalent about the use of their legal powers and are not particularly interested in the debate about

social control in social work. If part of one's politics is a belief in children's rights to safety, then having the power to protect them from adult violence can be claimed. Gabe had also worked under previous legislation (the Children and Young Persons Act, 1974) when removing children to institutions or to foster care with strangers was common practice. She described the realities of doing this as "absolutely horrifying", but also did not doubt that legal action was necessary:

> Let's face it, there had to be someone there who did remove those kids ... In lots of cases you couldn't have left them, and that was the actual reality really. (Gabe)

Experiences other people never get

Two social workers claimed that they could be the world's best story-teller because of the breadth of their work experiences. This awareness that social work had exposed them to the extraordinary, was shared by the other women. The job satisfied a sense of curiosity and gave access to people's lives in ways that would not otherwise be possible. Phyllis described this as having "access to the edge, the underbelly":

> You've got enough material to write a thousand books and a thousand plays and maybe it's being part of that edge ... the attraction to the edge ... I think it's why I've stayed so long because I'd miss it. Because there's no other job that gives you so much access to it. (Phyllis)

This was one of the fascinations of the work, but could at times tip the social worker too far into the unfamiliar. A sense of dislocation then arose, which was unpleasant:

> I had a case where, the father was very violent and into gangs and fighting dogs and things and I'd removed the child and placed him with his wife's grandmother. It sounds as if she was ancient, his great-grandmother, but she was only in her 50s and quite spry. I went and served the papers on him at ---- and it was such a contrast. Here was this huge man, with a tattoo round his forehead and a chain threatening to kill me and in the background they were making the movie of Katherine Mansfield's "The Doll's House". It just seemed incongruous

> that these two worlds were there so disconnected and so side by side ... It was like a nightmare. (Margaret)

A job that's never, ever boring

Social work provided a measure of autonomy and flexibility in the way the women worked. They were unanimous in describing the job as endlessly varied and never boring. There was scope for being active, innovative and accessing resources to make things happen for clients. Ruby contrasted this with being a counsellor:

> Just sitting there listening to people ... It seemed to me a really passive way of working with people, not so pro-active I suppose, so I went to CYPFS and, it just suited me down to the ground. (Ruby)

Teamwork and friendship

Working in teams was mentioned more often than any other positive aspect of the job by every social worker They liked the company and support of other women, the opportunities to share ideas and to have their own ideas and ways of working reinforced or challenged. They emphasised the importance of cooperating, giving as well as receiving support, caring about others and helping build a strong team. The women talked with affection about their colleagues and regarded good support as important for their survival in the job. When I asked Margaret about experiences which had most shaped her career the first thing that sprang to mind was the mentor when she first started:

> (She) was a very stabilising influence. She put some explanation to the great chaos of the Department and she gave me a sense of security and someone to ask questions, who could answer my questions in a way that I could understand and never became irritated with me despite the fact that I must have been very irritating. (Margaret)

A number of studies have confirmed that this experience of mentorship contributes to career success and satisfaction. Pauline Collins in the United States researched mentorship in 430 social workers employed in more than 300 settings (Collins, 1994). Two hundred and seventy three of the subjects were women. Her

study was quantitative and concluded that there were measurable differences in the success and satisfaction of those social workers who experienced mentorship. The other women all talked about the importance of colleagues:

> I think I get a reasonable amount of acknowledgment because I think my team really appreciate me. (Diana)
>
> I think one of most the wonderful things about social workers is the warped sense of humour. I remember that. That bond of absolute off the wall humour. (Gabe)
>
> I think people became very important, the actual people that I work with ... Because of the type of work that it is ... you *see* , you know the strengths and weaknesses in people and get to be fond of those ... I think you're learning an immense lot about people when you do that work. I like that. I like to work with people at that level. I wouldn't be happy just to go to work and not learn about people and just keep it on a superficial level. I feel that I've actually made many close friends ... That's been really important. (Poppy)

Good supervision

Supervision for child protection social workers is a crucial element in the process of identifying children "at risk" and imparting knowledge, understanding and skill to front-line workers (Alan Rushton & Jack Nathan, 1996). It differs from both mentorship and therapy and should include supervision of practice (including "live" supervision of work with clients), administrative supervision, and professional development of the social worker. John Collings and Philip Murray's research into stress in British social workers found that supervision which reinforces the social worker's value in the organisation seemed important in lowering stress (Collings & Murray, 1996:385).

Helen described supervision as " the part that makes you either fail or survive". Good supervision had enabled her to develop ideas and feel both supported and challenged. Other social workers made similar comments.

Bad supervision

Poor supervision was uppermost in the social workers' responses to my question about experiences which had most shaped their careers. Helen's first answer to my question about the most significant experiences during her career was about supervision:

> One supervisor that I had was incredibly bad. He was lazy and, oh he just had nothing to offer really. He'd been in the department too long and didn't want to be there ... He was just never available and he never challenged you. No constructive input whatsoever. (Helen)

When the poor supervisor was a woman, the disappointment was compounded.

Bad behaviour

Negative statements about colleagues were few. Two women spoke about being on the receiving end of another woman's bullying and unpleasant behaviour and disliking this intensely. The culture of some workplaces and lack of enthusiasm by departmental trainers was also an issue:

> I was really shocked at the amount of energy that went into negativity and fighting the management system. The moan was that they didn't have enough social workers to get on and do the job and yet I felt if they spent half the energy they did bitching about management they would actually have a whole lot more time to do the job at hand. It's incredibly draining working in a situation like that. (Shannon)

> Nobody in the Department presents anything with passion or they don't even appear to have first-hand experience of what they're talking about. So on the whole, training has been disappointing. I think most of the social workers, they bring with them their knowledge and skills. They don't gain any. (Helen)

Seeing the world's ghastliness

Constant exposure to child abuse had affected every woman. Some described this as making them more isolated, more private a person. Poppy talked about herself as having become "over-sensitised to abuse and I did think that every child was being abused and every male was an abuser , which wasn't a good state of mind".

This endorsed statements by other women, such as:

> It affected my ability to see men as individuals and I lumped them all together as this group of incompetent abusers who were incapable of humanity really, and that wasn't helpful. (Ruby)

Other women spoke about being affected by horror and ghastliness. Alongside the challenges and pleasures in the job, horror has always been part of child protection work. Harry Ferguson noted this in his research into historical case records from the NSPCC. He wrote:

> "Practitioners groped to find a language for what they were experiencing. They could barely believe what they saw, or smelled, or touched, and they struggled to contain the sensations it evoked - the risk, the adventure, the tragedy and the awfulness of it all" (Ferguson, 1990: 140).

I felt at times the participants in this research were groping for language to express how they had experienced the awfulness of parts of their work. Both the following passages were what the social workers first spoke about, in response to my question about their work experiences:

> In terms of client stuff I think it's been the depth of deprivation ... That there is some ghastly, ghastly things happening ... The sense of how vulnerable children and young people are and how much damage is done to them ... I can go over and over again into situations where children and young people are just treated like shit, and babies. So I think the impact on me has been the depth of horrible things that do happen ... The horror that it happens. That children, that children are in cages. They are tied up. (Phyllis)

> It's easy to remember specific social work incidents. They must be etched in your memory for the rest of your life, because you experience things that the average person doesn't have an opportunity to experience. Horrors that most people don't experience. (Gabe)

Other women talked about different ways in which exposure to the horrors of child abuse had affected them. Women who were mothers of young children, like

Margaret, had become more protective and fearful of harm to their own children as a result of their work:

> I certainly wouldn't let anyone look after her and didn't like her being handled particularly by other people and things like that. It certainly extended to the extended family and maybe a bit unreasonably so. But I think, it is difficult in some respects in that you see so many men who are abusive that it's almost hard to believe that there are any who aren't. (Margaret)

Fear and violence

All the women had experienced violence from a client, either actual assault or verbal abuse and threats of violence. Social work is a risky profession in which workers are exposed to work-related violence at a level second only to police officers (Kipper, 1986). Christina Newhill who recently researched violence against social workers in the United States reported that during the previous five years several have been killed by clients and scores injured (Newhill, 1995). Social workers' family members had also been killed. Similar information has been reported from Britain (Parton & Small, 1989; Leadbetter, 1993). In both countries the level of violence is said to be increasing. Experience of, and fear of violence is a very real part of New Zealand social workers' lives, including my own. The New Zealand Association of Social Workers circulated a questionnaire on "Social Workers' Experiences of Violence" to its members and in December 1996 reported the preliminary findings. Five hundred and three of the 547 respondents had experienced some form of violence in the course of their professional duties. These included threats to self and property (265), threatening gestures (321) and assaults with guns, knives or axes (35). A client was the perpetrator in 379 incidents and relatives and friends of clients in 313 incidents. In 92 situations the violence was perpetrated by a staff member in the social worker's own agency. Two hundred and thirty seven social workers had received no training on personal safety (NZASW, 1996).

Fear jeopardises survival and pleasure in the work. It can be experienced in many ways. For Gabe it included a general feeling of powerlessness:

> I remember fear. Being afraid. Also the feeling that, a lot of the time, you weren't in control of the situation and someone else was in control, both the Department, but also the client really. (Gabe)

Shannon talked about being involved in situations where violence between adults had erupted when she was visiting clients' homes:

> When I've dealt with really abusive families towards *me* I find that quite difficult to deal with and I still feel inadequate in some ways. Like dealing with domestic violence ... just knowing that there isn't the back up there for us to deal with that as social workers. (Shannon)

Phyllis referred to being afraid and "not knowing if people have got shotguns or knives". Her fear of guns is one I share after the experience of having to deal with an abusing father who was threatening to use his shotgun to kill social workers. Staff I supervise have been involved in similar experiences.

Not only did social workers fear for themselves, but for their families. Helen had changed her child's school to move her away from the area she covered as a social worker because "there were some families that I was really concerned about them retaliating on my own children at times", a concern that was expressed by several women. Others had been continually harassed, telephoned at home, threatened, and had their private lives disrupted in a variety of other ways.

A sense of futility

The following segments of stories capture an aspect of care and protection work, experienced by every social worker, that is difficult to put in words. It involves the frustration of not being able to measure success; wishing, but not being able, to do the impossible; feeling helpless in the face of enormous need and despair that one cannot create real change or make a worthwhile contribution. The three social workers who articulated this most clearly had all resigned. Sometimes the sense of futility was generalised :

> The futility, I suppose, and to a great extent always thinking, no not always thinking, sometimes thinking , what was the whole point of it and did you ever create any real change. (Gabe)

For Ruby and Ivana, it was felt more in relation to specific cases:

> It was a difficult case where the child was in the custody of the Director-General ... I really questioned my practice around allowing that child to go back to its mother and I don't think that that was a good decision ... I really couldn't live with that. It was, it was expedient ... and I thought, no, I'm not doing this job properly. I was really uncomfortable with it ... Everyone else involved with it had kind of gone along with it too ... That was the thing that decided me and I resigned within a couple of months of that happening ... I felt that the whole system wasn't going to work for her and it just seemed pointless. It knocked the guts out of me. (Ruby)

and:

> My practice key experiences are around particular cases. About kids whose names I'll never forget, whose images I'll never forget, who in my mind are the same age as they were when I dealt with them ... There are two in particular that absolutely stand out, that I just so desperately, as if they were my own children I wanted their lives to work out and I couldn't make them work out ... I mean do you ever achieve anything and how do you know? (Ivana)

Sometimes this sense of futility was expressed as regret at failing to create change as a feminist, or the pain of learning that women also abuse and fail to protect children:

> I just felt that naive thing of, well women would be good and some women weren't. I remember dealing with one child sexual abuse case where, this guy followed the kids home from school and knocked on the door and said "You've got really lovely kids and I'd like to take them out" and she thought he was a nice man. I just felt so let down that anyone could be that lacking in insight and caring for their children that, they would assume that was someone being kind to them. I suppose I look at that differently now when I think that person probably had so few kind things ever happen in their life that, they just decided to think that this person was kind. Which of course they weren't. (Ivana)

The deaths of children

Three women in this study had been involved in the deaths of children on their caseloads and had been deeply affected by the experience. Excerpts from their stories about this time in their working lives describe long lasting feelings of responsibility, blame, self-questioning and lack of support. Shannon's example mingles her emotional response with awareness that this was exacerbated by the organisation's attitude :

> Marnie: Really key experiences in the job, what have they been?
> Shannon: The deaths of children, oh it's really hard to get past that (silence) ...The impact, initially it was the emotional impact and the guilt that I felt. It was more the baby that died that I just felt terribly responsible for and I really questioned my practice and I went through a lot of self analysis about what I could have done better, what the organisation could have done better and the level of stress and the department's complete, just complete inability to cope in that sort of situation and punishing attitude it took ... I just felt like, there were a whole series of circumstances that blended together as they do in those situations that meant that the child was left very vulnerable. The effect has been for me to improve my practice and become a much stronger advocate for services, for supports and to become more proactive in my practice, to create things where there aren't things there ... It took me about a year to actually stop feeling responsible. I still feel a small amount of responsibility and really sad ... They don't have de-briefing or any supportive structures for social workers. We deal with that all the time. Children die every year...

The death of a child on Margaret's caseload had occurred after a legal decision overturned social workers' attempts to prevent the return of a child to his abusing parent. The experience left the social workers involved with feelings of powerlessness and "if only":

> The court returned the child to its mother so we lost the case ... That child died and that was pretty horrendous. I'd never want that to happen again ... It was traumatic that the child died because we had failed to keep that child safe through the court somehow and whilst I was aware that the court had responsibility ... I thought, maybe if we had presented information differently to the court it mightn't have happened that way. Or if we had been able to do more work with her. Somehow engage the mother or someone in that family situation maybe things would have ended up differently. I think that affected the

> way that I practised and the way that I've treated the court ever since. (Margaret)

The stresses innate in care and protection work, becoming aware of horrors in the human condition, wondering if one's work was futile, being afraid, and feeling responsible for deaths, were compounded by the nature of the organisation. Stress is an emotional response to the work, which, in moderation is appropriate and healthy. The failure to provide procedures which support staff to deal with violence, trauma and deaths is an organisational issue. The public perception of and media attitudes towards, social workers generate stress and are more general social issues. I now discuss these, and other components of stress in the section which follows:

Stress and burnout

A measure of stress in care and protection social work was accepted as inevitable and simply part of the job:

> Seeing kids battered and bruised and seeing parents in the state that they are, you can't help but be affected, I believe, by that sort of thing. Even with the best guard in the world and even though you've seen it for years and years. It's still horrible. Still really awful. (Margaret)

This type of stress was not seen as negative by Ivana, but as a sign that the social worker was not becoming hardened and alienated from her own humanity:

> I think if you're not emotionally affected when you hear a terrible story about a child, that's a concern. If you don't feel terrible at the thought of the terrible thing that's happened. I don't mean *crippled* by it but, if you can just think "Oh well that's what happens". (Ivana)

The stress of dealing with emergencies both during work hours and after hours, was mentioned often. Care and protection social work offices within CYPFS, organise this work in a variety of ways. Some work places have an intake team to carry out investigations of abuse reports, a team to do medium term work and yet

another team working with the children in state care. Some small work sites do both care and protection and youth justice work. The women I interviewed had all worked in care and protection teams which carried out a mixture of emergency, short and long term work. The advantage of this is the variety of work; the disadvantage is that urgent new work must take priority and, as Margaret had experienced, "having constantly to reorganise. Take a deep breath and do something entirely different to what you planned to do in the day".

Most women spoke about the physical signals of stress which they noticed. The " unexpected adrenalin rushes"(Margaret), of dealing with urgent work, and the resulting effects of this. Diana observed these to be " my whole physical state and emotional state is kind of ticking over three times as fast as what it would normally".

After hours work was reported as a constant source of stress. Social workers, and supervising social workers are rostered to provide a 24 hour service and receive an extra duties allowance for doing so. The nature of the roster differs from office to office but in my own workplace a social worker is rostered on approximately one night per three weeks, either from 5 p.m. until 8 a.m. on weekdays or 8 a.m. until 8 a.m. the following day on weekends and is expected to be available by telephone throughout that time. Supervisors are likely to be contacted for consultation by any of the social workers in their team. For all staff the inconvenience of interrupted sleep, disruption to their families and anxiety about what they might have to deal with, is compounded by the lack of placement resources. Every social worker has stories of having to execute Place of Safety Warrants at night to remove children from immediate danger or being telephoned by the police about intoxicated young teenage runaways and spending most of the night trying to find somewhere to place them until morning. Phyllis described the effect of after hours work as:

> It is that interruption stuff and you go home and you're worrying. I think the after-hours work got me down the most because ... often I was rung as a supervisor, at home. So whether I was on duty or not you get contacted. (Phyllis)

Stress was seen to be cumulative, resulting in impairment to a woman's health and sense of well-being:

> I just feel that in some ways the department has taken a huge toll on my life. It feels like, the abuse from the clients, the abuse from the organisation and probably my own personality type, has taken a huge chunk from my life. I feel that I haven't lived a full life for quite a few years because I have just been so emotionally drained by it all and now I feel like, maybe I was too young when I started working and I didn't have enough resilience. I thought I did and I had quite a bit of life experience before I got to the job but I think personally, it's taken a huge toll. (Shannon)

Stress in the social workers built up despite "stress management" and attempts to prevent this:

> I like to deny that it does have any physical effects on me but, I think it has. I developed asthma while I have been in the department and stress levels just build up on you at times. You put in place what you think will alleviate the stress, activities outside of work, but it creeps up on you. (Helen)

Lack of support and understanding, both at work and in a woman's private life, was also described as contributing to stress. Poppy talked about this as: "It's awful going home to someone who doesn't actually want to know. "

Phyllis also did not talk about work at home, but described this as an effect of, rather than the cause of stress:

> I don't talk about it outside of work. I don't actually discuss it with anyone outside of work. I don't talk to my partner about it. I don't talk to my friends about it ... I think it's made me more isolated and more, - It's hard to see the world clearly at times. (Phyllis)

This sense of isolation and not being able to talk about work which involved dealing with child abuse, was also expressed in response to my question, "Do you

tell people you're a social worker?". I was surprised that so many women described a reluctance to talk about their work in ways which mirrored my own experiences. I noticed that women gave both similar and very varied reasons for this. All were aware that to say "I'm a social worker" was likely to lead to questioning tinged with fascination and distaste. For Ivana not discussing her work also reflected disappointed expectations about her choice of career

> I would never tell. I felt embarrassed to say I was a social worker ... It was a worse conversation stopper than saying you're a lesbian (laughs) and I thought "Well what am I doing?" ... So I decided I didn't want to be a social worker any more. (Ivana)

Gabe's response was not based on embarrassment about her career choice, but she was also aware that saying "I'm a social worker" was likely to provoke an unwelcome response:

> I was never not proud of being a social worker, even when social workers were perceived as these ghastly women dragging babies from the breasts of mothers. I still was never, ever embarrassed about saying. I mean, you don't say you're a social worker because of the response, but I would never have been embarrassed. I always felt quite proud because there was a hell of a lot of things that I did that were very useful really. (Gabe)

Women did not talk about their work in social situations because to do so was "such a sure conversation stopper" (Poppy) and made the separation of work and private worlds more difficult:

> My private life is my escape. It's my sense of normality and if I tell someone I don't know that I'm a social worker, they invariably ask me questions. They want to talk about Income Support or crime or some other goddamn thing. There are occasions where it's unavoidable. If people directly ask me what my job is I won't lie about it but I will attempt to conceal it by saying I work in an office (laughs). Sometimes I feel guilty about that. I think, I should be advocating for the profession, things like that, but then I always regret it if I do. (Margaret)

Occasionally social workers had been made aware that a reluctance to talk about their occupation was not unique to social workers, and human service workers from other fields were even more likely to provoke an unwanted reaction:

> If I go out socially, I don't say what I do (laughs) because you get either barraged with questions or they start running down the department. A real dampener on the whole evening, so I used to avoid saying where I worked. It's interesting, I met a woman the other day who's over here from Australia and she told me she was a social worker and when I asked her what sort of social work she said well actually she was an HIV support person in Sydney, but she didn't like to say that, (laughs) so she just called herself a social worker. I assured her that it probably wasn't wise to call herself a social worker over here. (Helen)

Several studies have identified a poor public image of social workers as a factor which contributes to stress (Davies, 1990; Bennett and others, 1993). Recently Collings and Murray, (1996), referred to above in the section "Good supervision", surveyed 243 British social workers in Social Services Departments and found high levels of measured stress to be associated with perceiving society to have unrealistic expectations of social workers. The most powerful predictor of all was the pressure of too much administrative and paper work. The authors suggest that crude expenditure-led strategies which result in a stressed work force are unsuccessful and likely to depress the quality of service delivery.

Two of the women I interviewed talked about what was happening to them in a way that was worrying. They described the physical, mental and emotional effects of severe and prolonged stress on workers in occupations such as social work, counselling, teaching and nursing which are termed burnout. In addition to feelings of fatigue and depression, burnout can include cynicism and loss of concern for clients (Farber & Heifetz, 1982), apathy, futility and hopelessness (Barr, 1984) and disillusionment (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980). Many of these are present in Leah's story:

> Leah: I feel like I've got to go otherwise I won't survive, that in six months time I'll be in hospital, like it's, it's just, I'm worn out and there's many others that are feeling like me.
> Marnie: What do you notice happening, like you said not sleeping.

> Leah: Oh, not sleeping, crying, crying at work ... a feeling of victimisation, a feeling of martyrdom, a feeling of nobody loves me any more, nobody appreciates me, I'm the only person around this place working hard, which aren't very common feelings but that's real sign of burn-out stuff. Making bad decisions ... What else do I see? That I don't want to come to work, but I'm scared to go on leave because of all the secret things that I haven't finished up that I'd leave behind and somebody else might find out. That I take ages sometimes to get in touch with how I really feel because I'm so used to going around with barriers on. That I make decisions that are poor but also decisions that I have no respect for the person, making them. That I am managed by people who I can't make mistakes with, that I can't lean on, that I can't ring up and say ... "Help me through this". I have this facade on or else I'm in tears. I'm either pretending things are all right or collapse in a heap. I can't, you know, and I've got a great team. I've got good support ... We're doing the best that we can in a sick department.

Burnout has been discussed in the literature as an individual, an organisational and a societal problem: a response to stress and excessive work demands, to the emotional strain from dealing continuously with troubled people, to a sense of powerlessness to manage and influence events in the workplace and to alienation resulting from the reduction of human interactions to a market commodity (Freudenberger, 1977; Karger, 1981; Cherniss, 1980 & 1993; Maslach, 1982). The conclusions of a number of recent studies suggest that repeated restructurings and the emphasis on quantity rather than quality in CYPFS create conditions for burnout. Neil Guterman and Srinika Jayaratne, (1994) carried out a quantitative study of the role of work stress and control in child welfare practitioners' assessments of their own effectiveness. They concluded that while training and advocacy about stress reduction may be important, "apparently more central in the experience of success in child welfare work is workers' perceptions that they are in control on the job" (Guterman and Jayaratne, 1994:117). The social workers in my study talked about feeling controlled by a computer system designed to record outputs and expenditure and feeling powerless within an uncaring organisation.

In a 1994 study of the relationship between feelings of alienation and burnout in social work, William Powell also concluded that powerlessness and a feeling of being out of control create conditions for burnout. He stated "burnout rises in

conjunction with powerlessness. If a sense of powerlessness to deal with and resolve the problems of others exists, then professional practice is unlikely to provide the sense of meaning necessary to keep the practitioner cognitively, emotionally, and even physically healthy ... This information ... can provide administrators and supervisors with insight into ways of nurturing and preserving those human needs peculiar to professionals whose sense of self is linked to helping others" (Powell, 1994: 234).

At present I work in a social work office with a team management structure based on inclusiveness, consensus decision making and caring about each other: a feminist approach to management. It is an anomaly within the organisation, tolerated as a successful experiment, but not supported in any other way. My experience has been that in this working environment social workers are happier and less stressed than in more traditional CYPFS work-places and I was interested in reading any work written about burnout by theorists writing from a feminist perspective.

Janet Finn presented an overview of the literature, and proposed that feminist values of interdependence, participatory decision making, mutual support through processes of empowerment and removal of oppressive barriers were required to address burnout (Finn, 1990). She argued that the personal toll of burnout must be considered and addressed within a political context and that the tenets of feminism provide a link between the personal and the political nature of the phenomenon. The stories of the women I interviewed fitted with this approach. They described support from colleagues, supervisors, and innovative management as reducing their stress, but the overall climate of the organisation compounded it. They spoke about the demands of the bureaucratic system, many of which were seen as meaningless. Incompetent management, an absence of leadership, lack of understanding of social work and limited career opportunities for women within the organisation all exacerbated their stress. Although positive aspects of the organisation were talked about, every woman also spoke of "that absolute feeling of frustration and powerlessness with the organisation" (Poppy). They felt that the

passion, enthusiasm and commitment to social justice which had brought them into social work were being crushed by the demands of an organisation in which social workers no longer have a voice.

Finn argued that stress which leads to burnout stems from the arbitrary imposition of demands for predictability and control rather than from the nature of the helping process (Finn, 1990:61). Demands for predictability and control create a powerlessness in social workers, a "we - they" thinking and create working environments in which the strengths and vulnerability of workers and their clients are not acknowledged. She described the oppressive structures of present day human service organisations in which "...workers often provide specialized services in a fragmented delivery system that partializes clients into a series of problem-solving processes and imposes arbitrary rules under the guise of assuring equal treatment" (Finn, 1990:60).

Division of the care and protection social work service provided by CYPFS into outputs following the Weeks Report into the financial management practices in CYPFS, created just such fragmentation (DSW, NZCYPS, 1994). Changes within CYPFS following this report generated a preoccupation with staff conformity and accountability for budgets rather than quality of work.

Burnout needs to be addressed by changing organisations to include feminist values, rather than focusing on stress as a privatised problem and relief of the symptoms. These values include an holistic approach rather than one based on division of the social work task into outputs, inclusion so that social workers feel their work and opinions are valued rather than an emphasis on hierarchy, and empowerment rather than control. The social workers *wanted* to work in a well managed agency. They understood the organisation better than many of those who were in more senior positions and had ideas about what needed to be done. They had attempted, in vain, to have their voices heard.

An awareness that their ideas were out of step with the prevailing ideology was scattered throughout the transcripts. The following excerpts which express this are from the interviews of social workers from different workplaces and with varying lengths of service. All had a sense of being powerless to effect changes in the organisation:

> I used to think you'd get heard within the organisation if you actually wrote a letter or made a submission or did something, that you could be effective ... They don't want to hear it because it makes it too, it doesn't fit in with the simplistic way they want to approach it. (Phyllis)

> I would like to be able to write ... and say, "This is what I think is going on and this is what I know would help"... In my position, I can't do that. (Poppy)

> Shannon: Something that I always feel quite passionate about is our care of one another as social workers and the organisational care of social workers. I just see the organisational care as so far short of what's needed.
> Marnie: What's needed, like if you were in charge of planning?
> Shannon: Personnel planning ... Actually grooming women to come up through to management positions ... That whole thing of looking after staff ... When I first started it was very unsafe to get help for yourself professionally and yet we were sending, it's so funny, we send clients off all the time and punish them when they don't go to therapy ... It's that penny pinching sort of attitude. They just cut corners where they shouldn't cut corners. Having a trauma response. Supporting social workers to work in increasingly violent situations. Having 24 hour back-up.

Summary of the social workers' experiences which had emotional and spiritual significance

Helen Astin's suggestion that women value the activities contained in human services work was substantiated by the participants' responses. The women understood that they had been socialised into doing "a caring sort of a job" and that different information and opportunities might have led to other career choices, but few expressed regrets about the time they had spent in social work. They delighted in the personal and professional challenges of child protection work, in the variety of experiences and in teamwork and friendships in the work environment. There

was pride in their skills and in achieving success against the odds. They had attempted to work in ways which were congruent with their values and political beliefs. Every woman also spoke about the difficulties which are innately part of care and protection work and the horrors of exposure to the worst of human behaviour. They had experienced fear, violence, the deaths of children and a sense of futility forever hovering on the edges of their working lives. Media publicity and the public's attitudes to social workers compounded the difficulties of their work and, despite good personal stress management strategies, all the participants had felt severe stress.

Summary of the chapter

The social workers found their work challenging, interesting and stressful. They valued the diversity and richness of their experiences and liked working in teams with other women. Every participant also felt powerless and thought there was a lack of care for staff within the organisation. They chaffed at the escalating attempts to control social workers and the focus on outputs rather than quality of social work practice. Inhumane government policies, and arbitrary changes and about-turns in the organisation's policies made no sense to them. Their enthusiasm for social work had been sapped by the organisational climate. The women worked because social work met their needs to earn a living and do satisfying work. This, they found, was increasingly difficult to accomplish through employment in the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service. Three of the participants had left and others were watching the narrowing gap between their passionate commitment to child protection, and the bottom-line beyond which the organisation would not push them. The participants' positive and negative experiences of the organisation and the impact of changes in the state sector are the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Work Experiences Which Relate to Society and the Organisation

Introduction

The social workers' negative experiences which were a cause of stress and burnout were introduced in the last chapter. Aspects of the organisation and of wider structures exacerbated the stresses innate in child protection work. There was a perceived lack of care for staff, reluctance in social situations to "admit" to being a social worker because of a negative public perception of the profession and embarrassment because the organisation was subject to so much adverse publicity. A "penny pinching attitude" and a "simplistic way they want to approach it" led to social workers feeling out of step with the organisation. Social work practice seemed to be dropping through rents in the fabric. Ever-changing administrative requirements, as well as bizarre policy decisions, caused frustration and a sense of dislocation. During a group interview, Phyllis captured this sense of working in an agency where management practices are no longer comprehensible, with the words: "Social work is the only thing that's real any more." The social workers *wanted* to work in a well managed agency, with funding which enabled them to practise social work safely.

There were also positive aspects to working in a government department and doing social work in a statutory role. Poppy spoke about how she liked having legal powers to protect children. Other women referred to the advantages of working within a framework of stated practice guidelines in an organisation where social work with children and families is the dominant occupation.

The positive experiences of the organisation which women said had been part of their working lives are described next. Their negative experiences follow. Those concerning wider social structures are first and those experiences more specific to the agency next. I then discuss my search of the organisational literature and my attempts to understand the nature of the organisation. The chapter concludes with a model of management practice relevant to social services organisations in New Zealand (Hawken, 1996). The management methods described in this model provide solutions to many of the organisational stresses which the social workers described.

Work experiences which concern the organisation and society

Earning a living

All the social workers were self-reliant women who chose to work in full-time paid employment to survive and support themselves and their children. Working for the organisation provided a predictable income. "Moving around within the organisation" was also mentioned positively. Being able to have some sort of change every few years had enabled some women to stay in CYPFS rather than seek other employment. It was a strategy to avoid burn out and maintain interest in the work.

Women, like Gabe who had been doing voluntary work or working in private agencies had been attracted to CYPFS by better pay and conditions and more secure employment:

> So, I thought, "Oh, well if I'm doing social work now I might as well do it for the state. You'd have a bit more control and also you'd be paid a hell of a lot better". (Gabe)

Training opportunities

Access to training and in particular the provision of full-time study bursaries to complete qualifications was also reported as a positive side of the organisation. It

satisfied a need for access to specialised knowledge and led to social workers feeling valued by the agency as skilled professional workers. Such resources are unfortunately no longer available as the provision of study bursaries was abolished in mid 1996. The in-house scheme which was devised to ensure that all staff achieved a basic level of competence failed to achieve its objectives, which is of concern because of the relationship between poor practice and training deficits.

The need for a professionally qualified and experienced work force in the Department of Social Welfare has been stressed repeatedly in reports into the deaths of children known to the Department of Social Welfare (DSW, 1989). It was highlighted in the Mason Report (*Review of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act, 1989, - Report of the Ministerial Review Team to the Minister of Social Welfare*, Mason, 1992). Commitments were made by the agency's management to address these deficiencies by providing better in-service training and ensuring that all current staff were professionally qualified by the year 2000. These promises have not been kept. In-service training for social workers in the past three years has become dominated by courses on output recording and financial matters rather than social work practice. Rapid staff turnover makes lack of experience in the work force inevitable and sustains a demand for "beginner level" training so that little is on offer for more experienced staff.

Resources and legislation

Access to resources to implement child focused decisions was seen as important:

> I came into the department and it was like "Oh!", there were resources for clients ... In terms of social work in New Zealand we were kingpin ... It was *me* with a role and a mandate and I learned a whole lot of counselling stuff, a whole lot of community resource stuff ... it was *wonderful* . The new Act was *fantastic*. ... I loved those first few years in the new Act. It's only since about '92 or so that things have started to get really bad. (Leah)

Leah's words sum up an aspect of working for the organisation that was talked about by most women and captures my own sense of excitement at being involved in what appeared to be a revolutionary way of working within a state agency. The

present legislation (The Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989) was welcomed by many social workers because it endorsed a more empowering way of working and defined the statutory social worker's tasks more clearly. It held the promise of resources to implement safe decisions made through the Family Group Conference process. Disillusionment, and a sense of not having foreseen how the Act could be used to justify reducing state provision of services, was also part of every woman's story.

The negative public perception of child protection social workers

All the women had been affected by public attitudes towards social workers, whether this was expressed in adverse publicity following child deaths, negative comments in social situations or criticism and violence from clients. I was reminded of my own sense of shock and embarrassment, followed by anger, the first time I experienced this as a young social worker. An elderly (or so it seemed to me at the time, with hindsight probably in his fifties) man I happened to be sitting next to at a dinner asked whether I was a housewife or worked, and responded to my reply that I was a social worker with a loud statement that, "That's the sort of thing we can do without in this country".

The literature suggests a number of reasons for this negativity. In a recent review of all known reports into the deaths of children from non-accidental violence or neglect in England, the authors noted that if a child who is already known to professional child protection workers dies of abuse, intense public and media interest occur (Reder and others, 1993). Feelings of horror, anger, pity and sadness often lead to rage and blame directed at the professionals involved. Media coverage and inquiry reports reflect a belief that professionals should have prevented the deaths of children. Reder cited a number of other authors to make the point that this is an unrealistic expectation (Reder and others, 1993:18 & 121). The social workers' experiences, and my own observations of what happens when children die, reflect the experiences of British child protection workers:

> "Parton (1981) suggests that a moral panic ensues at the news of a child being severely abused ... The recurrent vilification of social workers

> helps calibrate public concern, allowing a sudden outpouring of anger so that the problem can then recede from social awareness ... Hallett (1989) suggests that in criticising the actions of individuals the basic social order remains unchallenged ... In particular, inquiries may be used as a political expedient" (Reder and others, 1993:18).

Blaming social workers, the authors argue, is both a means of evading political responsibility for the child protection system and its resourcing, and a way of exerting authority over the professions involved.

Social workers are also targets of public distaste for reasons which are more general than those which occur in response to the deaths of children. Melanie Phillips, *The Guardian* social welfare correspondent quoted in chapter four, argued that social workers are despised for three reasons. They are required, by the nature of their statutory role, to intrude into the most intimate and ambiguous areas of family life and therefore naturally attract suspicion and hostility. A second reason is: "The popular image of the hairy leftie who spouts sociobabble is not altogether a myth and obscures the other, equally valid image of the down-to-earth problem solver". The third reason lies deeper. Phillips described it as:

> "Evidence of the bestiality in our society - sexual abuse or cruelty to children, neglect of old people, ill-treatment of mentally handicapped people, and so on - produce a fierce reaction in which horror is mixed up with guilt, a refusal to believe that human nature, our nature, can be responsible for such barbarism. People do not want to face the fact that these things happen ... we expect social workers to remove them from our sight. When they fail to do this, for a variety of reasons, they receive the full force of our fury" (Phillips, 1987).

Hans Falck, whose article on the ambiguities and ambivalence of social welfare and social work was cited earlier in chapter three, broadened Phillips' argument. He held that, in countries where welfare recipients are held in public contempt, social workers are expected to alleviate the need for services and remove the poor from public sight. Rejection of the poor in such societies, Falck thought, is matched with rejection of social workers.

Repeated restructuring

In their assessment of the impact of reform on New Zealand's social services, Fulcher and Ainsworth paid particular attention to the case of the New Zealand Children and Young Persons Service, as the organisation was called at the time. They noted repeated restructurings, (nine between 1984 and 1994), within the organisation. The most recent, in 1994, was initiated as the result of an accountancy cost analysis which attempted to address " "dysfunction" between Outcomes and Output Classes, between Outputs and Tasks, and between Tasks and Job Descriptions" (Fulcher & Ainsworth, 1994:7). The report upon which the changes were based, described as "shoddy" and "dangerous nonsense" by the then General Manager of NZCYPS after his resignation, ignored the costs of organisational disruption and expediency (Fulcher & Ainsworth, 1994:8). The last restructuring of the agency, Fulcher and Ainsworth argued, compromised welfare services to at risk children because of the distractions and uncertainties caused to staff.

This fitted with many comments made by the social workers I interviewed, and my own experiences of this and eight earlier restructurings. The turmoil wasted many, many hours of staff time in compulsory briefing sessions, reapplying for one's job, protesting through proper and "improper" channels, worrying, dealing with the stress of other staff, moving whole offices from one area of a city to another or one town to another, and readjusting to change. With each restructuring, experienced staff are made redundant, resign or become ill. The stress of imposed change is compounded for women who have made arrangements for daytime and after school care of their children close to where they work. For CYPFS, the consequences have been disastrous and many within the organisation believe that this is intentional at government level. An unstable, fragile and poorly performing organisation is more easily dismantled and its functions contracted out.

Restructuring was experienced by the participants as a very negative experience, carried out for administrative reasons. It had paid no heed to the stress this process caused to staff, nor to the negative impact on service provision:

> I think it's really wearing on people and it feels (sighs) at times really unsupportive. I think all the changes that the department has been through, in the ten years that I've been there ... they're not small changes either. They really have been major changes. (Helen)

The lack of organisational stability was eroding the social workers' sense of hope and the vestiges of commitment to an agency where they had once felt proud to be employed:

> I think it's been the amount of restructurings I've been through and the change of the way the place has been managed and the change in resourcing ... I think I actually had a commitment to the organisation. I can remember when I did ... I worked my butt off, you know, work the weekends, go in at seven in the morning, go home seven at night. ... The organisation is slowly destructing. (Phyllis)

The effects of managerialism

Changes in the organisation's management practices since the introduction of reforms into the state sector had impacted on every facet of daily social work. It seemed that an obsession at senior management level with cutting costs and meeting reporting requirements had taken precedence over social work values. Leah described this as, "all about expediency and money and so-called accountability". The social workers did not object to improved accountability if this included the quality of work. What concerned them was the meaninglessness of what was being measured, the atmosphere of increasing surveillance and that accountability was entirely one way: from the bottom, up. Every social worker spoke about the frustration of working in the new environment.

Shannon was aware that her time to do casework was being encroached upon by ever increasing demands to comply with administrative requirements, such as

completing Key Performance Indicators, managing Client Financial Plans and collecting data:

> I realise how much of my time is taken up by bureaucratic crap that is created and generated and continues to grow every year. I get less and less time to do social work ... which is just going to create more work for us in the end because the less time we get to do social work the less gets done and the less safety there can be. (Shannon)

Administrative tasks were seen as taking priority over social work practice as the following two excerpts illustrate:

> Working out what you need to know about bureaucracy seems in lots of ways to over-ride what we're actually there for, the client based stuff, because we continually have to be accountable. Answer to this and that, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but it seems to over-ride it in terms of practice. (Diana)

> So much emphasis is placed on fulfilling the requirements of other areas whether that be financial or recording or accountability but not actual practice. (Poppy)

The changing climate within CYPFS in the past twelve years can be illustrated by excerpts from changing agency instructions and information issued to social workers. These reflect the narrowing of services provided by the state and the impact this has had on child protection philosophies and practices. The conflict between the values of social work, and management and business practices introduced from the private sector is evident.

The 1986 Social Work Manual of the Department of Social Welfare instructed:

> "Section 6 (1) [of the Children and Young Persons Act, 1974] stated:
> *"It shall be the duty of the director-general to take positive action and such steps under this Act as in his opinion may promote both the well-being of families and communities, and the most advantageous development of their children and young persons". It is therefore a statutory requirement of this department to actively carry out preventive work, or to organise community resources to provide the necessary services. The Act is sufficiently liberal to encompass any*

> *human problem which necessitates intervention, and is not restricted to children and young persons as may be suggested by the name of the Act".*

Two years later the social work role within the Department of Social Welfare had narrowed to cover the provision of services for children and young persons alone, in anticipation of new legislation which was passed the following year (The Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989). A departmental document, "Child Protection: Investigation, Decision-making and Management 1988", informed social workers that:

> *"The Department has an important role to play in child protection. All children have the right to live safely and within their families. The central issue of child protection is what must be done when these two rights conflict; when the family is not a safe place for children. The Department's first responsibility is to ensure that a child at risk of abuse is made safe. But it must intervene is a way which causes the least possible upset to the child's normal life in family and community... Social workers are required to investigate, assess and intervene in response to reports of child abuse. These tasks are set within their wider responsibilities to ensure the well-being of children and their families. Children are affected by inadequacies in housing, education and employment, and in wages and income maintenance levels. Lack of child care, support and parent relief also affect children. The Department has a role to play in making such inadequacies known, in advocating for improvements in service delivery, ensuring appropriate use of services and service developments. "*

These guidelines reflected public expectations of what social workers in the Department should do: intervene in family life, making children safe while at the same time causing minimal upset to the family's "normal" life. They were also expected to become involved in advocating for children and in providing a social work service to needy families.

Another document issued at the same time as the above, showed the impact of changes to state sector management and the thinking of administrative and financial managers who had replaced those from a social work background at the head of the organisation:

> *"... cuts in discretionary and operational funding have limited opportunities to develop new initiatives. For many social workers and community services workers, 'resources' now means the list of things that cannot be done. The economic ground has shifted".* (A Social Work Development Plan, Te Ara Hou-The New Path, 1989:5).

Five years later, the apologetic tone of "A Social Work Development Plan" was absent. Social workers were told that:

> *"The New Zealand Children and Young Persons Service is operated on commercial principles, producing specified and agreed upon products to a quantity and quality agreed upon with the Crown."* (NZCYPS, 1994).

The current "vision" of the New Zealand Department of Social Welfare is that, "All families are meeting their care, control and support responsibilities." (DSW, 1995:3). The climate in which the women participants in this thesis work is now one in which, at government and senior management level, the vision and language of social work have been lost within the practices of business management.

Bad social work practice

Three social workers spoke specifically about being worried that some of their colleagues' social work was poor. They mentioned lack of ethical conduct and the organisation's failure to address this:

> I do think people get into that thing of, "It owes me a living" and so they don't care any more. They don't care if they steal things or they steal time or whatever it is ... People doing *great* jobs getting less money and less thanks than people doing terrible jobs and less promotion when jobs came up. All those things, they really made me think the organisation was rotten. (Ivana)

Other women made more oblique references to the frustration of working in an organisation where much was spoken about accountability but was little done to address poor practice and, at times, criminal behaviour. "Accountability" seemed to refer to money matters alone.

Lack of care for staff

Women experienced this in many ways. One was the lack of any formal protocols to assist staff in dealing with the deaths of children, violence and critical incidents. This was contrasted with organisations such as the fire service and police whose mostly male work forces were thought to be better cared for when exposed to similar traumas. Phyllis observed that support for staff was not built into the organisation's practices. She had supported her social workers to deal with the traumas of children dying, but noted that:

> We had had a lot of deaths and ... I remember thinking nobody worried about me as a supervisor. Nobody said to me, "You take some time off, what about you"... Nobody said, "Well what are you going to do? What help are you going to get?". (Phyllis)

Comments about the agency were made by all the women throughout the interview process in words like "When I came into the job I think I had a real passion and enthusiasm for it, but that was quickly dampened by the management structure"(Helen) and, "a dreadful sexist organisation"(Ivana). Some participants were angry, and I felt that the interview process had created the sort of lull to voice this in a busy life, which Toni Morrison wrote about in *Jazz* as:

> "They fill their minds and hands with soap and constant repair and dicey confrontations because what is waiting for them in a sudden idle moment is the seep of rage" (Morrison, 1992:16).

Poor pay was also an issue. Social workers were described as having no voice when it came to lobbying for better pay and conditions, in comparison with management staff who were highly paid. A news item which appeared in *The New Zealand Herald* while the interviews were being carried out was an extreme example of this (New Zealand Herald, 1996a). The payment of over $8,437 per week to a senior manager on contract from the private sector was justified by the Chief Executive on the grounds that it was "a way of getting a job done as efficiently and expediently as possible". This is more than social workers earn in three months. Loss of social work expertise higher in the organisation had led the

participants to feel that they were being managed by people who neither knew nor cared about what social work involves. The experience of not being cared about within the organisation was a major source of stress. This, combined with stress innate in the social work, threatened the women's capacity to remain physically and emotionally healthy and find the work rewarding.

More than anything else, the social workers' employing agency, had impacted on their working lives. Every woman spoke about being constrained by the ever increasing demands of the organisation which got in the way of good social work practice. They talked about "fighting to no avail, going round in circles, the organisation being in an absolute mess" (Diana), and "not being heard within the organisation" (Phyllis). They struggled to understand why this was so:

> I'm quite reluctant to just blame the top of the organisation, because I think, there's a whole lot that's to do with history. God knows how you tackle it. (Ivana).

Women were aware that the organisation posed the biggest risk to their ability to survive and gain satisfaction from their work but had difficulty uncovering the reasons for this. An understanding was just out of reach, and I was reminded of the handmaid's question:

> " What would you like?" he says, still with that lightness, as if it's a money transaction merely, and a minor one at that ...
> "I would like ----" I say. "I would like to know." It sounds indecisive, stupid even, I say it without thinking ... "Whatever there is to know," I say; but that's too flippant. "What's going on" (Margaret Atwood, 1987:198).

I turned to the literature to try and make more sense of my own and my informants' struggle to understand the nature of the organisation and why working within it was so difficult. I wanted to know what was going on. The following section of this chapter covers my search of that literature and the conclusions I drew.

Trying to understand the organisation

My reading focussed on some theories and research studies about women working in bureaucratic organisations. This literature included Mike Witz and Anne Savage's *Gender and Bureaucracy* (1992) and three pieces of work from New Zealand: Jesvier Singh (1987), Robin McKinlay (1990) and Dianne Hawken's recent work: *Strong in their Spirits - Women Managers in the Social Services.* (1996). Witz and Savage reviewed the most important contributions to the study of gender and bureaucracy and provided analyses of three leading feminist writers, Rosabeth Kanter (1977), Kathy Ferguson (1984) and Rosemary Pringle (1988).

Witz and Savage argued that until the 1980s both organisational studies and feminist research neglected examining how gender inequality is reproduced by organisational structures and practices, with the result that "organization theorists were not particularly interested in gender and feminist writers had little interest in organizations except insofar as they provided examples of a more general set of patriarchal practices" (Witz & Savage, 1992:7).

More recent theorising, particularly that based on the work of Giddens, (1982 & 1984), Foucault, (1961, 1965, 1977, 1979 & 1984), and Clegg, (1989 & 1990), led to recognition that social structures do not exist in the abstract but through the specific practices of human agents. Critiques by these writers depicted organisations as sites of struggle between diverse social groups in order to gain and resist power but did not theorise gender inequality within organisations.

Rosabeth Kanter's work is from a liberal feminist perspective. She argued that differences in power (defined as the ability to realise one's will), not sex differences, explain the different experiences of women and men in organisations. Once women had organisational power, she thought, their gender would not be an issue. Kanter described practices within organisations through which men excluded women from power and efficacy. Via one process, they cloned

themselves in their own image and gave access to power and privilege only to men like themselves. In another, the boss-secretary relation perpetuated elements of feudal systems. Kanter's answer to this was that women needed to be employed in sufficient numbers and clustered together to gain power. She was optimistic about the potential for change and about women achieving equal participation in bureaucracies.

A more radical argument was contained in Ferguson's *The Feminist Case against Bureaucracy* (1984). She advocated a separatist solution on the grounds that attempting to achieve equality within bureaucracies was merely working to preserve the status quo and thereby perpetuated oppression. The practices by which this was achieved, Ferguson contended, were both structural and through "bureaucratic discourse". This analysis drew on the work of Foucault and referred to the constraints which the institutions and practices of bureaucracies place on those working within them. These constraints are reflected through the limits of the available discourses. Development of a feminist discourse promised an alternative voice. Ferguson believed that women could achieve little working for change from within bureaucracy and needed to withdraw, in the short term at least, in order to evolve their own forms of organisation, based on expressive female values and caring rather than the instrumental practices of men. This was envisioned as a prerequisite for other change, from which radically different, androgynous ways of organising would be evolved.

Witz and Savage criticised Ferguson's work and in particular, her argument that there are other more female ways of getting things done which are grounded in gender-differentiated ways of acting. Through the work of Dorothy Smith, a British sociologist (Smith, 1987a, 1987b), Savage and Witz argued for a less dichotomous and more relational understanding of gender and bureaucracies based on the concept of gender differences being not fixed attributes imported into organisations, but part of power relations in paid work. Men appear to organise and dominate, but both within and outside bureaucracies, it is the practical and conceptual work of women "facilitating, cleaning, tidying, bolstering, soothing,

smoothing over, sustaining etc." which actually keeps the everyday material world going (Witz & Savage, 1992:25). This analysis generated recognition of the *relational* quality of gendered ways of behaving in the world and a strategy for change. This is by forcing men to recognise that they are dependent and their privileged position is sustained at the expense of, and only because of, women.

Jesvier Singh writing in the New Zealand context, reiterated Ferguson's views. To be a "change agent" in an institution, she argued, was a contradiction in terms. Singh did not want to reject the practical gains which had been made by women working within traditional institutions but she stressed the limitations. Working from within "the system" was a conformist and uncritical feminism and "self absorption and self-gratification are the hallmarks of most feminist professionals" (Singh, 1987b:35).

Robin McKinlay (1990) questioned Kathy Ferguson and Jesvier Singh's conclusions that feminist ideology was incompatible with working in a bureaucratic environment. She researched the strategies used by New Zealand feminists working in the social policy area of the public service. McKinlay's study involved interviewing ten women about working for change, and gathering information about the strategies they used. Like the social workers in my study, the women McKinlay interviewed brought a feminist agenda to their work. In various ways they attempted to ensure that a woman's perspective was reflected. They were well aware of the power of "the system" and the pressures to conform to bureaucratic values.

Rosemary Pringle (1988) differed from both the liberal and radical views of Kanter and Ferguson and argued that within organisations sexuality is about pleasure as well as power. Her work reminded me of the pervasive heterosexuality in the participants' employing organisation, but I did not otherwise pursue her ideas. This would be an interesting topic for further research.

These theories gave me a framework for analysing the agency which employed the participants in this study. The reformist argument, that women could achieve equal power if their numbers were large enough, seemed inadequate. Women have always dominated care and protection social work, but have lost power and seniority over the past 20 years rather than gained it. The structure of the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Social Welfare consisted of two parallel streams, Boys Welfare Officers (BWOs), and Child Welfare Officers (CWOs). CWOs, the larger group, were women social workers and supervisors, with women managers. At the most senior level was the Superintendent in Wellington, the equivalent of what is now called in the legislation the Director-General of Social Welfare (the Chief Executive). This position was always held by a man. At a local level therefore, until the early 1970s when the Child Welfare Division was absorbed into the larger, very male dominated Department of Social Welfare, women social workers were supervised and managed by other women. My memories of working in that environment as a very young trainee social worker, are that the workplace was rigidly hierarchical but that I was surrounded by strong-minded, articulate and independent women who were very much in control. A career path for women was guaranteed by the structure of the agency at the time.

Once the two organisations were combined, women like this lost ground, despite being clustered and in the majority within the social work sections. Men with no experience of social work moved quickly into management positions and although social work was partitioned off into a separate business unit (the New Zealand Children and Young Persons Service) in 1991, women have remained disadvantaged. In the new managerial environment neither social work skills nor the concept of public service were as valued as mobility and technical skills. Spending on new computer systems to meet the requirements for reporting output delivery took priority over client services or raising the salaries of low paid staff, and the culture of the organisation altered, to alienate many women.

The social workers' experiences supported Kathy Ferguson's argument that bureaucracies are not merely distorted but fundamentally defined by male power. The information I gathered in interviews did not confirm her view, which is shared by Singh, that women become completely coopted (Singh, 1987a & b). The women in my study were aware of the risk of this and had individual and collective strategies to resist. They were determined not to lose their humanity and values. They believed in "chipping away" but were not optimistic about being able to create change in the structure of bureaucracy. One of the women Jesvier Singh spoke with said "Conflict and tensions existed on almost every level. Almost everything we opposed, the department stood for" (Singh, 1987a:36). The women social workers in this study echoed those words but spoke about their personal strategies for sustaining their integrity and visions and their understanding of power. Margaret, for example, had managed to work in a more holistic way. She ignored some of the demands of the organisation, continued to practice social work in ways which were consistent with her values, and had her own theory about why the organisation was so chaotic:

> I've also got a little bit wise to ways of dealing with the organisation and realised that you really have only one year where they'll actually catch up with you for anything that you might short-cut around the organisational side of things, and that's the middle year ... We've got a 3 year election cycle so we have one year galvanising up for the election, one where they're finding out what might be going on with the organisation, or trying to make their mark a bit and the middle year has a semblance of normality about it ... That's a large reason why the organisation's so chaotic of course. We've got a very short electoral cycle. We've got all these politicians who are desperate to make their mark and they don't really care how they do it as long as they do it and they're already wanting votes so they're bound to grab at anything that might make a headline and make a bit of noise. They don't actually understand the business and don't have any motivation for doing so. They're not going to be there long enough to implement anything that would really work longer term. (Margaret)

The women I interviewed were able to be what Robyn McKinlay described as "bi-lingual" (McKinlay, 1990:94). That, is, despite participating in the bureaucratic discourse they had not lost a feminist critique. They felt constrained and often

compromised, and like the women in McKinlay's study, were very aware of the dilemmas of their working situation. McKinlay reported that the danger of cooption is felt more strongly with seniority (McKinlay, 1990:78). None of the women in this study are in senior positions, which may in part explain why so many of them had been able to work in the organisation for years: they had not experienced as much pressure to conform to bureaucratic norms as women in management positions. The one woman in my study who had worked as a manager left this position by choice because she felt herself compromised.

Dianne Hawken's qualitative research on the experience and practice of women managers also highlighted the strengths and personal attributes of women with a feminist approach to their work (Hawken, 1996). She analysed the women in management literature within a framework which combined feminist and management theory and interviewed eight pakeha women managers in New Zealand social services organisations, mainly middle managers. Like the social workers who participated in my research, these women felt at odds with the organisational culture in bureaucracies. Managerialism had impacted negatively on their working lives in ways which the women I interviewed echoed. The emphasis on outputs rather than quality bothered the participants in Hawken's study, as did the imposition of new recording systems which were time consuming to use. They saw their agencies becoming increasingly male-dominated and struggled to retain their social work and feminist values in an environment where they felt invisible and undervalued. Their way of managing was based on skills and attributes which were different from the organisational norm. The managers were on their way out of employment in bureaucratic organisations in order to salvage their integrity. One of Hawken's interviewees, Anna, described her agency as having become "morally bankrupt" and "obsessed with new managerialism". Other women were similarly disillusioned.

Dianne Hawken developed a model of feminist management practice which fits with my conclusions about the sorts of changes which must become a part of

CYPFS if the organisation is to retain experienced women social work staff. She based this on four principles:

- Inclusive relationships. This encompasses caring, cooperation, empowerment and encouragement of diversity and is expressed in many different methods. They include giving attention to process, acknowledging home and work, democratising processes and structures, sharing resources and information and being open to challenge.
- Social transformation. The methods used to express this principle include acting collectively for justice and strategising to change systems, processes and structures.
- Women's well-being. Recognising women's oppression and working to improve women's lives are among the methods under this principle.
- Quality of service. Four methods are presented: Model and set high standards. Make hard decisions. Take risks and work hard. Value rationality as well as intuition.

Many of these are the basic principles of sound management and the bedrock of a feminist approach to working with others. They combine caring with leadership and wise use of power with a collective sense of responsibility. The managers in Hawken's study were focused on excellent quality in service delivery and understood that this was dependent on management practices which valued staff.

Summary of this chapter

The social workers acknowledged the advantages of working for an organisation where they could earn a predictable income and where there were resources for clients but they struggled to cope with constant changes. Most of these seemed pointless, and damaging to good social work practice. They valued the work they were doing but knew that the general public's attitude to social workers was negative. The organisation attracted a stream of bad publicity. This was frustrating, as was working in an output driven organisation. The climate of the new managerialism and lack of funding were depleting their morale. Although

they understood the organisation well, the women felt powerless to effect changes. They had no hopes of having their voices heard but had not given up. Many had found ways of manoeuvring around ever changing policies and regulations to retain a focus on the quality of their social work practice.

Chapter 6

Doing Feminist Social Work

> Marnie: How did feminist ideas influence your work?
> Ivana: In a very idealistic way to start with ... but I found it so much more difficult in everyday practice to think in terms of broader social, global issues and I ended up being very focused on people's individual situations ... I started to see women as actually, individually, having options ... and one of the things I could do would be to assist women to see that, to some extent, the world was like that but there were choices and there were options ... Sometimes you just had to deal with the immediate and forget your theoretical model.

Introduction

One of the aims of this research was to explore questions I had asked myself about the relationship between living with a feminist perspective and doing social work in a state agency. I wondered to what extent other women who were feminists had been able to put into practice what the literature defined as "feminist social work". Trying to make sense of my own working life over the years by searching for clues in the literature had produced mixed results. Some articles I had read left me eager for dialogue with the author. Other works, also by academics in the feminist social work field, had merely dismissed statutory work as "unfeminist".

I wanted to find out how other women had managed the conflict between their ideals and what the job required them to do, for there *are* real dilemmas. The excerpt from Ivana's interview with which I began this chapter illustrates this. Statutory social work involves both social control and possibilities for empowering women. Children are abused by women as well as men. Some women, some of whom are physically and emotionally battered into submission and some not, participate in terrible abuse perpetrated by men. Social work intervention often

results in exploitation of women as unpaid or underpaid caregivers. Child protection social workers who are feminists experience conflict between their commitment to empowering women and the reality of having at times to protect children from women. It is simply not possible to have a relationship of equal power with women clients while working within a statutory agency.

I reviewed the feminist social work literature and compared what the participants told me about their work with what the literature described as "feminist social work". The chapter is organised into three parts: an acknowledgment of the links between feminism and the development of social work as an occupation is followed by a review of the literature on feminist social work, searching for information specifically on feminist practice (which is not extensive). Quotations from the social workers' interviews have been used to illustrate some of the practice principles.

This is followed by my analysis of the interview material into themes. These illustrate two things: the influence of feminist ideals on the participants' daily work as social workers, and the ways the social workers acknowledged and addressed the dilemmas inherent in their statutory role.

The links between feminism and social work

Social work is, as has been pointed out by many writers, such as Elizabeth Wilson (1977), Sue Wise (1990), and Helen Land (1995), a profession with roots which lie in women's work and concerns. In the United States, as well as in England, many of the women who pioneered social work, such as Florence and Octavia Hill, Mary Carpenter, Louisa Twining, Josephine Butler, Jane Addams and Mary Richmond, combined this with a zeal for social reform and an interest in the rights of women. They campaigned to address issues such as women's suffrage, the abuse of women and child prostitutes, access to contraception, women in workhouses, and pauper and delinquent children.

This relationship between social work and feminism was eroded as social work developed further, and became tense and complex. Both are concerned with social justice but have not pursued this common interest in harmony. Statutory social work has been seen by feminists outside the profession as coercive and un-feminist, alien to, rather than part of, the emancipation of women. Women social workers have often not felt supported by other feminists. Social work academics have tended to theorise about feminist social work in ways which are not grounded in an understanding of social work practice in statutory agencies. Despite social work being an occupation with large numbers of women workers, the profession has reproduced the patriarchal pattern of women workers and highly paid male senior management, although in New Zealand there are some exceptions to this pattern outside the state sector in smaller organisations.

Nan Van Den Bergh and Lynn Cooper who co-edited one of the classic feminist social work texts (1986), noted that although many of the concerns of feminism are supposedly shared by social work, in particular the relationship between individual and community, feminism seemed to have impacted little on social work. Research, they argued, indicated that stereotypic views of women persisted among social workers and in social work texts and journals. It showed that women social workers and academics received lower salaries and less status than men and "although the majority of social work practitioners and recipients of service are women, feminist visions seem to have had a difficult time pervading the profession"(Van Den Bergh & Cooper, 1986:3).

This silencing is especially fascinating when one considers the issue of sexual abuse. It is a crucial feminist issue and a social work issue, but the links are not discussed. Sue Wise lamented feminism's invisibility with the words: "What should be the loudest and most influential voice in social work - ours - is, instead, a tiny whisper. How can this be so?"(Wise, 1988).
This is also the situation in New Zealand. Although many social workers identify as feminists and work in ways which are compatible with feminist ideals, there is

no hint of this within practice guidelines, manuals, memoranda or training materials produced by most social work agencies.

The literature

Within the literature on social work, most of which has been written by male academics, feminist social work occupies a small niche and covers administration, education and practice. The amount of material on feminist practice is small and the examples used to illustrate what has been achieved tend to be drawn from feminist therapy, clinical practice and women's organisations like rape crisis services, women's health collectives and the women's refuge movement. Analyses of social work in statutory agencies and how changes might be effected tend to be vague and there is little written about the actual experiences of social workers. Most visions for feminist social work have been the work of British and American writers and much of the information and debate from America is contained within a single publication, *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*..

Some of this literature is discussed below. The focus of my literature search was on material which listed principles for feminist practice, which I could use as a framework to analyse the experiences of the women I interviewed. I begin by listing some sets of principles for feminist practice. They are taken from the work of Van Den Bergh and Cooper (1986) and Van Den Bergh's more recent work (1995). This is followed by work from New Zealand feminist theorists. I then consider a selection from the literature which presents an overview of feminist practice and material about the relationship between feminist practice and social work in statutory agencies. I conclude the literature review with some work from Britain. Marie McNay attempted to combine ideas from radical, anti-racist, and feminist social work into an integrated theory based on empowerment and, in doing so, addressed issues in the relationship between social work and feminism (McNay, 1992). Helen Land proposed the most comprehensive principles for feminist social work which I found in the literature (Land, 1995).

Van Den Bergh and Cooper defined five feminist visions to promote professional practice and education for social work (Van Den Bergh & Cooper, 1986). Their ideas were that feminist social work was integrative and holistic in the sense of inter-relatedness between people and their environment. They suggested ways in which these principles might be incorporated into the profession.

The first principle was the elimination of false dichotomies and artificial separations. Van Den Bergh and Cooper argued that this principle challenges the prevalent trend in Western thought, which classifies knowledge and observation around principles which separate. They aimed to promote a feminist approach in social work practice, of inter-relatedness. They sought to promote awareness of alienating power structures. Feminist practice, they argued, should undermine hierarchical organisation and foster a more holistic approach with a focus on integrative and collective decision making.

Many of the social workers I interviewed spoke about "separations" which were being introduced into CYPFS which divide social work practice into discrete and measurable outputs. This discourages long term social work interventions. They thought that this approach was incompatible with good practice and that it bore no relationship to the realities of human beings making changes in their lives. Margaret described these departmental policies as "a load of nonsense" and Leah talked about her difficulties working in a climate in which, "everything is constrained, boxes".

Women were attempting to resist this and work in ways which were more compatible with what Van Den Bergh and Cooper called "an ecological and spiritual perspective":

> I have a fairly holistic view of it ... The department expects an awful lot of nonsense in terms of the way things are recorded and all kinds of things. They make artificial barriers around what needs to be done. (Margaret)

The second principle involved reconceptualising power. Within patriarchy, Van Den Bergh and Cooper argued, power is seen as a finite commodity and generates "haves and have-nots". "Accordingly those who hold power manage the environment and determine goals, information is withheld, and rules are created to censure behaviour" (Van Den Bergh & Cooper, 1986:5). Van Den Bergh and Cooper thought that a feminist view could see power as infinite, facilitative and an empowerment to action rather than domination. This view neither denies "the reality of differentials that exist between persons in knowledge, influence, skills, resources or responsibility", nor fantasises that persons are all equally powerful. Instead it argues for the creation of structures which give more equal access to resources, information and issues. Both Helen and Diana commented on the importance of information sharing and empowerment in their work with children:

> Working with adolescents, a lot of it is about trying to empower them to take control of their own lives. (Helen)

and:

> I suppose the biggest thing for me is that the kids that we work with get a fair deal and that they know their rights. (Diana)

Valuing process equally with product was the third principle. This concept maintained that the means are as important as the ends: " the merit of a goal is related directly to the way in which it is achieved" (Van Den Bergh & Cooper, 1986:7). The principle sought to replace competition, conquest and individualism with participation, co-operation, encouragement of feedback and critique and the acknowledgment of personal concerns within work settings. Poppy illustrated this when she spoke about "not becoming the ogre" in her use of statutory powers and how she had tried to develop a way of working with clients which was co-operative:

> I learned over time... that forming a relationship with people was a much more successful way of getting to where I wanted to be. To engage in a process rather than using standover tactics. (Poppy)

Van Den Bergh and Cooper's fourth principle was the validity of renaming (Van Den Bergh & Cooper, 1986). This idea involved trying to expand the meaning of words like "family" beyond conventional definitions. It acknowledged the relationship between names and a sense of individual or group identity. Claiming or reclaiming names of choice was thought to be a crucial step towards addressing oppression, as was being able to name experience. I became very aware of this while I was interviewing. Several women had failed to achieve promotion to positions for which they were the most capable and experienced applicant. During the interview they talked about these individual disappointments and named the experiences, not as personal failings or being less able to do the job, but as sexism within the organisation. Others spoke about the importance of claiming the right to meet as a group of lesbians and named discrimination on the grounds of sexual preference.

A catchcry from the U.S. feminist movement of the early 1960s, the personal is political, was the fifth principle. Within feminism, this is expressed in an understanding of the relationship between women's personal problems and oppression through the mechanism of sexism. It is also expressed in the relationship between one's way of life and political beliefs. Feminism argues that the two are intertwined. A woman's lifestyle is a political statement. Phyllis illustrated this principle in her statement that:

> How you live your life is your politics. It's not what you say at the dinner table or what you argue or what books you read. It's how you live every day of your life. (Phyllis)

Van Den Bergh and Cooper concluded their description of these five premises with an acknowledgment that "Their incorporation into the core of social work will not be easy. These premises are intimately linked to challenging power, prestige, and

the dynamics of existing practices, policies and programs"(Van Den Bergh & Cooper, 1986:10). They suggested ways in which each of the five premises might become part of direct and indirect social work practice, social work education and research. Some of the strategies suggested for direct work with clients were more relevant to the therapy room than statutory work (such as achieving a worker/client relationship of equal power). Others were realistic as ideals in statutory work. These were trying to work in an integrated way rather than in narrow specialisms, aiding clients to develop skills that might be used to influence their environment, serving as an activist role model and political education (of clients) being a legitimate part of the social worker's role. All the strategies involved a more holistic way of working in which the person was considered not as an individual only, but as a person in a social situation.

A successor to Van Den Bergh and Cooper's co-edited 1986 work was published in 1995 (Van Den Bergh, 1995). This assessed where feminist social work has been and asked "Where are we going?" The principles of the 1986 work were replaced with a set of themes for feminist practice associated with feminist standpoints. The participants in my study all talked about their work in ways which demonstrated the five principles in Van Den Bergh and Cooper's 1986 work. I was interested in understanding whether their social work practice was also compatible with themes in Van Den Bergh's more recent text.

Before doing this, I needed to understand the author's change in thinking and use of language. It reflected postmodern assumptions and I was interested in the implications of this for social work and feminism. I have also experienced a dizzying perception that "something was happening" (Van Den Bergh, 1995:xii) in terms of feminism but, unlike Van Den Bergh, think that what is happening is not going to be good for feminism as a political movement. Van Den Bergh strove to combine the assumptions associated with feminism and social work which were expressed in her earlier work, with postmodernism. She defined this term as opposition to the construction of grand theory based on the assumptions of underlying structures and truths (Van Den Bergh, 1995:xii). Most social work

practice, Van Den Bergh considered, has been informed by knowledge derived from this paradigm. She proposed instead, a practice based on partnership. This incorporated four feminist standpoints for social work practice to supersede the five principles of the 1986 book: knowing, connecting, caring and multiplicity.

First the term "standpoint". Van Den Bergh meant by this an epistemological (way of knowing and generating knowledge)/ontological (way of being) perspective. "Standpoints" were defined as "truths or knowledge created through awareness of reality gleaned from particular social locations" (Van Den Bergh, 1995:xxvii). What is real depends on where one stands, which is grounded in an individual's life experiences. This concept generates innumerable feminist standpoints: lesbian and heterosexual, and standpoints dependent on ethnicity, age and abilities. In this, lies the difficulty postmodernism poses for feminism and for social work. By acknowledging multiplicity and diversity, we run the risk of losing what should continue to unite us: an analysis of oppression based on gender, race and class, and a politics to address this. Van Den Bergh argued that to address this risk, it is imperative that social work continues to articulate the inequities of disempowered groups and retain ethics, values, assumptions and principles of a "social gospel of caring for the promotion of collective well-being" (Van Den Bergh, 1995:xxxi).

The four themes drawn by Van Den Bergh from the postmodern feminist literature express, she argued, the multiplicity and diversity of women's experiences and ways of knowing. They portray "action as well as value and represent what social work is as a profession, that is, the operationalization of activism and caring on behalf of client advocacy and empowerment" (Van Den Bergh, 1995:xxx).

The theme of knowing contains ideas about listening to many ways of knowing, the use of narratives and stories, and ideas about social worker and client co-creating meaning. Ivana's search for memories of work she could measure as successful contained an example of this:

> Only two things that I can remember are positive feedback. One of them was, a woman coming in, a very poor woman ... She had baked some biscuits and said, "You're the nicest person I've ever had dealings with and I've made you these ... you've really made a huge difference"... She was someone who I think I helped in terms of that beaten woman ... who'd really just been pushed down by her relationship. It was a matter of helping her to see that she was an intelligent capable woman who'd been given a hard time. (Ivana)

Connecting covers an holistic approach, interconnectedness, interdependence, ideas about community, commonality, work which involves collaboration and the feminist call to "think globally act locally".

Caring acknowledges mutuality and interdependence, concern and empathy, morality and responsibility,

The fourth theme, multiplicity contains acknowledgment of diversity and difference, pluralism and non duality.

I felt that these principles were a re-wording of the earlier guidelines for feminist practice but lacked the explicit call to action which had been the attraction in the earlier work.

A short New Zealand paper by Mary Nash (1989) also contained a list of practice principles which echoed Van Den Bergh and Cooper's ideas. They were derived from a piece of research into feminist social work placements, carried out in 1987 and reflected an holistic approach. They are basic principles, made explicit by examples from the students' placement experiences and I found them useful as a foundation for looking at material written by other writers in less accessible language. Nash's five principles were:

Analysis

This is required at both macro and micro levels. In a feminist approach, Nash believed, both structural and power relations as these affect women must be

examined. This analysis needs to be linked to one's own experience as a woman and then used as a basis for action.

Integration

This concept recognises differences of class, gender, race and ability. It also acknowledges similarities between the social worker and women clients and sees people holistically. This recognition then leads to the social worker making conscious use of her gendered self as a worker.

Affirmation

Involves helping women to make sense of their experiences in ways which are sympathetic and encouraging rather than pathologising.

Empowerment

Closely linked with affirmation, empowerment means the social worker sharing knowledge and information *with* women in order to counter oppression, solve problems together, and increase understanding.

Supervision/support

This was the only example I found in the literature of peer supervision being included in basic principles for practice. It was a theme in the experience of the social workers who participated in my research and was valued as one of the things that held them in the job. For example:

> I think that the women in the teams that worked together usually were a very good support to each other but there was no expectation that there would be any of that coming down from above. (Gabe)

The first four of these, and a different fifth principle, action - reflection, were reiterated in more recent work by Robyn Munford and Mary Nash (Munford & Nash, 1994).

The work of British social work theorists Lena Dominelli and Eileen McLeod (1989) did not contain practical principles or techniques for use by workers in statutory agencies, but presented an overview of feminist practice and the authors' ideas about statutory work. Feminist social work was described as in the process of formation and gaining a specific set of characteristics. Feminist practice was considered to have made a significant contribution to welfare in four main activities that define social work, all of which were under direct or indirect state control. These were: community work, counselling, the definition of social problems for intervention, and statutory social work.

The definition of social problems for intervention covered such broad issues as gender oppression, women's physical and emotional health, the right to define and enjoy sexuality, and sexual and physical violence. Dominelli and McLeod considered that what had been achieved was not only the definition of these issues as problems. There had also been a shift from locating their origins in patriarchal social relations instead of in an individual woman's defective emotional or psychological state. As I noted in chapter three, this achievement is being eroded in New Zealand welfare provision. We are seeing a return, in policy planning, to locating the source of abuse in individual failing.

I will now discuss Dominelli and McLeod's ideas about statutory social work in more depth because, although thought provoking, they disempower social workers. The text is, as Sue Wise put it "couched in abstract theoretical terms with little reference to the everyday realities of practice" (Wise, 1990:248). Social work carried out by feminists in statutory agencies, was, Dominelli and McLeod argued, unfeminist. Although work consistent with feminist aims could be carried out, it was, they stated, a minority activity within sexist and controlling routines. It failed to work with women clients as equals, failed to achieve non-hierarchical organisational structures, invaded personal privacy, threatened civil liberties and reinforced middle-class ideology and agency norms. Evidence of social work practice from a feminist perspective reflected and compounded the limited nature of feminist influence because "*the same (feminist) workers* are still engaged in

work reinforcing various forms of social control of women, with all the inegalitarian implications of this" (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989:125). For statutory social work to become "truly feminist" Dominelli and McLeod believed that it needed to embody the egalitarian principles of feminist work which was being done elsewhere: on redefining social problems, work on feminist therapy and in developing feminist campaigns and networks. Dominelli and McLeod did not develop principles for practitioners. The means of achieving this, they stated, would be the establishment of a strong feminist political presence in central (British) government, "not impossible, only extremely difficult" (Dominelli and McLeod, 1989:129). This would transform statutory practice into a truly feminist enterprise.

A more recent paper by Lena Dominelli (1996), indicates that these hopes for an increasing feminist presence in government to promote feminist social work, have been dashed. She stated: "So powerful and fundamental was the feminist critique with its attendant practice, that both the central and the local state quickly moved in to foreclose developments when these threatened to take off in a big way in the mid-1980s through the closure of Women's Units and the withdrawal of funds from projects with a feminist orientation" (Dominelli, 1996: 161).

An approach to feminist practice which is grounded in the author's experiences working as a social worker in a British statutory agency is contained in a paper by Sue Wise (1990). This described her changing theoretical and practical understanding of local authority social work and her attempts to work as a feminist in child protection work. She voiced the dilemmas and compromises of trying to be a "good feminist" and a good social worker, using examples of work with clients:

> " ... the edges of friendship and formal relationship become very blurred indeed for both worker and client. This can become a real problem when the need to emphasise the 'authority' role arises. For example, whenever I had to produce court reports on Mrs G. she felt upset at the things I wrote in them, not because they were things that I hadn't already said to her, but because she felt betrayed that I had said them to someone else. Such a close involvement caused some heartaches for

> me too" (Wise, 1990: 241). ... "The detrimental effects of their mother's behaviour on these children may 'go beyond the limit' one day and they may need to come into care. I am very, very glad it won't be me who will have to do it" (Wise, 1990: 243).

I have certainly experienced the heartache of having to remove children, for their survival, from the care of women who I liked and who had trusted me, and some of Wise's dilemmas about 'authority' in statutory work were echoed by the participants in my study. Gabe, for example, spoke about trying to see the world from the perspective of her women clients and attempting, "as much as possible to be an ally". She had tried to balance this wish to be an ally, against the knowledge that this was not truly possible because of the power discrepancy between the roles of statutory social worker and client:

> Your ... power relationship ... in fact for a lot of women meant that no matter how much they saw you as an ally, you couldn't be an ally. (Gabe)

There is a common theme running through all work by feminist social work theorists in the 1990s, in the United States, Britain and in New Zealand: the need to recognise diversity, promote anti-discriminatory practice *and* to grasp what we have in common as women. This is imperative in order not to lose collective resistance and the agency to achieve change while social services are becoming increasingly fragmented and under resourced.

Marie McNay (1992) wrote in this vein and attempted to combine ideas from radical, anti-racist, and feminist social work into an integrated theory based on empowerment. In doing so, she addressed two issues in the relationship between social work and feminism. One was feminism's apparently marginal impact on social work. McNay believed this was because social work theory is constructed through a sexist process. The second issue, and the point made by Sue Wise, was the lack of any feminist analysis useful for practitioners doing everyday social work. This was attributed to feminist social work practice being seen, in the main, as being work with women.

McNay argued that gender and race perspectives suggest the means of transforming mainstream theories because they expose the ways in which theory is constructed to reflect the values of the dominant group. She proposed that existing theories about gender, race, class and other oppressions be understood in a wider framework and integrated by using power relations as the unifying concept. This revision of mainstream theory would bring feminist analysis and feminist social work practice from margin to centre. Feminist practice, and anti-racist practice, could then be valued as "good" practice rather than marginalised activities. In social work practice, the use of this framework of power relations would lead to more attention being paid to the values which underlie agency policies and practices.

McNay made two proposals. The first was that a notion of interdependence, drawn from systems theory, could be used to integrate structural and individual perspectives in social work. In social work practice, this would involve acknowledging the importance of understanding how a society's values interact with social institutions like the family and social work agencies (McNay, 1992:57). The second proposal was that modes of intervention be needs based, rather than narrowly problem oriented.

McNay's work did not contain a set of practice principles or a set of techniques, but provided me with a way of thinking about, and some answers to, the marginalisation of feminist theory within social work. At present neither feminist practice, nor an analysis and practice style based on anti-racism, are well integrated into mainstream social work theory. For instance, in a very widely used text on social work theory, Payne (1991) covered feminist and non-sexist social work towards the end of the book. He defined this as "help, usually given by women to other women" (Payne, 1991:217).

I found McNay's argument persuasive: Feminism has made little impact on mainstream social work theory because social work theory and practice have been

constructed to reflect the values of the dominant group. Feminist theory and practice have been side-lined as "other". Strategies to address this lie, *not* in by-standing while feminist issues are diluted or co-opted then ignored, but by locating feminist practice within a different framework. This would place importance on analysing the dimensions of power in considering social problems. By implication, this involves considering every aspect of power issues in direct social work with clients: power based on gender, on race, in the worker-client relationship and in the relationship between client-worker-agency-state. The importance of power issues is not new to social work theory. What is new is the concept of integrated theory, with a feminist analysis in the centre.

Helen Land's principles for feminist social work conclude this discussion of the literature (Land, 1995). Her focus was feminist clinical social work. She questioned what constitutes feminist practice and defined it as a philosophy of intervention, rather than a set of techniques. At the core of this philosophy lie ways of seeing which can be expressed in practice. Land drew these into thirteen areas. They are the most comprehensive expression of the ideals of a feminist approach to social work I found in the literature and are:

Validation of the social context - paying attention to the effects of the client's social context. These include environmental pressures, gender roles, and gender-based discrimination which affects the client's experience.

Revaluing positions enacted by women - for example valuing compromising, seeking consensus, providing nurturing to others and care giving (which includes working in occupations like social work) as much as competitive striving for upward mobility. The former behaviours are more often performed by women, the latter by men and are valued more highly.

Recognising difference between male and female experience - and challenging assumptions about women's experience which are gender-blind. Land cited as an example of this principle being expressed, the research of Carol Gilligan (1982).

Gilligan's studies on the psychological development of women challenged assumptions made on the basis of research which used only males as research subjects. Her results showed that women develop different relationship patterns and ideas about morality from men. Gilligan, and colleagues, have continued to research the development of women and girls and some of their publications are relevant for social workers. Some of it I have found useful in understanding stroppy and suicidal behaviour in work with teenage girls (Gilligan, Rogers & Tolman, 1991).

Rebalancing perceptions of normality and deviance - countering labelling the behaviour of less privileged groups as deviant or dysfunctional. The example cited is the attempt made by feminist psychotherapists to block "self-defeating personality disorder" being inserted into the American Psychiatric Association's 1994 *Diagnostic and Statistical Handbook of Mental Disorders.* The objection was made on the grounds that the definition labels behaviour more often seen in women as pathological when "dominating personality disorder", a male behaviour, was not a diagnostic option.

An inclusive stance - involves re-examining assumptions which are based on the values of the dominant culture only, such as the meaning of "family".

Attention to power dynamics in the client-helper relationship - reiterates what has been expressed for many years throughout feminist writing and social work texts: the desirability of an egalitarian client-worker relationship.

Recognition of how the personal is political - also revoices one of the basic principles of feminism. The principle is expressed in practical terms useful to a social worker.

Deconstructive and partnering stances - these two principles highlight the importance of attending to the use of language as a way of challenging assumptions, and they query the ban on self-disclosure which is traditional within

psychotherapy and social work. The work on women and girls' psychological development cited above, demonstrates this principle through providing a new way of understanding and talking about behaviour in teenage girls. " Problem behaviour" is renamed as resistance and courage.

Inclusive scholarship - valuing a variety of scholarly traditions and "noting the knowledge-building interplay between feminist clinical practice and feminist scholarship" (Land, 1995:10).

Challenging reductionist models - challenges models which code gender-based behaviour, such as assumptions that women are the emotional and social caretakers.

Empowerment practice - revoices one of the basic principles of feminist social work.

Rejection of the myth of value-free work - argues for biases to be made explicit.

To incorporate these principles fully into social work with clients, Land held that it is important for social workers to become increasingly aware of the diversity of cultural, ethnic and racial values and the effect of social environments. She argued that feminist work in all the traditional areas, such as women's health, sexual abuse, and development of theory, must continue but she believed that some feminist issues, such as sexual exploitation of clients, sexual harassment in the workplace and domestic violence, have now become part of the mainstream. They form the essential knowledge base for practitioners, ethics committees and academics.

Land also advocated an inclusive stance on the grounds that, "The problems of women are problems of the world, and what is good scholarship and practice for women is good for the whole of society" (Land, 1995:13) and "We need to recognize that it is not feminist scholarship that has moved into the mainstream; rather,

feminists have acted as part of the conscience of ethical social work practice, helping move mainstream thought away from destructive paradigms towards new ones that are influenced by feminist thought" (Land, 1995:14).

I now turn from the literature to the research participants and focus on the relationship between their feminist values and their social work practice. I was interested in how each woman described the way she worked, her assessment of the influence of feminist ideas and ideals on her work, and how this fitted with what the literature described as "feminist social work".

The influence of feminist ideals on the social workers' practice

I asked each woman whether she described herself as a feminist. The initial responses to this question varied. Only one participant replied "yes" immediately:

> Poppy: Since I was 18 I would have called myself a feminist.
>
> Marnie: Not everybody does. People that I would identify by their behaviour as utterly feminist agonise over that term.
>
> Poppy: They obviously didn't do a consciousness raising group (laughs) at age 18.

Hesitation and ambivalence about using the feminist label have been noticed by other researchers. Dianne Hawken in her study of feminist managers in the social services reported on the reluctance of managers to term themselves feminists. This seemed to be a reaction to the somewhat pejorative connotation the word has within the general population (Hawken, 1996).

The ambivalence of the social workers in this study was rather different. Some seemed to be expressing diffidence about claiming the label because doing so implied certain things: that they had lived up to feminist ideals, kept up to date with feminist theory and expressed their feminism in political activity. These are the other responses to my question "Do you describe yourself as a feminist?":

> I'm very wary of doing that like because I don't want to put that label on me. I don't necessarily believe I can live up to what people believe a feminist is. I just, I, I suppose I am a feminist. (Ruby)

> It's a long time since I've asked myself. I think I would, but if I was going to be accountable for it I'd want to quickly run away and re-read some stuff and just check myself out quick before I said it very loudly (laughing). (Leah)

> Marnie: Do you describe yourself as a feminist?
> Diana: Yes, but I don't consciously go out to be that. I suppose I see myself as a feminist. I see myself as a lesbian. But none of those things are at the forefront of anything that I necessarily say or do. I just I see myself as being who I am and I've got the good fortune of being both feminist and lesbian and that's just how it is. I don't consciously go out to be that .
> Marnie: If you were consciously "going out to be that", what would you be doing?
> Diana: (pause) Well I suppose, consciously going out there. Be more, more, pro-active and more, fighting a cause.

Other social workers elaborated on this sense of "being who I am". They described a strong sense of self and disliked being labelled because this led to inaccurate assumptions being made about who they were, what they believed and they way they live:

> Helen: Well at times I have (laughs). Nine, ten, twelve years ago, yes. But , I don't really feel the need to have a label, I don't like them.
> Marnie: Is that because of what the label now means in a way that it didn't in the seventies?
> Helen: No, it's probably because I feel more comfortable with who I am and what I'm doing that I don't feel the need to have any sort of label. Some issues that people label as being feminist, aren't necessarily mine.

Phyllis understood that the word "feminist" has become problematic and disliked assumptions being made, but did not reject the label:

> Well if people want to call me that, I don't have an aversion to it. If I was to describe my politics, lesbian feminist, they'd have to be. That's part of my life ... I think it's a word that only came about in the seventies ... It's been a source of discussion and argument and the patriarchy trying to corrupt or to destroy feminism because it was a label given to

> something that's been going on for years. So I think it's the word that people get caught up on, not the actions. (Phyllis)

Ivana's reservations arose from a sense of constraints having been imposed on her while she was actively involved in the feminist movement:

> Marnie: Do you describe yourself as a feminist?
> Ivana: I don't think I do. At some point and I think it was to do with getting overwhelmed by the people who advocated hairy legs and no lipstick. I thought women's liberation was a better term (laughs) ... I would call myself a feminist. Feminism is a generic term anyway ... I certainly subscribe to feminist ideals.

Unlike Hawken's managers, none of the women in this study expressed any reluctance to use the term feminist because it was risky for them to do so in the workplace or they feared it would attract antagonism. I assumed this was because they were lower down the agency hierarchy, worked in teams where they generally had some support from like-minded women, and, perhaps, that they were women for whom the freedom to voice their values had not been constrained by ambition to climb an organisational ladder. All had chosen to remain in social work practice and training, or they had left the organisation. One woman had returned to social work practice from a manager's position which she had "hated, and made this clear decision then that I would never go into management". Her experience of management was that she could not avoid making decisions which conflicted with her values.

I also wondered whether heterosexual women might be reluctant to be labelled "feminist" because the term has been associated negatively with "lesbian" in the anti-feminist backlash. They replied very firmly that their hesitation was due to a general dislike of labelling and had "nothing to do with that" (Helen).

All the social workers talked about the difficulties of sustaining a hopeful feminist vision in an organisation where it was not nurtured and in work where they saw the harshness of women's lives. Gabe's word were typical of the comments made,

when she described care and protection work as "a job about the real world". She reflected on her seven years in social work and said that the realities of the work had made her aware of the difficulties of creating change:

> It just reinforced what bloody awful lives huge numbers of women have, really. I suppose that as a feminist in the middle classes, you could define yourself in terms of feminism but you could lead your life and have no insight into the subjugation of women ... It just reinforces doesn't it, how awful, awful, awful the lives of so many women are. But also really, in a sense, how powerless you are to create very much change for those women. (Gabe)

I also asked the participants whether they had begun to describe themselves as feminists before or after they began careers in social work. All had done so before. They described the process of doing so as a mixture of childhood influences and understandings gained in their young adult lives:

> I think it always has been instilled in me that women can be strong and women can get education, and can go ahead and get what they want. That's part of the way I was brought up. (Phyllis).

> Just working with the women in that centre ... The unfairness of how women were treated. I hadn't felt it in my own life and in my own family life to the extent that a lot of these women did so, that was the beginning of a lot of feminist issues and beliefs. That's where it started from really. (Helen)

> I can remember my mother saying "It's not very feminine for a woman to drive a car" and thinking "Why isn't it very feminine for a woman to drive a car?". But then I think they raised me to always question everything and to think about things. I just read a lot and developed that point of view from what I read and at university talking to different people and thinking about things, it just didn't seem logical to be otherwise. I can't pin-point one particular thing that made me have that point of view. It was just cumulative I think. (Margaret)

Practice values and the influence of feminism

I approached information gathering about the social workers' practice through two sorts of questioning, one more general than the other. I asked each woman to

describe the way she worked focusing on the values which informed her practice rather than departmental requirements, and what her bottom-lines were. We then talked about whether, and how, feminist values had influenced her practice. The sequence and wording of the questions differed slightly from interview to interview. Some women had more to say and some covered most of the material in response to a single question. Others were more reticent, or simply had thought less about it.

Only one social worker, Diana, said that she was not aware of taking feminist values into her employment in social work:

> ... that wasn't at a conscious level at all and the only times that's come up since then I think, are probably in relation to issues with other staff. (Diana)

For the others, separating the influence of feminism out from "who I am" was often difficult:

> I can't seem to distinguish. I think feminism is so much a part of my outlook that it's hard to differentiate. (Shannon)

For most women a difficulty was also struggling to hold on to their ideals. Comments like this run like a vein of frustration and regret through the tape transcripts:

> It's incredibly hard to hold any philosophical stance at the moment, because everything is so haphazard .The values behind what we're doing aren't discussed at all. I think I've got older and it's hard to retain some of the energy and anger and wonderment that I had ten years ago when I was discovering it. Fifteen years ago. I think that in an environment where it's not nurtured, and I haven't gone out of my way to nurture it outside, then it just, it gets thrown out. (Leah)

My findings about the influence of feminism on the social workers' practice are now discussed under the three themes which emerged: analysis, practice values and practice methods.

Three themes: feminism as a base for analysis, practice values and practice methods

I have drawn the material into the three areas in which the social workers described their way of working as having been influenced by feminism.

Analysis

Most social workers described feminism as having given them their analysis of the world and their understanding of oppression. This was the bedrock on which their practice was based. Their analysis had been constantly reinforced by their experiences in care and protection work.

Analysis of the nature of power and oppression

The social workers attributed to their feminist perspective, an ability to analyse at every level. It led to an understanding that what women clients were experiencing was not the result of individual pathology:

> It depends what you define as feminist social work. I mean if you had a women that came in and said "My husband's beating the shit out of me", the fact that you recognised that and realised it was part of a phenomenon that was happening to a lot of women and you believed her and all of those kinds of things could be called feminist social work. (Gabe)

Others spoke about feminism having given them the ability to analyse structural and power relations as they affected women. A feminist outlook contributed to their ability to analyse oppression more generally, as the following three excerpts demonstrate:

> It's given me my analysis of power, of oppression, of the way I see New Zealand society, all that sort of stuff. (Leah)

> For me it's a way of understanding the world and the power structures that are, that exist. It's a way of interpreting that and I also have an awareness of where the indigenous culture fits in and where that fits in with oppression. (Shannon)

> I think overall it has expanded my feeling of, what I knew already about people who have and people who haven't, and the political implications and the class implications and race and culture. That has really expanded my understanding of all those issues. (Poppy)

I was struck by repeated references to oppressions other than gender-based oppression. The feminist literature emphasises that a feminist analysis is *not* focused exclusively on the disadvantages suffered by women but is concerned about oppression more broadly. The social workers spoke about those concerns.

Analysis of the organisation

One aspect of the theme of analysis was that a feminist awareness led the social workers to notice oppressive practices within the organisation which employed them. The impact of the organisation was explored in chapter five. The point made here is that feminism provided tools for analysis and a language to voice this. Both Phyllis and Ivana had observed discriminatory promotion practices which left women at the bottom of the hierarchy:

> I was concerned about the role of women in the Department. How I saw men being supervisors. Men running the place and yet there seemed to be predominantly women doing the work. Women were managing work with children and going home and then going into another job when they got home from work. Men did a lot less work and yet they went home often into a situation where they were well looked after. They had their washing done, their dinner done, or whatever. (Phyllis)

> That was still very much, a female dominated occupation with women all at the bottom. Certainly it was very easy to have a feminist analysis. (Ivana)

Margaret made the same point that women were the *workers* in the organisation and were client focused. The motivation of the men who rose to the top appeared to be more self-interested:

> That galvanises my feminism. It is a very masculine system. It's all these very self-centred, self-motivated, political-type people who are largely men who do all this stuff which has nothing to do with the business of the organisation. (Margaret)

Practice values

This heading unites six categories which I found when I analysed the interview transcripts: a belief in social justice, honest and ethical behaviour, respecting differences, improving women's lives, co-operative ways of working and, "one person can make a difference".

In describing their practice, the social workers spoke about grounding what they did in notions of social justice. Most saw themselves as social workers first and agency employees second. The agency emphasis on output delivery and short term intervention conflicted with their understanding of clients' needs and their more holistic approach. They emphasised the importance of treating clients with honesty and respect. Giving accurate and full information was part of this. Several women spoke about observing other staff members' disrespectful behaviour towards clients and worrying about poor practice. They felt ashamed to work in an organisation in which this was not addressed and it had been a factor in their decisions to leave.

The six categories which have been grouped into the "practice values" theme are:

Social justice

Social work has always had dual components, one personal, one political and this is stressed on social work training courses. On the course I completed to gain a professional qualification the concepts were described as "public issues and private troubles". We were taught that addressing both these areas was our task as social work practitioners.

Women spoke about ideas of social justice still being essential to their practice, despite it not being part of the social work role as it is now defined within their organisation:

> I've got a really strong sense of social justice and equity. Equity of outcome, not just equality of opportunity. (Leah)

Ethical and honest treatment and information giving

Treating clients with respect and honesty was important. It was based on feminist values of empowerment, affirmation and attending carefully to the power dynamics in client worker relationships:

> I've always believed in being very honest with the client in terms of practice and not withholding information and that the social worker has to not be afraid of who they are with a client in terms of their practice. I suppose I've had to go through that myself because of being a lesbian. I'm not saying that I go out to a client with "I'm a lesbian" written all over my T-shirt, but by the fact that I've had to deal with it. (Phyllis)

Ivana spoke about basing her work on feminist and personal values of respect for others and was appalled when she saw the absence of these values in some of her colleagues:

> I think that I tried to approach it from sort of an ethical personal belief basis but I found it intensely difficult to work in that system ... That belief that people you deal with, by and large, in child protection are poor people, or people that have less options or understand their rights less and so, you must make sure they get everything they're entitled to and that their rights are protected as much as possible. I think that was one of my main things. I thought that people should be really respected and valued. That was one of the things that I found quite horrifying coming ... to Social Welfare and I put it down to an absolute class thing ... I was horrified when I came to Social Welfare at the way people were spoken to, the way they were treated, the complete lack of confidentiality, the way social workers would make an appointment and not think twice about turning up an hour late, all those were basic things. I was just really horrified and I tried never, ever to do those things and I always thought of it as a class thing. I thought, "If these people were middle class you wouldn't treat them like this." (Ivana)

Respect for difference

This value was contained in most women's descriptions of casework with specific clients and in criticism of the organisation's commitment to EEO. Respect for diversity seemed deeply part of the social workers' value base:

> It's part of that whole philosophy of everyone's a little different but everyone's very valuable. (Margaret)

Improving women's lives

Eight of the social workers said that a desire to help women was a main reason they had chosen to enter, or had remained in, care and protection social work. This desire had been sustained by finding that effective work could be done:

> I brought some of those values with me about wanting to help women and children. That was my focus really, going into social work. (Helen)

> One of the things that actually did get me into the social work field was that I really wanted to work with women. (Poppy)

Ruby had also focused her work in CYPFS mostly on women and children because she had found through experience that it was more productive:

> I see women as the facilitators of change ... It's the women who are able to shift and move and have the ability to take on new ideas and new concepts whereas the men in the family weren't able to do that. They just didn't have the capacity to do it and it was the women that you could work with. (Poppy)

The wish to work primarily with women was not shared by two social workers:

> The bottom line, ultimately, I think was I've been very child-focused all the way through. I notice some women who come in who clearly have worked in women's organisations, have difficulty transferring away from being woman focused. They're much more woman focused than they are child focused ... They find it very difficult to shift. (Phyllis)

And Diana , who also described her practice as very child focused:

> I haven't at any point thought I want to work with women or men or whatever because if I had I would have gone into women's refuge, or that kind of field.

I was interested in how the eight social workers who were very clear about wanting to work *with* women clients, managed the inevitable conflicts between this and the realities of practice. At times, children need to be protected from harm inflicted by women. The dilemma is debated in the feminist social work literature and statutory social workers are often judged harshly for failing to adhere to the feminist agenda. Dominelli and McLeod, for example, stated:

> "Feminists such as Wise (1985) have tried to resolve this issue by prioritising the interests of the children over those of the mother. We take the view that the situation requires a more complex response than this, because responding as Wise does endorses the subordination of the interests of the woman concerned. We believe that feminists are not in the business of fostering relations of subordination at any point in their work. Feminist practitioners need to concentrate on working out how to create ways in which the interests of both parties can be kept on an equal footing" (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989:112 - 113).

I have come to the conclusion that keeping the interests of the parties on an equal footing is, in practice, often just not possible. The best that can be done is to treat women who abuse respectfully, to see that they are given good information, to ensure that their rights are safeguarded, to make resources available so that they are supported and have access to help, and to work within an analytical framework which does not attribute their abusive behaviour exclusively to individual pathology. Compromising the safety of their children is not an option.

The social workers I spoke with about this dilemma had made a journey very like that which was described by Sue Wise (1988). She wrote about trying, as a new social worker, to discover whether "feminist social work" was possible. Wise decided that analysing social work as an institution in a conventional structural way does not lead to an understanding of what "doing" social work involves. Later still, she concluded that feminist social work, if that was defined as working non-oppressively with women, is a fantasy in local authority work. She questioned "whether feminist social work is *possible* , but also whether it is even *desirable*" (Wise, 1988:238). Wise argued that the feminist critique of social work

and social workers is over-simplistic and fails to show what it is that social workers actually do. What statutory social workers do, she proposed, is to intrude into people's lives to protect the most vulnerable members of society - a valid feminist concern. Social work, she found, is not about attempting to improve the quality of people's lives in a general way but is the social policing of minimum acceptable standards of care. The task for feminism is to deal with aspects of social control which are inherent in feminist social work; to debate the issues with reference to the everyday realities of practice; and to generate answers to questions like: What should be "acceptable standards"? Who should decide what these are?, and How should they be imposed?

The social workers in this study all echoed Wise's conclusions:

> I think I started off from a very feminist point of view where I didn't see children's rights as being very distinct and important. I saw women's rights as being very distinct and important. As I went on I think I had to accept that women could do terrible things and there was no excuse for that and the important thing was their children's rights. That was a real progression for me in terms of my ethical base. Thinking about, "Well who is the client?."(Ivana)

and Shannon:

> I find myself more focused on women in my practice than I am on children in the job.
> Marnie: So when it's a woman abuser or a woman who's unprotective, how do you weigh up that interest in women, working with women, with the child as your client?
> Shannon: Then I'm focused on the children. If I feel a situation is unresolvable ... if there's no movement or change possible then I focus on what's best for the child.

Co-operative ways of working

The principles which are common to all the feminist social work literature I reviewed, in social work practice, management, training and supervision, are those which argue for ways of working which promote an holistic approach. They undermine hierarchy and focus on collective decision making (Van Den Bergh & Cooper, 1986), support (Nash, 1989), inter-dependence (McNay, 1992), an inclusive

stance (Land, 1995), and, caring and connecting (Van Den Bergh, 1995). The value of co-operative ways of working was also common to the social workers in this study. Teamwork with other women had been an experience central to the positive side of their work.

One person can make a difference

Leah talked about a value which was common: despite success in social work being difficult to measure, it is a job worth doing. Other social workers also talked about this value in words like "making a little bit of difference", and "chipping away trying to change things":

> I've always felt that as one person, I have got something to offer other people, and I don't see myself particularly as an expert. I'm a great believer in information giving. Not telling people what to do, but that I have got some knowledge that can often be helpful in terms of people accessing resources, and that I've got some communication expertise, and the time and the commitment to people as people ... I've also got a very strong value that people are trying as hard as they can, so that even people who do the most repugnant acts, I can still work with. I don't necessarily like it ... but I don't really believe that there are a lot of malevolent nasty people around. I've got quite an optimistic view of human nature. (Leah)

Practice methods

This theme contains the ways in which social workers demonstrated the influence of feminist values in their practice methods. All were focused on the safety of children but knew that ways of achieving this often lay in improving the material conditions of their parents' lives, usually through working closely with the mother. They talked about raising women clients' self-esteem, creating access to resources and advocating with other agencies such as Housing New Zealand. Despite the constraints of the organisation, they had a measure of autonomy in the way they worked and strategies to sidestep the limitations imposed by requirements to work within time-limited outputs:

> We set up those support groups for women exactly in that situation and got other women together who were in a similar kind of situation. That's all feminist social work. (Gabe)

> Marnie: Conflicts between what the Department expects of you and what you expect of you, are there any?
> Margaret: Oh yes, oh yes. The Department expects an awful lot of nonsense ... I see people as being able to work at their own pace ... Small achievable steps basically. In trying to undo generations of influence, you can't do that in a three month family/ whanau agreement ... For the sake of the books you divvy it up that way. Leave them to their own devices for a few months knowing very well that they'll come back again.

These three components of doing social work which incorporated feminist ideals: analysis, practice values, and practice methods, were intertwined in the stories. Below is a longer excerpt which demonstrates this: a feminist analysis, based on feminist values, which lead to practice methods:

> Margaret: I think that one of the strengths of being a woman is that on the whole we're pretty good at communicating and at working collectively to solve problems rather having to go and have a war ... Which leads me to believe that women need to do things differently and hopefully better. So, I guess that affects my view of things and the way that I work as well.
> Marnie: In what ways, when you're working with a case?
> Margaret: When I'm working with a case I'm very focused on practicalities, because I think women work in terms of practicalities. They're thinking about feeding their children, they're thinking about clothing their children, getting them to school, practical things, and my ideas that I present to clients about how things might be done differently, have to be linked to very practical things ... It also means that when I'm working with other people I like the idea of working as part of a team. I don't like the idea of being an individual, isolated social worker going off to save the world ... so that affects the way that I practice too. I like to have someone to talk to about ideas, to share what I think and ask what they think because there's safety in that and also you don't miss things, and that helps me to think too. If I'm getting information back from someone else I can work on that, and build on that, make suggestions back to them so it's, it's a more creative process sometimes, and I think you get fuller information. Good decision making comes from good information.

Summary of the chapter

All but one of the social workers were initially reluctant to describe themselves as feminists. Each woman subscribed to feminist values but several felt they were insufficiently active politically to claim a place within feminism. Others found the label problematic because it masked their individuality and led to inaccurate assumptions being made about their beliefs and lifestyles. Each social worker demonstrated the principles of feminist social work in her practice.

There were common themes in the feminist social work literature about these principles. Each author argued for social work practice which was woman focused, holistic, undermined hierarchy, valued process and celebrated diversity. The analysis of power and paying attention to power dynamics in the worker-client relationship was important. This was the way the women I interviewed worked. Their social work practice was based on a vision of social justice and improving women's lives. They struggled to sustain this vision in the organisation. Their practice was woman focused but not at the expense of children's safety. All the social workers were very clear that the child was the primary client and children's rights to safety and freedom from harm took priority.

Feminism had given the social workers the ability to analyse power and oppression. They understood the role and place of women within the organisation and described this as doing the real work at the bottom of the hierarchy.

CHAPTER 7

Lesbian Social Workers' Experiences

> "Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativities can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters" (Audre Lorde, 1984:111).

Introduction

The last chapter amplified the "tiny whisper" of feminism in statutory social work. This chapter acknowledges the creative fund of difference in women's lives as I consider social workers' experiences of identifying as lesbian at work. Relevant lesbian-feminist theory is introduced, followed by an overview of theorising about homosexuality and the concept of lesbian identity. I then discuss and analyse the social workers' experiences under four themes: identifying as lesbian at work, losing control of information about lesbian identity, dealing with myths, and the organisation from a lesbian perspective. The chapter concludes with a search for answers to a final question I asked the lesbian social workers - why have so many of us worked in care and protection social work?

I wanted both to understand the differences between the experiences of lesbian and heterosexual social workers and to acknowledge the interdependency between women with feminist values. All women social workers working in CYPFS share the oppressions of a sexist organisation. In my experience those with a feminist outlook generally support each other and are united by a common understanding. There are also some differences. Heterosexual women do not experience the anxieties of managing lesbian identity, the worry about being labelled a sexual

abuser while working with teenage girls, or the fear that being lesbian leads to greater vulnerability within the organisation.

My attempts to explore lesbian experience without creating a dichotomy between "lesbian" and "heterosexual" were not entirely successful. I asked each woman whether there had been any issues to do with being lesbian or heterosexual during her time in social work. Two women, both of whom I knew well, strongly disliked being labelled "heterosexual" and there was an awkwardness in this part of the interviews. I learned later that this reaction has been experienced by other researchers. As part of a piece of work which attempted to theorise heterosexuality, British psychologists Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (1993) wrote to heterosexual feminists, asking each woman how her heterosexuality contributed to her feminist politics. The responses included blank incomprehension, ambivalence, discomfort and anger about the label. I experienced something similar and felt women I had labelled as heterosexual did not like being positioned as "the Other". It was difficult for them to think of ways in which their sexual preference might have been an issue in the workplace. Both Leah and Ruby responded very briefly that, "Basically, I'm in the majority and I can forget my sexuality" (Leah) and "Not an issue for me, no, never an issue. It never occurs to me. That's not something I refer to at all" (Ruby). In contrast, the lesbians had quite a lot to say about what they thought the difficulties for heterosexual women might be:

> Oh heterosexuals who've got a partner, I would imagine that they'd get into all sorts of conflict, within their own heads or in reality about their partners ... I'm sure that heterosexuals probably have a lot more to deal with because they work predominantly with offenders who are men. (Diana)

> The reality is in child protection, by and large abusers of women and children are men and so being a lesbian gives you the ability to analyse that. If you were living with a man, even if you were living with a man in a non-violent happy relationship, it must be very hard. It must be harder to have an analysis. Your analysis must be somehow more complicated. I've heard heterosexual women ... who I think are clearly heterosexual and enjoy being heterosexual and make no bones about it

> and seem to be very straightforward in their sexuality and are also highly competent experienced practitioners ... say, sometimes when you're doing these really, really horrible cases ... the fact that that is *your* sexuality, that has a personal effect. (Ivana)

The participants returned to the subject of lesbian and heterosexual identity when I met with them later in group discussions. The same pattern occurred. Managing lesbian identity was not something the lesbian workers could ever afford to ignore. Heterosexual women felt they could generally forget about their sexuality in the workplace, although some were aware that they benefited from "heterosexual privilege" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993:9-10). They were in harmony with heterosexist norms of the agency and did not notice what the lesbian women referred to as "continuous [hetero]sexualised banter":

> There is *always* this heterosexual talk. Talking about their men. Talking about having sex. (Poppy)

Women in both groups were interested in how they were seen by the other. This was a topic upon which the lesbian social workers had much more to say, although each had a different point of view:

> Shannon: I think quite a lot of the heterosexual women are frightened. They're scared by us.
> Poppy: I think they think, "They're going to taint us".
> Ivana: I don't think it's that! I think that they're attracted to women and they don't trust themselves more than they don't trust us.
> Phyllis: I don't think they want to go out and visit clients with us. I think that they would rather be with someone who was less obviously...
> Diana: No I think that's to do with people recognising us or you, or whoever, as being competent and assertive. I don't think that's to do with being lesbian.

I became very aware as I thought about the place of feminist social workers within the organisation, that there has been no forum to discuss many of the issues which surfaced during interviews. These included the awareness that sexual abuse and domestic violence are *hetero*-sexual crimes, heterosexual privilege in the agency

and a suspicion of "the Other" which lurked beneath the bonds of feminist values. They are topics for further research and action.

To create a context for the data from the lesbian social workers' interviews, I will now introduce some ideas from lesbian feminist theory and concepts of gay and lesbian identity, before moving on to analyse the social workers' experiences.

Lesbian-feminist theories

Lesbian-feminist theories add to other feminisms the argument that heterosexism is a basic oppression, which is economically sanctified by patriarchy. This underlies women's oppression and lesbian oppression. The theories include notions of compulsory heterosexuality and argue that women need to withdraw their energies from men and male institutions into lesbian existence (Adrienne Rich, 1980; Janice Raymond, 1986; Sarah Hoagland, 1988). Rich challenged heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women in numerous ways. She included among these "the socialization of women to feel that male sexual 'drive' amounts to a right, the idealization of heterosexual romance, rape, pornography, seizure of children from lesbian mothers in the courts, sexual harassment, enforced economic dependence of wives and the erasure of lesbian existence from history and culture" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993:2).

Janice Raymond developed these ideas further, into a theory of "hetero-reality" which considered most aspects of women's lives to be defined by the ideology that women exist for men. Like Adrienne Rich, Raymond understood women's relationships to be on a continuum between heterosexual and lesbian, which has always existed. In order to resist compulsory heterosexuality, the feminist philosopher Sarah Hoagland argued for "stepping out of the framework," to develop a lesbian ethics and female moral agency:

> "developing ability within a situation without claiming responsibility for the situation ... resisting de-moralization under oppression ...

> resisting the belief that if we can't control a situation, our actions make no difference and we are powerless. Moral agency involves the ability to go on under oppression: to continue to make choices, to act within the oppressive structure of our society and challenge oppression, to create meaning through our living" (Hoagland, 1988:13).

These theories challenged the marginalising of lesbians by feminism and have led to attempts to theorise heterosexuality and challenge its taken-for-granted status.

Alison Laurie (1992) wrote that the kinds of analyses which are central to lesbian-feminist theories are also able to take account of other oppressions based on race, age, ability and ethnicity. An alertness to many oppressions was something I noticed in the interviews with some of the social workers and this awareness was more pronounced in the lesbians. They talked about issues of race and class and had little difficulty in imagining possible dilemmas for heterosexual women working in care and protection. Shannon attributed this noticing of other oppressions to her experience of coming out as lesbian, which she had also observed in other lesbians she knew. The process had exposed middle class pakeha women to the experience of oppression and she suggested that this was one of the reasons lesbians were able to stay in care and protection work - the direct experience of oppression had politicised them and enabled lesbians to work to address the oppression of others:

> I think so much of the work that we do has a political edge to it and lesbians have a political awareness. I think coming out is a political process and it politicises most dykes that I've met ... In a lot of ways it's about taking power back and, for a lot of us it's a political decision about who you want to spend time with and want in your life and your emotional supports. That gives you an awareness of oppression. (Shannon)

Shannon's words illustrated the point about the political aspect of lesbian identity made by Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger:

> "For many lesbian feminists, accepting the label "lesbian" is a defiant act of self-naming, in which we assert our refusal of the heteropatriarchal order, and our commitment to women and to lesbians. It is claiming for

> ourselves, and as political, the identity they taught us to despise ... lesbianism is never something a woman simply becomes by chance, without thinking, by default" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993: 6).

Theorising about homosexuality and the concept of lesbian identity

Homosexuality has been attributed to many causes and the notion of lesbian identity is shaped by culture and time. My own university text in Abnormal Psychology described "the practice of homosexuality" as adolescent experimentation, disorganized psychotic behaviour, meeting "the need for ready, quick, and cost-free orgasm (by oral sex) on the part of heterosexual males with unsatisfactory marital relations", fear of castration by the dominant powerful mother, and lack of an adequate, loving father (Harmatz, 1978:460-461). Female homosexuality posed an even more puzzling challenge to the author's understanding. It was reported that parents of lesbians "generated overwhelming guilt and fear toward sexual contact with men, starting in the early pubescent period" (Harmatz, 1978:462). Finding the causes of lesbianism had otherwise "defied systematic investigation".

Current theories of sexuality take one of three approaches (Connell & Dowsett, 1992; Rubin, 1992). In the essentialist model, sex is viewed as a natural and individual phenomenon which is genetically based and located in hormones or the psyche. Heterosexuality is considered to be normal; minority sexualities the exception. This has been the traditional theory in the fields of medicine, psychiatry and psychology. The model has, however, also been used by the lesbian and gay rights movement in attempts to decriminalise homosexuality and oppose discrimination by using the argument that homosexuality is also a natural, genetically determined, biological form (Beckett & Denborough, 1995:110).

Social construction theories do not understand sexuality in purely biological terms but as constituted within a social, historical and political context which shapes thinking about sexuality and sexual experience. The French philosopher, Michel Foucault is credited, by many later researchers, with first introducing these concepts.

The third range of theories extend the social constructivist approach to focus on "how individuals actively construct their identities, noting both resistance to and compliance with dominant ways of thinking" (Beckett & Denborough, 1995:114). The emphasis lies on the active *construction* of identity through available discourses, a term which is used to talk about language as not only describing the social world, but also as, in some sense, constructing it (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). These theories offer new ways of exploring questions about the relationship between sex and identity.

Lesbian identity, as I define it, is both a sexual preference about who we desire, a claiming of self, and a political choice.

The lesbian social workers' experiences considered under four themes

Identifying as lesbian at work

Lesbians working in organisations have been described by Marny Hall as being in "double jeopardy" (Hall, 1986). Lesbians, as a symbol, transgress the norm that organisations must appear to be sexless and rational. In addition, they violate these norms on a personal level by not being "the Other", that is, they are not heterosexual women, who men require for self-definition. Lesbians are penalised for this, Hall argued, "within the organization, at the very least, [through] a forfeiture of good will; at the most retaliation, harassment and the loss of one's job" (Hall, 1986:178). The surveys of lesbians which Hall cited, revealed that a high percentage of lesbians did not disclose their sexual identity in their workplace and distanced themselves from workmates. They maintained a protective secrecy and were deprived of benefits such as health insurance and travel bonuses which included partners.

The five lesbians in my study shared lesbian identity, but were otherwise very different. They resisted assumptions being made in the workplace, by both heterosexuals and other lesbians, that having something in common meant

having everything in common. Ivana described two ways in which she tried to retain her individuality :

> I went to great lengths to try and promote the idea that lesbians were all sorts of different things and attitudes and life styles and whatever.
>
> and:
>
> The only other issue was that feeling that some of the other lesbians there thought that you should immediately be their best friend and be supportive just because you were a lesbian too. (Ivana)

All five women were out to colleagues in their own workplaces. Each spoke about the complexity of managing lesbian identity and I became interested in understanding the features of a workplace which might enable, or restrict, disclosure.

A quantitative study by Beth Schneider (1986) drew on data from 228 lesbian workers in the United States to explore the issue of coming out at work. Like the participants in most published studies, respondents were highly educated, feminist-identified, overwhelmingly white and mostly professionally employed. She reported that employment in the human services showed a strong, direct and positive effect on disclosure. Work which promoted helping clients through honest relationships with patience and tolerance, provided a setting in which lesbians were more likely to be able to identify themselves. The proportion of female workers and the flourishing of some sort of female culture in the workplace were also significant. Opportunities to socialise with women workmates out of work hours made coming out more likely. It was found, however, that lesbians who work with children and those in highly paid jobs were less likely to be open. This was also the case for lesbians who had previously lost a job because of their sexuality. Secrecy was more prevalent in large workplaces.

The work environment of the social workers in this study provided many of the conditions which Beth Schneider found were conducive to openness about sexual identity. As care and protection social workers they were employed in small to

medium sized workplaces, mostly with other women. They worked closely together in small teams. Much of the work involved working in pairs during difficult and stressful child abuse investigations. The work situation was one in which there were opportunities for trusting friendships and self-disclosure between women to develop.

Schneider cited earlier studies by other researchers which reported that once sexual identity had been disclosed, "these persons are invariably at greater ease than those who remain closeted" (Schneider, 1986:466). She concluded that "lesbians survive at work through a complicated assessment of the degree to which a particular work setting provides opportunities to be honest about their sexual identity" (Schneider, 1986:467). Social workers are trained, and are required by their code of ethics, to be non-judgmental, accepting of diversity and non- discriminatory. The lesbians I interviewed acknowledged that this made it more likely that lesbian and gay workers would be accepted in a social work agency, but suspected that prejudice lay beneath a veneer of tolerance. They made remarks like: "the straight ones, it's actually hard to know what they think" (Shannon), "I'm acceptable to a certain level and then I'm unacceptable" (Phyllis) and, " That's not to say that it's not an organisation with a lot of intolerance at other levels but it doesn't express itself in those very, very direct ways. It expresses itself in all sorts of other ways" (Ivana).

The lesbian social workers in this study wanted to be open about their lesbian identity and had sought a working situation in which this was possible. The one woman in the study who had been dismissed from previous employment because she identified herself as lesbian, had then chosen to work in CYPFS because she knew there were other lesbians and she would be more protected from discrimination.

Schneider gave the reasons for *not* coming out as including a general fear of challenging the presumption of heterosexuality, specific fears of losing one's job and/or access to promotion, and fear of harassment or isolation. Her conclusions emphasised that coming out is a process which is never totally completed. "There

are always new situations and new persons; decisions are being made constantly" (Schneider, 1986:467). Shannon spoke about this process occurring continually for her:

> I'm often conscious when I go to another office than I'm not out there. I have to go through that whole process of, " Shall I or shan't I?" ... as a lesbian, I have to ask myself that ... just down to social functions, "Shall I take my partner?"... When a lawyer asks me what I'm doing this weekend do I say, "I'm off to a lesbian workshop". (Shannon)

This continuous alertness and energy consuming, self-monitoring has been discussed by lesbians in other, related, occupations such as psychology and therapy. Suzy Stiles (1995) described it as a continual watchfulness, a "weasel voice that mutters somewhere between brain and ear *Do they know? What will they think? Is this the right time to say it?"* (Stiles, 1995:3).

The issue of being out, or not being out to clients was a major problem. Concern about the consequences of being identified as lesbian were present in all the lesbian social workers' responses and I was surprised by their level of anxiety about this. What also surprised me was the realisation that I had never discussed this issue with other lesbian social workers before, and had made an assumption that my own anxieties were a personal lack of courage rather than a shared fear.

Statutory social work often involves involuntary clients who are in a crisis. Adults who have been reported for alleged child abuse, at times, respond to social workers with hostility. All social workers are vulnerable to clients gaining and using personal information about them. Harassment on the basis of suspected lesbian identity is not uncommon, as Helen noted:

> As a heterosexual woman, we probably get challenged more about it, especially when we are seen to be socialising with a lot of women all the time, not having a male companion. It happens quite often. (Helen)

Four lesbians managed their lesbian identity with great care. Only one, Phyllis, described herself as being out to clients and then only if they asked :

> I say, "Yes I am" ... I don't introduce myself as a lesbian (laughs), but if they ask me. (Phyllis)

She had determined never to conceal her sexual identity and as a result Phyllis had experienced abuse from clients:

> Client abuse has been one of the biggest things I've experienced ... I think it's because on the whole I have short hair and still wear fairly androgynous type clothing. I fit some of the stereotypical images of a lesbian. (Phyllis)

The other lesbian social workers were unwilling to reveal their sexual identity to clients. They avoided being asked about this directly although all had come out to a woman client at least once when asked. The questioner was in most instances herself a lesbian. Diana, who described herself as completely out seemed horrified when I asked whether this openness extended to clients:

> Marnie: What about any issues to do with being lesbian?
> Diana: Well, that never consciously comes into my mind ... it hasn't been anything in my consciousness.
> Marnie: Ever?
> Diana: No
> Marnie: So how out are you?
> Diana: Completely out.
> Marnie: With clients?
> Diana: No, oh no, not out there.
> Marnie: Ever?
> Diana: No, no and I won't ever ... I wouldn't, I just definitely wouldn't come out with a client .

The other three women shared this reluctance. Ivana's reasons were based on suspicions informed by an experience of mistaken identity:

> I have a huge reluctance to disclose my sexuality and that may be well founded or not well founded but I was not prepared to take the risk ... I

> always suspected that it would create a level of discomfort in my relationship with clients.
> Marnie: Was that based on specific incidents?
> Ivana: No it was based on never testing it out. I could have been completely wrong. I also had a fear with some nasty clients that it might be used against me and I did have a few nasty clients ... A client who had come into contact with me and another social worker complained about the other social worker on the basis that they didn't want any of those *dykes* like that sent round any more. The other social worker was heterosexual but more butch looking than me and they trusted and wanted me (laughs) ... That really reinforced (laughs) that ... you are dealing with people often who don't share your politics and who make bizarre judgements. (Ivana)

Shannon's fears about clients identifying her as lesbian were based on similar observations:

> I know that colleagues of mine have been accused of being, it's an awful thing to say *accused* of being lesbian ... It's been used as a form of abuse and a way of getting social workers off the case. (Shannon)

The stress of keeping silent behind a mask was most apparent in Poppy's description of dealing with angry, anti-lesbian and anti-gay clients who were unaware of her lesbian identity. Her strategy was to withdraw emotionally from the interchange and mask herself behind the persona of the detached professional social worker, attentive but unengaged: " just sit back and not feel the need to be defensive or to make comment. Just to allow it to be."

Information spreading

Losing control of information about their lesbian identity was also an issue for every lesbian. It has been an issue for me. Helen Cosis Brown (1992) commented, in a paper on *"Lesbians, the state and social work practice"*, that "Both social workers and their clients live in a world that hates, fears and is fascinated by homosexuality"(Brown, 1992:216). I was reminded of this when I listened to the lesbian social workers talk about their experiences. They were often outed by heterosexual colleagues who had no inkling of the complexities of managing a

disreputable identity. Phyllis continued her story of being out to clients with a remark that was echoed by other lesbians:

> Often people have done all the announcing before I get somewhere, that's the other thing that happens ... Other social workers might have indicated it or they've told other people I'm going to meet. (Phyllis)

Shannon attempted to tease out the reasons for this:

> I feel like I'm more often outed by heterosexuals ... It feels like a power and control issue somehow ... If they have knowledge of a certain thing then they can disseminate it and they have control of the process ... When I'm talking about myself as a lesbian and I'm talking to another lesbian and we're in a group of people and I know that they're out and I'm out and we're talking about lesbian issues, then that's fine. It's just, I resent being outed by heterosexuals ... Someone asked about why that was and I couldn't really explain it but it's something to do with ownership and control of our own community and our own knowledge. I guess indigenous cultures go through the same thing ... It's almost like an intellectual property that's really important to hang onto because if we share everything we have nothing to make us distinctive. (Shannon)

Dealing with myths

Discriminatory myths exist about any group, including sexual minorities. Two of these in particular were noted by the participants as having an effect on their work life. The myth that lesbians are likely to abuse children sexually led to tensions in direct social work. Myths about sex and identity led to a feeling of being stereotyped by non-lesbian colleagues.

- The myth that lesbians are sexual abusers

Helen Cosis Brown, in an article which discussed the implications of coming out for social workers, noted that lesbians and gays who work with children are at risk of accusations of sexual abuse, despite evidence to the contrary (Brown, 1992).

Lesbian social workers voiced their fears of these accusations in words like:

> Particularly dealing with kids. The whole, myth of not so much lesbians, but about gay men being paedophiles. I think it does stretch to women too. That women are going to try and have sex with any young girl or young women. (Poppy)

Diane Richardson (1992) suggested that the reason for this stereotyping is that lesbianism came to be defined in terms of sex and sexual desire via theories of homosexuality which were primarily concerned with men. This construction of lesbians as essentially *sexual* has had repercussions in concerns about the kinds of relationships lesbians have with children. She argued that, "In such cases the traditional perception of women as maternal is overshadowed by the notion of lesbians, either directly or indirectly, posing some sort of sexual threat to children" (Richardson, 1992:191). As Richardson pointed out, this view of lesbians would seem to contradict the dominant view of female sexuality as "passive" and primarily concerned with meeting men's needs. It is, however, congruent with the view of lesbians as unlike real women - an "unlikeness" which portrays lesbians as pseudo-men and therefore more interested in sex than real women.

- The myth that lesbianism is just about sex

The idea that lesbianism is primarily about sex led to another issue for lesbians in the workplace - a preoccupation by other staff with lesbianism as sexual activity. Poppy had experienced remarks being made which erased the political component of her lesbian identity. Assumptions had been made which distorted the meaning of her interactions with other women:

> I suppose just that continual sexualised banter that some heterosexuals get into because they think that lesbians are 90% just on their sexuality. Always referring to things we might do as if they are in some ways a sexualised action towards another women in the office. (Poppy)

The belief held by some heterosexuals that lesbianism was "just about sex" also made it more difficult, in Poppy's experience to talk at work about sexual attraction. Within the workplace heterosexuality was considered normal. She had observed that it was quite acceptable for heterosexual social workers to make remarks like "He was quite a hunk, I'll go back and visit him again", whereas, as a lesbian, she felt more restricted:

> I think we're just as likely to feel it, in terms of being attracted to clients or other women social workers or whatever, but heterosexual women feel that they are able to express it more openly. (Poppy)

The organisation seen from a lesbian perspective

Most lesbians mistrusted the organisation. They felt unprotected from harassment by clients and strongly believed that they had been or would be discriminated against over promotion. In contrast, they also considered that there was some protection from discrimination for lesbians below senior management levels in the sense that there were formal equal employment opportunities and personal grievance procedures. Diana was the lesbian who spoke most positively about the organisation. Not feeling isolated and knowing about the equal employment policy had led to a feeling of relative safety:

> I might do if I was one lesbian in the whole organisation, but I know that there's a lot of lesbians. There's a lot of support out there and the organisation seems to recognise things like EEO reasonably well, and has some kind of appreciation of individual differences ... I actually think that the lesbians who work in the department have quite a lot of respect from the other staff, because I always think, all the lesbians that I know are all confident and competent and people look up to them. (Diana)

The other four women were much less positive and all had direct experience of prejudice.

Lesbian and heterosexual social workers believed that lesbians were discriminated against, either directly or in subtle ways, at higher levels in the organisation. Helen had seen this as:

> I'm thinking back ten years. There were a lot of people at that time that were really uncomfortable and were threatened by women, let alone lesbian women, who they perceived as being more radical ... I think a lot of them have to fight that little bit harder to get from some people, to get acknowledgment of what they're doing. I mean their work. They're labelled. (Helen)

This observation echoed statements made in a report on the career aspirations and experiences of women and men in the Department of Social Welfare which was published in 1987 (Burns and others, 1987). Women who were interviewed for this research told the interviewers that getting a reputation for "speaking out" was not helpful if they wanted promotion. Women in two workplaces reported anti-lesbian discrimination in the hiring and firing of staff (Burns and others, 1987:21).

More direct incidents and fears were reported by Shannon, :

> The manager had shared my, a lot of information from my personal file ... There was that vulnerability again, and it's not having control of the information about myself.
>
> and,
>
> If I was going to apply for a job as a supervisor that that would be the first thing that would come up, "Oh she's another lesbian". It's almost like an EEO issue that works in reverse. (Shannon)

The result of experiences and anxieties of this sort was a high level of mistrust towards the organisation's management:

> I don't think the Department has a good record of protecting its lesbian social workers and I think if there was ever a complaint made ... I wouldn't be protected. I don't feel that the Department is a good employer and I have no trust in its ability to protect me, particularly around lesbian issues. I know that the level of homophobia is still quite high. (Shannon)

One lesbian, Phyllis, who had been employed in CYPFS much longer, expressed similar views. She had experienced direct pressure from more senior management to conceal her sexual identity:

> I knew that if I was to want to stay in management that I would have to dress to such an extent that nobody would know I was a lesbian outwardly ... And that's why I had to give that manager's job up ... The pressure on me to conform was huge. (Phyllis)

This pressure not to challenge the norms of the organisation has been theorised by Laura Brown, in a recent work on lesbian identity. She contended that "... women

who are lesbian but who actively deny or hide their status, are treated similarly to women who are not lesbian, "forgiven", as it were, their sexual orientation as long as it is hidden from public view; intentional and public commitment to a lesbian identity carries meaning within a dominant cultural context above and beyond an individual woman's self-perceptions" (Brown, 1995:6).

Phyllis also made reference to the impact on her of the backlash against all women who work in child protection. In this backlash, the issue of sexual abuse has been trivialised and attention has been deflected, via powerful lobby groups with access to the media, from abusive men, onto the sexual identity of women working to protect and heal children from abuse:

> They obviously don't want lesbians running the department. They don't want lesbians going beyond supervisor ... They don't want that. They're worried about that. They don't like it ... They somehow, I believe, think that ... because of all the thing around lesbians hijacking the sexual abuse industry, that they're convinced ... that we're all man haters and we think every male is abusing a child. So you have to doubly work to demonstrate that you have an objective approach to practice. (Phyllis)

Why have so many of us worked in care and protection?

I asked the lesbian social workers a final question. Why have so many of us worked in care and protection social work? There were some suggestions in the literature about how this pattern had arisen.

Vern Bullough who wrote a popular account of homosexuality, argued that, until the nineteenth century, few women were economically able to live independently (Bullough, 1979). As a result, female homosexuality was invisible. When males did become aware of the existence of female homosexual couples, such relationships were not taken seriously because of disbelief that women could do anything without a man.

Bullough suggested that, as some of the economic barriers to women's independence dropped, it became possible for more women to become exclusively

homosexual. A significant number of these women became leaders in professions such as teaching, nursing, social work and librarianship. "This was not because these professions initially attracted more lesbians than other female occupations did, but because they were regarded as occupations for unmarried women. The overwhelming majority of women who entered these occupations married and either dropped out or made their occupational role secondary to their domestic role. Thus leadership fell to the woman who never married, often a lesbian" (Bullough, 1979:118-119).

The social workers' responses to my question included political and personal reasons and many hypotheses. These included wanting to do pro-active, child focused work in an environment that was not full of men (Shannon), or "because society labels lesbians deviant, we go off in search of deviant work"(Phyllis). Diana echoed this last suggestion:

> Marnie: I know one other person said, "Well maybe we go in search of deviance".
> Diana: Well, that may be so because I've pretty much gone in search of deviance for as long as I can remember. When I look way, way, way, back I've always had an appreciation of people who are different. So that could be very valid for me ... Way back as a kid I remember always wanting to dress up or put clothes on that had some sort of striking element to them. I'm not quite like that any more (laughs), but I used to be. Certainly there was a deviance.

Ivana thought the answers lay in lesbians' greater ability to analyse child abuse:

> I do have this belief that somehow lesbians are drawn to this work which seems terribly unfair ... There's lots of heterosexual women who have done amazingly good work but there does seem to me to be a disproportionate number of lesbians among the people I would consider to be competent, hardworking. That thing of people who are capable of understanding the complexity of the issues and working with it. (Ivana)

The interviews generated lots of ideas but mostly this part of our conversations ended with more questions than answers, and perplexity:

> I still do not know why so many lesbians do it when it seems to be particularly unrewarding, really. (Ivana)

> I've often wondered that ... I think, it's a sense of, I sometimes wonder if it's a sense of putting something back into society that women have done, whether it's been through church committees or what, over generations ... that whole nurturing thing ... why do so many lesbians become counsellors as well? God, I can't, I don't know. I really have never quite understood that. (Phyllis)

Kris Morgan and Laura Brown's (1993) work on lesbian career development, work behaviour and vocational counselling offered some further answers. They reviewed the available literature on lesbians and work, and assessed what three theories of career development added to the understanding of the career development of lesbians. One of the theories they assessed was Helen Astin's model, which was used as a framework in chapter four.

Morgan and Brown noted that most lesbians work in paid employment and assume that they will always be their own primary source of financial support. They need paid work to survive. Many lesbians value feminism and its ideals and are therefore likely to seek employment which is consistent with this outlook. They exhibit more gender non-conforming behaviour than non-lesbians.

These points were relevant to understanding why the lesbian participants worked where they did. It enabled me to understand my own motivation. Social work and feminism share ideals of social justice, and social work is the key activity of the organisation. Remuneration is predictable. All the women had found a workplace in which they could be out as lesbian to colleagues. The choice of social work as an occupation, although it is a form of traditional women's work, enables lesbians to dress in non-conforming ways. As long as they remain in direct social work or lower-middle management positions lesbians are not pressured to dress or behave in ways which are the norm in occupations like law and in the business sector. Making sexual abuse a public concern is not a "feminine" activity and challenging violent behaviour which harms children is a political act.

For lesbians, Morgan and Brown said, the perceived structure of opportunity (the subjective perception of occupational options) has an important impact on work behaviour, "prompting many ... to carefully consider the political/social climate of various occupations"(Morgan & Brown, 1993:277). Astin's model, it was stated, is particularly applicable to lesbian career issues in that it accounts for changes in the perceived structure of opportunity. This was of relevance to the vocational concerns of women coming out as lesbian. Lesbians are more likely to come out at work, and remain employed, in an organisation where there are openly lesbian role models and a number of unprejudiced colleagues.

Summary of the chapter

This chapter has focused on the experiences of only half the women in this study, to explore the issues for lesbian social workers. All were out as lesbians at work but managing this identity was not always easy. It was difficult for them to clarify and articulate the reasons for remaining in care and protection work but all were aware that they chose to work in an environment where they could be honest about themselves and do work they valued. The lesbian and heterosexual women were united in their shared feminist values, but divided by stereotypes and some mistrust of "the Other". Heterosexual women fitted into the sexual norms of the agency, although some had been "accused" of being lesbian because they lived independently and were not known to be partnered by men. The lesbians felt anxious that knowledge about them might be misused. There was little confidence that they would be protected by the organisation if they were discriminated against by clients and all had experienced discrimination, often subtly expressed, in the course of their employment.

CHAPTER 8

The Dinner Parties

> "I was thinking about a series called "Twenty-five Women Who Were Eaten Alive". In my research I realized over and over again that women's achievements had been left out of history and the records of their lives had apparently disappeared ... over the next year and a half the concept of *The Dinner Party* slowly evolved ... women would be honoured guests ... and the piece would thus reflect both women's achievements and their oppression" (Judy Chicago, 1979: 11).

Introduction

I was keen from the outset of this project to do collaborative research and, as Patti Lather recommended, to involve the participants in constructing meaning (Lather, 1986). I outlined in chapter two under "methodology", the way I approached this. I used the group discussion method to bring the social workers together to discuss our experiences and to try and weave individual stories together. Discussing in groups the patterns and anomalies which had emerged from individual stories would, I hoped, enable the participants and I to make more sense of what had happened to us and what was happening to social services organisations. Perhaps the opinions of women social workers, expressed collectively, might be less vulnerable to erasure from the record. Like strands from the treasured waste heap of the tapestry weaver, they could be woven back into the "official" story of the agency at a later date. There were many clues within the feminist literature which suggested that women's stories, told singly, carry no weight.

The feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye, once wrote that women's experiences often appear to be anomalous, idiosyncratic and "crazy" in the light of dominant and official male stories. Women think that their individual experiences are discrepant and distrust their senses and judgements. It is, she said, through consciousness-raising conversations among themselves, that women "discover

that similar "anomalies" occur in most of their lives and that those "anomalies" taken together form a pattern or many patterns. The fragments which were each woman's singular oddities (often perceived as her own faults or defects) are collectively perceived to fit together into a coherent whole ... we can recognise that it is in the structures of men's stories of the world that women don't make sense" (Frye, 1992: 59-60).

I became very aware as I interviewed the participants, that we were all struggling in isolation to understand what was happening in our working environment. Both Judy Chicago's and Marilyn Frye's words capture exactly what I felt at times during every interview. Our achievements and the oppression of women workers in the welfare system were invisible and would be left out of the recorded history of the organisation. The experiences I was recording were at odds with the dominant and official story of the agency. Even the language used to talk about social work was different. The women talked about "having a holistic view", "forming relationships", "working with clients in small achievable steps" and "working at the grassroots". The agency has adopted the language of the military. Social workers are "on the front line". We "target youth at risk". Managers "launch initiatives" which aim to make an impact and engage in "strategic planning".

I also wanted to use the group discussion method to check out whether the social workers agreed with my tentative analysis. Was it, as Marilyn Frye put it, "crazy" or was it coherent? This approach is a valid feminist research method. The object is to develop the views and understandings of the researcher and the participants together in conversation. It is also a way of attempting to address power discrepancies and to alter the role relations of those involved. Reinharz (1992) described participatory or collaborative research as "limited to a slight modification of roles or expanded so that all participants have the combined researcher/subject role. In feminist participatory research the distinction between the researcher(s) and those on whom the research is done disappears. To achieve an egalitarian relation the researcher abandons control and adopts an approach of openness, reciprocity, mutual disclosure and shared risk" (Reinharz, 1992:181).

Reducing power differences between the researcher and the researched is an important principle of feminist research (Oakley, 1981; Mies, 1983; Finch, 1984; Lather, 1986; Stanley & Wise, 1983 & 1993; Middleton, 1993). I wanted to acknowledge the expertise of the participants and protect the data from my passion for the topic. Use of the group discussion method seemed a way of doing this.

As the final phase of my study, I met with nine of the ten women I had interviewed to discuss my findings. The one woman who did not participate was keen to do so, but unavailable. I achieved a "slight modification" of roles. The distinction between myself as researcher and the social workers as research subjects remained, but my conclusions were formed in collaboration with the participants.

The group discussion process

The group discussions took the form of two dinner parties at the end of November 1996. Prior to these taking place I contacted each women by telephone and subsequently wrote to her with a consent form for the group discussion (Appendix Six). I enclosed a print out from her interview transcript of all the quotations I was considering using and a long letter summarising chapters four, five, six and seven, which had been completed in draft. These chapters were based on the content of the social workers' individual interviews. My letter also contained some preliminary conclusions which I wanted us to discuss in groups. The sense I had begun to make of the data from the individual interviews was to consider that the culture of social work within CYPFS was being set aside under the influence of the new managerialism. The caring "female" values of social work were being replaced by more "male" values of quantification, competition and control. This seemed the only way of explaining the shift in the function of the agency from:

> "The ... function of the Child Welfare Division ... is to ensure ... that all children have the chance to become happy members of society ". (Anderson, 1963)

to:

> " ... parents, family/whanau and communities take responsibility for the care, protection and control of their children and young people." (Families and Children Unit, 1989).
>
> and:
>
> "The New Zealand Children and Young Persons Service (NZCYPS) is a business unit ... contracted by the Minister of Social Welfare to achieve the outcomes desired by government." (NZCYPS, 1996).

Every social worker's story was riddled with the effects of being caught in this shift. I began to see it as central to the participants' experience of the organisation, and to my own. This analysis fitted with the results of other New Zealand research (Hawken, 1996) and I wanted to generate discussion which would corroborate or alter my ideas about this.

The information I sent to the social workers

I tried to use group discussions in a way which balanced my role as the researcher between participation and control. I decided to write to the social workers before we met to give them as much written information as I could about the literature I had been reading and the themes which I had derived from the interview data. The letter which I sent to all the women is as follows. It is a summary of the contents of chapters four to seven, and my tentative conclusions:

> November 13th, 1996
>
> Dear ,
>
> Enclosed is a print-out of all the quotes from your interview that I might want to use. Could you let me know if there is any material you are not happy about me using, or if you would like to know the context in which excerpts will be used, before you decide. I may need to edit some sections to make them shorter.
>
> The interview transcripts were really interesting and I've enjoyed analysing them. What I've done, is look at all the information from the interviews under three headings: general work experiences, working from a feminist perspective, and the experiences which resulted from identifying as lesbian at work.

This is a summary of how I analysed what you told me:

General work experiences

I considered these in relation to theories about career choice and work behaviour. The model that most interested me was one developed by Helen Astin (a psychologist) and published in The Counseling Psychologist in 1985. ("Counseling" is the American spelling, apparently). She was interested in the meaning of work in women's lives and suggested that most human behaviour is directed towards satisfying three basic needs - survival, pleasure and the need to make some sort of contribution in the world (in a much broader sense than traditional "helping"). Work is important, she thought, because it has the capacity to satisfy these needs. Astin proposed that people share basic reasons for working but that they make different choices because of different expectations, different socialisation experiences and the "structure of opportunity". This last concept covers all the sorts of changing social forces which affect women, such as job availability, discrimination, the state of the economy and changing family structures. I looked at the interview data within this framework, to try and find out what experiences enabled women child protection social workers to survive in the job, gain pleasure from the work, and to have a sense that it was worthwhile. The details of each woman's story differed but there were common themes which I divided into delights in the job, and horrors in the job. Briefly, these were :

Delights in the job

(Most of these - and there were lots - were around things that are innately part of social work or part of working in teams with other women. There were lots and lots of positive things said about getting out there working with women and children and being part of a team with some like-minded women. There were very few "delights" to do with the organisation).

-"Keeping on learning". Child protection social work is a job that involves continuous learning, about oneself, and other people and lots of challenges.

-"Succeeding against the odds". You all spoke about successful work, and "lots of positive client experiences".

I noticed that there was a difference between what women who are still working for CYPFS and those who had left, said about actual social work. The three women I interviewed who have left CYPFS talked more about getting overcome by a sense of futility, than their sense of having had successes. Maybe when social workers lose a sense of being able to make a difference in the world (Helen Astin's concept of "contribution"), this becomes a big part of the decision to leave. What do you think?

-"Living your politics". Women talked about "your politics is what you do, not what you say" and about child protection social work and protecting children being a really important and valuable activity. One person talked about liking having statutory powers so that, if absolutely

necessary, she had *power* over abusing adults to protect someone more vulnerable.
-"Experiences other people never get". Two of you said you could be the world's best story-teller because of the incredible breadth of work experiences. Others talked about exposure to the bizarre and getting access to other people's interesting lives.
-"A job that's never, ever boring". People talked about liking variety and a measure of autonomy and being active. One person contrasted this with being a counsellor "just sitting there listening to people".
-"Teamwork and friendship". Everyone talked a lot about liking working in teams with other women and the importance of women colleagues.
-"Good supervision". One person said this was the bit that either makes you fail or survive, and it was an important experience for others. (Bad supervision was also talked about).
-"Earning a living", "access to training opportunities", "working in an agency with some resources and legislation". These were the positive things about working in a statutory organisation. Everyone I interviewed wanted, and needed, to work to support herself (and her children for the women with children).

Horrors in the job
Some of these were to do with what child protection work exposes social workers to, but most of the "horrors" were organisational.
-"The deaths of children". Women who had had children on their caseloads die still seemed deeply affected by this. The organisation's response had compounded their feelings of sadness, grief and responsibility.
-"Seeing the world's ghastliness". No-one talked much about specific cases, but everyone seemed affected by constant exposure to child abuse. You used expressions like " you experience horrors that most people don't get to see" and "the absolute ghastliness of it all".
-"Fear and violence". Most of you talked about having been abused on the job, either verbally or physically and I want to check when we meet whether this is an experience common to all of us. You talked about being afraid, not knowing how to deal with very abusive families, and that the levels of violence are getting worse.
-"A sense of futility". The three women who have left CYPFS expressed this theme most clearly, but there were threads of it in every interview - that sense of "did I ever really achieve anything, and how on earth would I really know?"
-"Bad supervision, bad practice and bad behaviour". Women talked about being worried by colleagues' bad practice, being shocked at the organisation's failure to deal with poor performance issues and having poor supervision. This seemed especially disappointing when the poor supervisor was another woman.
-'The organisation". Most of the negative experiences you talked about were organisational, in three themes: the effects of repeated

restructurings, lack of care for staff, and the impact of managerialism (everything is now about financial accountability, loss of social work values, "time wasting bureaucratic crap" etc.)

I tried writing up this chapter as "positive and negative experiences", which didn't work very well because often the two were intertwined. Maybe what I'm trying now will work better, which is to separate the responses into 'internal' emotional and spiritual responses and 'external' things to do with management/structures and society. On the whole I think (although there are individual differences) that people said child protection social work has been mostly satisfying but also horrifying, and that the organisation has been mostly horrific but has also provided the means of earning an income to survive. Everyone had a bottom line, beyond which she would not be prepared to continue working in CYFPS (and some were very close to reaching that). Women who had already left had done so in part because the work itself was no longer satisfying a need to get pleasure and a sense of making a contribution. But the main reason for leaving, or thinking about leaving, was the nature of the organisation. This was structural, not the fault of individuals, although some individual managers had behaved badly.

The way I've started to make sense of what you all said about the organisation, and my own experiences of it, is to understand CYPFS (and DSW and the old Child Welfare Division before that) as a very patriarchal structure within which, a "female culture" of social work existed. I have a sense of this female culture of social work having been allowed to exist in the past because social work was too insignificant to bother about. Abuse reporting rates were low, the service was smaller and less expensive to run, and sexual abuse was not on the agenda of social problems. Social work wasn't of much interest to the media and women just got on with it largely unnoticed. Some of you talked about this and about having more autonomy in the past. "The organisation" seemed far away and unsupportive, but of little relevance. Linked to this was that there was more long-term work and more scope for innovation because there was less pressure.

What I think has happened now, is that the state sector changes in the last decade, have brought a more "male culture" into CYPFS which is, in all sorts of ways, eroding the "female culture" of social work and systematically removing (or attempting to remove) social workers' independence, autonomy and creativity, and forming real relationships with clients, which are all the things that have enabled women with feminist values to gain satisfaction from the work. No-one I interviewed objected to a need for accountability, effectiveness etc, but there was a very strong objection to accountability being expected from social workers and supervisors, while there is no similar expectation of

accountability or responsible behaviour in senior managers and those at the very top of CYPFS.

Dianne Hawken finished her MSW thesis on Women Managers in the Social Services in NZ earlier this year - it's great - and has been a really useful source of information and ideas about organisations and organisational theories. Some of the literature on social services organisations talks about them as being "inherently gendered" and sexist. The clients, work-force and care-givers are mostly women, the managers are male. Women bring to their jobs a sense of caring about others, a global perspective, ideas about wanting to make the world a better place for women and children and a wish to work cooperatively. The organisational and management values are about effectiveness, measurable quantification, competition, hierarchy, control and male authority. Women workers with feminist values learn to be "bi-lingual" within these organisations. That is, they retain their feminist values and use these to critique their involvement in the organisation. They understand that all they can do while working within the organisation is chip away, make a few small gains and push back the boundaries a bit, but believe this is worthwhile. They try to do this while hanging onto their integrity and feminist values. Some of you talked about exactly this when I interviewed you.

What I'm hoping we will do when we meet on 20th and 22nd, is discuss all this and combine our ideas into some sort of conclusion about how to interpret our combined experiences. They are considerable as, between the eleven of us, we have worked in CYPFS for over 100 years! I'm then going to try and use the tapes of this discussion to write the final chapter (or chapters) as a co-authored dialogue, involving all of us.

The next area I looked at was the relationship between doing social work from a feminist perspective, and working in a state agency. Every woman described herself as a feminist, but often this was done with reservations. Some women said they just don't like labels, some felt they weren't really entitled to call themselves feminists because they hadn't read a feminist book for 10 years, or hadn't been "out there, fighting a cause". I found that feminist values had influenced your social work practice in three main areas.
-feminism provided the base for an analysis of power and oppression. You said things like "it's a way of understanding the world and the power structures that exist".
-it enabled women to analyse the organisation and voice what they saw happening.
-feminism influenced practice values in six main areas
- a belief in social justice
- beliefs about treating people ethically and honestly and giving full and honest information
- respecting difference

- making improving women's lives a priority
- valuing cooperative ways of working
- believing that one person can make a difference.

There was also a sort of gutsy resistance to the organisation in everyone's story that I think is part of working from a feminist perspective.

I have pulled a number of sets of practice principles out of the feminist social work literature and compared these with what you said about the way you practice social work. All the different sets of principles have in common things like valuing process, an holistic approach, understanding power, empowerment, the personal is political, affirmation, and caring. Although you didn't claim to be "doing feminist social work", the way you described what you do (or did) in practice fitted with the way the literature describes this.

The third sorts of experiences I'm looking at are to do with sexual identity at work. I had hoped to do a comparison between the experiences of lesbians and of heterosexual women but do not (as yet) have much material on what heterosexual women think about this. The lesbians had quite a lot to say about what they thought the issues for heterosexual women might be, but heterosexual women themselves didn't. Which is very interesting. I've been reading some work by two lesbian psychologists, Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson, who said that feminist theory has tended to assume heterosexuality as a given. They attempted to analyse it and wrote to feminists asking "how does your heterosexuality contribute to your feminist politics?". The responses ranged across ambivalence about the label ("although I have lived monogamously with a man I love for 26 years, I am not now and never have been a "heterosexual"), incomprehension, acknowledgment that "heterosexuality" is not a political label in the way that lesbian is ("Who would want to mobilize around being straight!"), to anger ("How dare you assume I'm heterosexual"). The authors talked about this as a reluctance to acknowledge "heterosexual privilege" - if you're heterosexual you automatically benefit from fitting into the norm.

I got the same range of responses as Kitzinger and Wilkinson when I asked social workers about whether there had been any issues about being heterosexual and doing care and protection social work.

Women with children, irrespective of their sexual preference, talked about issues to do with being over-alert to the possibility of abuse, and anxious about their children. Women with male partners did not seem more anxious about their children being abused, than those without.

The issues for lesbian social workers were around identity management, "information spreading", dealing with myths, and direct experience of

discrimination and mistrust of the organisation. Lesbians were generally not out to clients at all, because they worried it would create discomfort in the client-worker relationship. They were also very anxious about personal information being misused. (This was also an issue for heterosexual social workers who have been mistakenly "accused" of being lesbian by clients).

I think the issue about personal information was more complex for lesbians without children than just about sexual preference, and several talked about women with children having more credibility (even if they were terrible parents), than social workers without children. All the heterosexual women I interviewed have children and it would be interesting to know if childless heterosexuals have the same sense that they are disadvantaged and that they may have less credibility with clients because of childlessness. I suspect that would be so.

Other issues for lesbians were being outed by heterosexual social workers, and also a dislike of losing their individuality under the lesbian label. This happened when assumptions were made by other lesbians that friendship would be automatically available just because they were also lesbian, and when assumptions were made by both heterosexuals and lesbians about what "being lesbian" meant. Myths that lesbians sexually abuse children, and that lesbianism is just about sex, were a problem. Four of the five lesbians had experienced direct discrimination at work. These included, managers sharing information with job interview panels, being pressured by senior management to dress differently and conceal a lesbian identity, and offensive comments. One heterosexual women had also experienced this and objected to insinuating remarks being made about her sexual preference.

I've also looked at the lesbians' experiences within the concepts developed by Helen Astin. There's a paper by two other authors (Kris Morgan and Laura Brown) which uses Astin's ideas to analyse lesbian career development. It suggests that the "structure of opportunity" has an important impact on lesbian work choice and behaviour. We are more likely to come out, and continue working, in an organisation where there are openly lesbian role models.

My overall conclusion so far is very much along the lines of Dianne Hawken's observation that "If managerialism continues to maintain its grip in social service organisations, and if those organisations become more masculinised as a result, competent women managers will be lost to the profession". I think what we are seeing in CYPFS is the impact of managerialism lower down the hierarchy, on competent, experienced social workers.

At the moment everything I've written is incomplete and needs a lot of work. I hope to have done this by mid-December. If anyone is

interested in reading and criticising the whole thing before I submit it, I'll get a copy to you - I'd love some feedback.

SO! I hope you manage to read all this before coming to dinner next Wednesday 20th/ Friday 22nd at 7:00 and that you will have things you want to discuss and debate.

See you then

Marnie

Dinner party conversations: making a coherent whole out of fragments of individual experiences.

I ate and conversed with my "honoured guests" in two groups, the lesbians first and the heterosexual women two days later. In keeping with the notion of transparency in feminist research, the main recipes are appended (Appendix Seven).

Initially, both groups talked about things in the letter I had sent them, especially the subject of sexual identity. This discussion has been incorporated into the previous chapter.

I then asked a number of questions about the research process: "Are there any quotations you are not happy for me to use and if so, please don't forget to let me know?". "Did the framework from Helen Astin's work which I used make sense to you?". "Is there anything you drastically disagree with or think, "She's generalising so much that doesn't represent me?". No-one had any problems with the overall research process and everyone thought that Helen Astin's work, which I had used to understand women's careers, and the themes I had used to categorise their work experiences, made sense. A number of women asked me to check and/or remove quotations I had asked to use. These were not objections to the interpretation of the material but queries about accuracy. Two small quotes were eventually not used because the speakers told me that what they had said was not

what they really believed. I initiated some discussion about confidentiality and asked women whether they would like their tapes back, or whether they wanted me to delete them, once my work had been marked.

We then discussed some gaps and discrepancies in the interview data and things which had puzzled me in the individual interviews. One thing which I had been particularly keen to discuss in the groups was whether involvement in the anti-racism movement within the Department of Social Welfare in the 1980s had been, for those employed in DSW at the time, a significant experience. I had expected it to be, but only one woman spoke about this in her interview. In the group, women talked about being involved in the women's movement, women's liberation, anti-Springbok tour activities, anti-racism and, for some women lesbian activism, simultaneously. The experience had been so central to that time of their lives that they had not singled it out as a "work experience".

When I interviewed women individually the conversations were focused on remembering and recording experiences. Analysing these and attempting to create coherence out of individual fragments was the focus of the groups. About two thirds of the way through each discussion/dinner party, and I became more aware of this when listening to the tapes than I was at the time, there was a point at which the general talking about our lives and work, reminiscences, banter, laughter, and clattering of plates stopped. The conversations coalesced into what I had hoped to achieve through group discussion: dialogue which made some real sense of what we had experienced individually and what lay ahead for our futures.

I felt once again that I was involved in tapestry weaving, this time with myself as a participant. The feeling intensified as I listened to and transcribed the tapes. We shared an understanding of what is happening to child protection social work, social services in general, and to the statutory organisation in which we are all (or have been) employed. Our understanding was, like the warp and weft on the loom, fashioned out of many stranded threads of equal strength and quality, coming from two entirely different directions - at right angles rather than opposite.

One came from a lesbian perspective; the other from a perspective in which sexual identity was not the focus. In both, feminist values were so much a part of the strands that they were inseparable. The finished work, in which different ways of being in the world were united, was a bold and very sombre picture telling a story about faulty and inhumane structures and loss of hope.

Much was said about the corrosive impact of changes in the organisation on social work practice and the flight of experienced staff from CYPFS. Women in both groups spoke about the dwindling representation of minority groups in senior positions, the very small number of women now employed above supervising social worker level, the role of the Treasury and of Departmental policy makers. As we tried to make sense of our individual experiences and anomalies, we recognised that within the structures which managerialism has imposed on social service organisations, our world of social work and feminist values no longer makes sense.

Excerpts from these sections of both discussions are reproduced below, with very little editing and without commentary, as a co-authored statement in answer to my quest to understand: "What's going on?". This is followed by my conclusions: the picture I saw when the completed weaving was lifted from the loom and turned from back to front and right side up. The warp and weft were combined into one coherent image which told a story of what the participants in this study, and I, think is happening. The section from the discussion among lesbians, which comes first, concentrates on "what's going on for *us*, for lesbians in CYPFS" and understanding the subtle processes of discrimination. The talk then moves into an understanding of the more general impact of changes which have been made to the state sector in the past decade:

> Ivana: One of the things that makes me realise how seducing the whole thing is, is that I have *never* actively experienced any lesbian discrimination, so you get tricked into the belief that the place is quite lesbian friendly. Unless you try and do anything subversive or new ... It's not until you step back and actually think about the number of highly competent lesbian women who have lost their jobs or have been

made to be very uncomfortable when they have tried to climb up the hierarchy, that you realise that the whole atmosphere is so oppressive ...

Poppy: I think that's because it does happen behind your back.

Diana: Yes, that's it.

Marnie: Are all women oppressed in this organisation and lesbians more so, because of the structure?

Shannon: Yes, I think it has to be so.

Marnie: So why is it? Someone made the comment that it's a fear of women's power.

Ivana: Yes, I think it is something about that.

Phyllis: But I don't believe they can openly identify what their fear is ... I don't know of any lesbian who has risen to any level in the Department, who has begun ... to challenge on a different level, who hasn't been destroyed with everything that they could throw at them. I've seen it.

Poppy: If you think of the people who have made a career of it, they have had to be real "yes' people, haven't they. They haven't actually been strong, independent thinkers to go up the ladder of the organisation.

Phyllis: Yes. When you look at the social workers who are in the Department and their extreme youth, 55 % of them have less than 12 months experience. When you compare that with the experience that we hold, who are in this room now, how many of us are at any level beyond supervisor?

Shannon: None.

Poppy: It's as far as it's ever possible for us to go.

Ivana: One step up the ladder basically.

Phyllis: Yes, none of us are any further than that ...

Poppy: But do lesbians want to be managers though?

Phyllis and Diana: No.

Ivana: But they would like to be at least recognised for the level of professionalism and ability and competence that they have. I don't think you get even that.

Phyllis: The ladder is not attractive. Who has gone up it? We could name them ... Because they are strong, intelligent women who are able to write and articulate and challenge, they get destroyed ... because they want to expose, they want to say, " Look, this is corrupt. This is not right. This is not how you should be doing things." So they then set about systematically destroying them. If they don't have a mental breakdown, they drive them out ... I think it's because they don't want those women in positions of responsibility where they are going to keep challenging. The fact that they are lesbians just compounds it really, because then they justify it. The minute they can associate it with lesbianism.

Shannon: I think there have been lesbians who have given a hell of a lot to CYPFS.

Ivana: I think so! ... My firm belief, now looking at it from the outside, is that lesbians are the most competent workers. There's quite a few people that you think, "You can't possibly be employed by CYPFS. You must have escaped from somewhere!". But when I thought about the lesbians that worked for CYPFS. There was only one that I thought was unsuitable and one or two that I didn't think were very competent. But I would feel totally comfortable, by and large, with any of the other lesbians having to deal with members of my family as social workers. If you look at the general population of social workers, especially the male population of social workers, it gets far less. And that was based on having contact with *large* numbers of social workers. Most of those who worked for CYPFS ...

Marnie: So, is there any scope for optimism, for the future?

(Long silence)

Phyllis: We're in a sort of fiscal revolution, I believe at the moment. We've been in it since the 80s. It's a western phenomenon, where everything is monetarily controlled. I think that is inherently opposed to what we see, or I see, as the foundations of good social work practice ... So I don't know. You've got a choice. You either ride it out or you get out of social services. Because we haven't even seen the beginning of the destruction of social services. This is just kindergarten material really. So you ride it out, or you just say, "I'll walk away from it. I'll just walk away from social work altogether". Whatever organisation you go to now where social work is a component, it's the fiscal mentality that dictates the management, that dictates the practice.

Poppy: Although I think that under MMP there's going to be a lot more women, in government.

Ivana: That may stop it partly.

Phyllis: Yes, but I think government is only the face. It's only the shop front.

Shannon: The policies are already in place that are driving it.

Phyllis: And no-one ever reneges on policy. You might find next time round they challenge it. But you'll never find any government that comes in and actually withdraws it.

Poppy: So you don't think they are going to spend any more?

Phyllis: No ... You could have the most competent person running this Department, but if they were saying "There's only so much money you can do this job with" ...

Ivana: Oh exactly, but you've got to spend it well. The money that they waste on stupid things! that could actually go into making practice better.

Poppy: The thing that really surprised me was when the Treasury people came to our office. They were *engrossed* in what we did. And they went away, those little men in their grey suits, and made a decision based on what we did. How much money should go into CYPFS. Just like that.

Ivana: But that's it. They shouldn't be. They should be making highly informed decisions. That's why you need someone at the very top of CYPFS who can make the right decisions. We haven't got that. We've got the view of the hard Right.

Phyllis: What about this new thing about Child Support. You know what they're going to say next. They'll say "Sorry, you've got to collect the revenue. You're not going to get any more money for Special Costs".

Marnie: The whole thing is ridiculous. They have just landed it on us and it's *nothing* to do with social work practice.

Diana: I was just thinking, when I did my interview with you, I felt quite positive. But since that I've slowly gone the other way. I would tend to say the organisation is in crisis and there's no way out really ...

The excerpt from the second group discussion, with the heterosexual social workers, moves between reflection about the numbers of women in management, the impact of managerialism on social work practice, and the future of the organisation:

> Helen: If you look, there are less women in management than there were two, three, four, five, years ago. And that's reflected in what's happening .
>
> Leah: The combination of technology and the philosophy is ..
>
> Margaret: .. very much based on the factory floor mentality. It's the way the Treasury thinks ...
>
> Leah: The job is so much less about face to face client work nowadays than it was five years ago ...
>
> Marnie: So is there *no* hope?
>
> All voices: No.
>
> Leah: Maybe post-managerialism.
>
> Margaret: It's the impact of managerialism, it's too great. And the role of the Treasury and the policy parts of the agency.
>
> Leah: We need more money. But in terms of the culture and the philosophy ...
>
> Marnie: But what will happen to social work?
>
> Leah: People will ring up and they just won't get a service ... There are no experienced staff.
>
> Helen: People coming off social work courses, they now see the department as a training ground for something else ... as a string to their bow.
>
> Leah: Some people come into Social Welfare for child protection per se. Some may still get hooked by child protection ... But there's less women and Maori in the department now, and none higher up ...
>
> Margaret: There is that paternalistic idea that we are just sort of factory workers ...
>
> Leah: Do *you* think the organisation's going to get any better?

Marnie: I can't see any scope for it at all. The organisation is now held together by people at supervisor and senior practitioner level, and very experienced social workers who came in with some notion of social justice and have just stayed on. When we go ... It's partly that Helen Astin stuff about the structure of opportunity.

Ruby: Yes that made sense to me.

Margaret: And it's interesting ... that managers who have gone up feel very much the meat in the sandwich. There is this divided loyalty when they have been social workers. They want to be supportive, but get all this stuff from upstairs. It's very much "What do I do. What do I do !". Split personality all the time.

Marnie: Are there *any* experienced women who want to be managers? It seems it is men who do ...

Silence

Indistinguishable voices: No, although there's lots who could do it better. But the costs are too high.

Marnie: I'm an optimist. I really, really want to think the organisation is going to get better. That risk estimation is an excellent tool ...

Leah: Well, I've got to the point where I've felt that every time I close a case on the machine I am going to record, "These are the risks. This is the situation. This is what really needs to be done, but I am not able to do it because this organisation does not have the resources to deal with this case appropriately". And then I'm going to close it.

Marnie: Professional dangerousness got dropped from risk estimation really quickly.

Ruby: What! Have they dropped it? ...

Marnie: When risk estimation first came out, professional dangerousness was one of the risk factors. Then we got the message, "drop it". We were recording "This child is at risk because of professional dangerousness. We do not have the resources to respond appropriately".

Leah and Margaret: Because professional dangerousness was about the risk the organisation posed to child safety ...

Leah: What's being delivered nowadays has little to do with social work.

Marnie: So what were you saying about post-managerialism?

Leah: There will be a post-managerialist welfare ...

Margaret: Well, I don't know. The grey people will stay at the top.

Conclusions of the chapter

I was overwhelmed as I listened to the taped group meetings, by the absence of hope for the immediate future of child protection social work and the general feeling that worse is to come. The discussions resonated with everything that women had spoken about individually, and with my own understanding of "what's going on". The stories of highly experienced social workers corroborate criticisms of New Zealand's public sector reform (Schick, 1996). The changes have been too hard edged and there are short-comings which must be remedied. Policies and practices which have become part of state sector management since the State Sector Act 1988 and the Public Finance Act 1989 were passed have eroded New Zealand's social services. The organisation with statutory responsibilities for child protection is no longer able to do the task. Experienced and competent women social workers have little interest in competing for management positions in CYPFS because they have lost hope that the organisation can be improved. They experience the organisation as discriminating against all women and against lesbians in particular. Although at senior management level there are some likeable and humane individuals with an intelligent understanding of what is needed to provide a good service, there is no collective will to fight for this. Resourcing decisions are under the control of Treasury officials who have no understanding of what is needed. New Zealand is failing to deliver an adequate care and protection service to children and young people and the emotional and physical health of social workers is being sacrificed in the process.

This is not the understanding I want to hold. Abandonment of responsibility for child protection by the state should not happen. It is morally wrong, financially foolish in the long term and breaches the United Nations Convention on the

Rights of the Child to which New Zealand is a signatory (New Zealand Herald, 1996b).

Despair was, however, not the only emotion I felt. Robyn McKinlay's (1990:78) observation that women who stay at the bottom of a hierarchy are less likely to be co-opted rang true and this was exciting. It gave me hope. None of the women involved in this study have lost the values which drew them into social work. None aspire to be managers but I felt confident that if any one of the participants does, in the future, change her mind, her feminist values will not be lost while clambering the career ladder.

I was also able, after the group discussions, to clarify my thoughts about a question which had been on my mind since I first considered my thesis topic: "Why on earth do the capable, intelligent women I chose to interview, who could easily find employment elsewhere, continue to work in CYPFS?". I think the answer is that a determined and stubborn resistance to being crushed and pushed out of social work has become part of their motivation. As Margaret Atwood put it:

> "Why does she do what she does? ... Who cares? Almost nobody. Maybe it's just a hobby, something to do on a dull day. Or else it's an act of defiance" (Atwood 1993: 536).

Chapter 9

Conclusions

> " Every ending is arbitrary, because the ending is where you write *The end* . A period, a dot of punctuation, a point of stasis. A pinprick in the paper: you could put your eye to it and see through to the other side, to the beginning of something else" (Atwood, 1993: 540).

Introduction

My wish to record and understand the experiences of women care and protection social workers in New Zealand, and my own working life, was motivation for this thesis. At the time I began my research, I also felt anxious about what was happening to social work and social workers and hoped that my results might in some way be used to improve their working conditions. My anxiety was compounded by what I learned as I carried out the interviews and read the literature. In this final chapter I draw together my conclusions from each chapter, the themes which I identified in the participants' experiences, the themes from the literature which I reviewed and the features from chapter three which Malcolm Payne (1991) considered influence the evolution of social work and attempt to "see through to the other side, to the beginning of something else". I propose some guidelines for the future of statutory child protection services in New Zealand. These are in three areas: staff retention, child protection policy, and management practices.

My conclusions

The women who participated in my study had, between them, over eighty years experience within the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service. Interviewing them about their work was both exciting and depressing. The social

workers' commitment to child protection social work, the embodiment of feminist values in their work practices and their strength and humour were cause for celebration. They believed in what they were doing and spoke about their work in ways which echoed the quotation from Harry Ferguson at the beginning of this thesis. Like Victorian caseworkers from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the women I interviewed were driven by hope. They had some vision of their work as a whole and its value to the community and they "seemed to find meaning in labour that was invariably emotionally gruelling and always contentious" (Ferguson, 1990:135). Like Ferguson's NSPCC officers, my participants were neither "organizational dupes" nor lackeys of the state, but actively involved in trying to improve the lives of the most vulnerable members of society.

I analysed the social workers' experiences within the framework of a theory of women's career choice and work behaviour developed by Helen Astin (1985). This enabled me to understand why women had sought work in the organisation and why they had either remained or resigned. People work to meet their survival needs and having a predictable income was important to the independent women I interviewed, many of whom were supporting children. There were clues in the literature and in the women's stories as to why lesbians have worked as social workers in organisations like CYPFS. Human service organisations provide a setting in which lesbians are more likely to identify themselves although there are risks and pressures in doing this.

Women also work for other reasons: to meet the need for a sense of emotional and intellectual pleasure gained from performing and completing tasks and achieving goals and to contribute to the well-being of others. A career in social work had provided the participants with challenging, never boring work in which they were able to live their politics. They liked working in an agency that had improving the safety and well-being of children as its primary objective. Working in teams with other women was enjoyable, as were the opportunities to get to know fellow workers very well and to work with women clients. The social workers had

achieved successes in their casework, against the odds. The work was innately stressful and exposed social workers to fear, violence, tragedies and the worst of human behaviour. Despite this, the women were still positive about care and protection social work itself.

The social workers' lack of confidence in the organisation which employed them and loss of hope for the future were worrying. Every participant spoke about a gap between the demands of the organisation and what she believed to be good social work practice. This was the greatest source of stress in their working lives. Lack of resources was seen as only part of the problem. Working in an organisational environment where social work seemed to be neither valued nor well understood was increasingly difficult. The resources of the organisation were not being directed towards providing a quality child protection service or rewarding social work staff. Resources were wasted on information technology and unproductive schemes such as a Competency Programme but there were no funds to assist families. The social workers saw the management as obsessed with administration and measuring outputs. They felt crushed and negated by organisational requirements which did not make sense and they were struggling to work in ways which were consistent with their feminist values and their belief in social justice. Women and Maori were thought to be losing, rather than gaining senior positions and the lesbian social workers had no confidence that they would be protected from discrimination, despite the organisation's EEO policy.

Some women felt ashamed to work in an agency where unethical behaviour, poor quality of work and laziness were condoned and good work went unrewarded. Other social workers spoke about poor supervision, lack of access to ongoing training and lack of care for staff. Three of the participants had left CYPFS because their ability to gain satisfaction from working in the organisation had been eroded. They had lost hope that they were able to make a difference and improve the quality of children's lives. All three women had moved to work where they were better paid and less stressed. I felt that the other participants were also weighing

their commitment to social work against the personal costs of staying in an organisation where they felt unvalued and had no voice.

Women like the social workers I interviewed have been the strength of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service. The safety net of statutory child protection services in New Zealand has been woven out of their labour and without their experience, and the experience of other women like them, CYPFS is not viable as a child protection agency. Resignations from experienced CYPFS staff in the area in which I am employed escalated in 1996 and the majority of care and protection social workers in many offices now have less than a year's experience in the work. It is impossible to provide a quality social work service in such conditions.

A news item from the British media on the death, by cruelty, of a six year old child at risk was placed on the noticeboard of my workplace as I completed this study. It described staffing problems, overwork and poor management in an English Social Services Department with statutory responsibility for providing a child protection service. The article reported that "the system at the investigative/initial assessment stage was breaking down and children were not being protected". This statement and the following description of working conditions in the agency could have been referring to the working conditions of the child protection social workers who participated in this study. It is exactly the present situation in my own office:

> One social worker, who declined to be named, said, "When I joined the team I noted the numbers of unqualified and inexperienced staff carrying out complex child protection cases. The workload was high and there was a chronic staffing shortage. When new staff arrived they were quickly overburdened, went sick and left" (The Guardian, October 31, 1996).

Working conditions like this are not compatible with a safe child protection service and it is imperative that the management of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service takes action to stem the drift of experienced staff from

its work force. The stories of the women who participated in this study contain many clues as to what must be done. The remainder of this chapter treats those clues as foundation stones from which to build a more solid organisation.

Guidelines for the future of statutory child protection services in New Zealand

Payne (1991:14) argued that the role and tasks of social workers are conditioned by changing social forces, such as social needs and political and legislative change. Changing political and public perceptions of social and individual needs also have an impact on the development of social work. The nature of the organisations which employ social workers is influential, as is actual or potential conflict between social groups and institutions involved in social work. In times of rapid social change and alterations in management personnel and style, the demands placed on social workers by their employers also change. The impact of change is intensified by cuts in social service budgets.

New Zealand's political and social environment during the period the participants in this study have been employed as social workers has been turbulent. Patterns of employment, education, immigration, family life and religious beliefs have changed. Definitions of child abuse have altered continuously and abuse reporting rates have risen. The government departments of twenty years ago have vanished and the state sector has been transformed. Notions of public-regarding values and the common good have no place in the new climate of "hard-edged contractualism" (Schick, 1996:24). It is not surprising that child protection work has become more stressful and that Gabe's description of social work as "a job full of conflicts and hard to make sense of" rang true for every participant. The conflicts and senselessness which caused most difficulty were not those in the work itself. These were predictable and social workers learn how to manage them. It was the organisation which caused the utter frustration, stress and burnout which drove women out of the work. A number of organisational issues must be

addressed if CYPFS is to retain experienced social work staff in its work force. The most crucial are child protection policy, management practices and staff retention.

Child Protection Policy

New Zealand's record in child welfare has been "appalling" according to a recent non-Government report to the United Nations (New Zealand Herald, 1996b). In this report *Action for Children in Aotearoa* accused the Government of breaching the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in numerous ways. It was said that "there are increasing levels of child poverty, fragmented and poorly resourced services, high levels of violence against children, many avoidable deaths and extremely high suicide levels ... the problems are being denied by the Government" (New Zealand Herald, 1996b:21). Commenting on this report, the former Commissioner for Children, Ian Hassall, said that "despite extensive debate this year on child poverty there is still no policy for children looming on the horizon" (New Zealand Herald, 1996b:21). Other writers have made the same points. Raeburn and Sidaway, who prepared a literature review on school-based services for children, referred to as "one stop shopping", stated that the needs and plight of New Zealand's "at risk" children and young people must be addressed on humanitarian grounds. Attending to the needs of this group is also essential "in terms of having a livable society with minimal crime, government expenditure on prisons, health and welfare services and an international reputation of which we do not have to be ashamed" (Raeburn & Sidaway, 1996:11). New Zealand needs a comprehensive policy for children and it is beyond the role of any one government department to formulate and implement this. CYPFS can only play a part. What can be addressed by CYPFS, in the short term, is that the work of CYPFS be replaced on a sound foundation and the organisation's child protection policy is re-linked to reality.

At present the Strategic Vision for the Department of Social Welfare is that "All families are meeting their care, protection and control responsibilities" (DSW, 1995:3). This is unrealistic nonsense, which implies that the state has no role in

the provision of welfare services and a need for help is indicative of individual and family failing. It negates the idea that citizens in need have a human right to assistance and leads, as many experts in the social services field have argued, to public attitudes which make individuality dominant and hold welfare recipients in contempt. It generates a welfare policy orientation of laissez-faire and leads to under-funding of child protection services (Boston, 1992; Fulcher & Ainsworth, 1994; Falck, 1996). As a result CYPFS is becoming unable to provide a service to children who have been, or are likely to be abused and neglected. The following changes must be made:

- Child protection work in CYPFS must be based on a realistic strategic vision. It must be based on the acceptance that some families are not and never will be, able to protect and care for children. Many children who have been abused will require state resources to be kept safe until they can be cared for within their families.

- Adequate resources for counselling and to support families to care for damaged children are essential. It must be acknowledged, in child protection policy, that some children will always require long-term care which is costly and must be funded realistically because the structure of opportunity for women has changed. Most women are no longer willing or able to foster children for a pittance. Foster care has been under valued as an essential service for some children which has resulted in a severe shortage of good quality foster facilities.

- It must be acknowledged that one of the realities of child protection is that social workers engage in difficult complex work with children and their families. This is time-consuming and social work intervention cannot be confined to short-term outputs. Being able to do thorough work enables social workers to achieve successful outcomes and gain satisfaction.

Management practices

Dugald McDonald (1994), suggested that New Zealand's first child welfare workers were public servants first and social workers second. That may still be so for some social workers, but not for the participants in this study. Their primary loyalties were to social work values and to improving the lives of women and children. The Code of Ethics of the New Zealand Association of Social Workers requires social workers to, "reveal unequal, socially unjust and repressive political/social structures and systems and to work for and advocate amendment and, where necessary, the abolition of these" (NZASW, 1993:6), "advocate policies and legislation that promote social justice and improved social conditions"(NZASW, 1993:12), to "engage in constructive action to change the structures of society that create and perpetuate injustice"(NZASW, 1993:12), and to "maintain and improve the structures, policies and quality of service of their employing agencies and organisations"(NZASW, 1993:12). The present management practices of CYPFS do not acknowledge that this is the focus of many of its experienced staff.

A clash between the culture of social work and the business culture of the organisation was causing problems. The women I interviewed felt that they were treated as "factory workers" (Margaret) rather than members of a profession with a commitment to seek social justice. The organisation's management seemed to be attempting to exert control over its largely female social work staff. They were being diverted from direct social work with clients.

Dianne Hawken's research on women managers in the social services, cited earlier in this report, contains a model of management practices which acknowledges the dual focus of social work (Hawken, 1996). The principles of this model provide answers to the perceived lack of valuing and caring which was felt by the social workers in my study. They also encompass the notion of quality work based on the realities of social work practice. The four principles are guidelines for the future management of CYPFS:

- Value quality relationships in the workplace through caring, co-operation, empowerment and the encouragement of diversity. This requires the organisation to do better than pay lip-service to the Equal Employment Opportunities policy.
- Acknowledge that part of the social work role is to challenge oppression and attempt to bring about a just and equitable society.
- Value and affirm female attributes, encourage women to go for promotion and to reach their potential.
- Promote excellence, as defined by social workers, in service delivery. The priorities in the organisation must change from administration to good social work practice.

Staff Retention

For the participants in this study, being part of teams with other women, having mentors and receiving good supervision were all positive experiences. These working conditions are dependent on a stable work force. Without these conditions women are more likely to leave the organisation. Social workers also leave because they no longer have a sense that they are making a difference in the world and their efforts seem futile. They leave because of stress.

Research studies on stress and burn out in social workers have found reasons for high stress. These have included society having unrealistic expectations about what social workers are able to achieve, excessive work demands and a sense of powerlessness to manage and influence workplace events (Freudenberger, 1977; Karger, 1981; Cherniss, 1980; Cherniss, 1993; Finn, 1990; Maslach, 1982; Powell, 1994; Guterman & Jayaratne, 1994). One survey, (Collings & Murray, 1996), found that the most powerful predictor of stress was too much paper work and administrative demands. The women in this study spoke about this. They did not disagree with the needs for accountability and to record thorough casenotes, but objected to a system which fragmented recording into many different outputs. They were diverted from social work by demands to complete Key Performance Indicators,

respond to Official Information Act and Privacy Act requests, produce the same data over and over again and complete paper work which they knew was meaningless.

Among the experiences which had most affected them, the participants spoke about being exposed to violence. They felt that the organisation did not acknowledge this. They had experienced an absence of support when a child on their caseload died. The upheavals of repeatedly restructuring the organisation had wasted time and damaged morale. They were at risk of finding the work futile and losing hope that the organisation could be improved. The women had been encouraged to stay in the job by access to advanced training and opportunities to develop professionally. They wished to work in more holistic and innovative ways. The following guidelines would help retain staff:

- Social workers need to be freed from the administrative tasks which are peripheral to their work as social workers.
- They need to be rewarded adequately for the work they do.
- Conditions of work must improve so that workloads are not excessive and social workers have some sense of being in control of their work.
- Women in the organisation need opportunities for advanced training, and for promotion.
- The organisation's resources need to be spent on social work, rather than siphoned off into other ventures (such as the Competency Programme and Service Excellence).

Audre Lorde, in a conversation with Adrienne Rich about racism, said,
"There's always the question: "How do I use this? What do I do about it?" ... How do you deal with the things you believe, live them not as theory, not even as emotion, but right on the line of action and effect and change?"(Lorde, 1984:106-7).

If as a society we believe that children have a right to be protected from harm, then social policy makers, those at the top of DSW and CYPFS, and politicians with responsibility for welfare matters, need to use the wisdom of experienced and

competent child protection workers like the women in this study to improve statutory child protection services in this country.

Information Letter APPENDIX 1

Project title - The working lives of women social workers: a lesbian/feminist analysis.
Thesis supervisor - Marilyn Waring, Dept. of Social Policy and Social Work, Massy/Albany. Ph: (09) 4439665

----------, 1996.

Dear
I am doing a thesis to complete an MSW degree at Massey (Albany), on the experiences of women social workers. Thanks for your interest in being part of this project. This letter is to give you some more information about what is involved and a consent form. If you are still interested in participating, please return the consent form to me and I will arrange a convenient interview time and place.

My thesis is based on a feminist perspective and research methods and the objective is to record the experiences of women social workers, both lesbian and heterosexual, who have worked in the care and protection field, to analyse the interview material and to attempt to understand our experiences within a framework of feminist and lesbian theory.

The research design involves each participant in one or more loosely-structured interviews, probably between one and a half and two hours long, which will be recorded on audio-tape. I am interested in how and why women get into social work as paid employment, what happens in the course of their working lives and why women stay in social work, or leave. I am also interested in whether a women describes herself as a feminist and how that influences the way she works, and in any differences between the experiences of heterosexual women and lesbians.

After the interview has been transcribed I will return the transcript to you for any corrections you wish to make. A second interview will be arranged if you want to add substantially to the information. Once I have categorised all the interview material I will feed back to all respondents how this has been done and my thoughts about how it could be written up within a framework of feminist and lesbian theory.

What I hope to do then is to organise discussion of this in two groups, one lesbians, one heterosexual women. The aim of this is to develop the theoretical section of the thesis together with the women who have been interviewed, rather than just imposing my own ideas on the

material. I will be asking for consent to your involvement in a group discussion separately. If you do not want to be involved in the group discussion, you have the right to withdraw from the study at that point. The consent will include agreement to keep confidential information given within the group. These discussions will also be transcribed and sent back to everyone in the group.

If I get a grant from the Massey Graduate Research Fund towards the costs of tape transcription I will be using a public typist to do some of this work and transcribe the rest of the tapes myself. If the grant application is unsuccessful I will be doing all the transcribing. If a public typist is used, a signed agreement about confidentiality will be obtained. None of this work will be done by a CYPFS typist. Names of the participants will not be used in the thesis and will not be used for the purpose of arranging a group interview without your permission. Specific permission will be sought to include in the thesis any quotations from any of the interview material.

After completion and examination of the thesis, all draft material will be destroyed. If you would like to have the tape of the interview, I will return it to you. If you don't want it, I will wipe it. Prior to the examination all material will be kept secured from any other person.

If you agree to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any question during the interview. You have the right to ask any questions about the study at any time during participation. Your name will not be used for any reason connected with this project, without your permission. The information given during the interviews will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project. You have the right to ask for the audio-tape to be turned off at any time during the interview. You have the right to be given a summary of the findings of the study when it is concluded.

Please contact me if you would like any other information or want to discuss anything else about being involved.

Yours sincerely,

Marnie Hunter

Consent To Individual Interview APPENDIX 2

PROJECT TITLE: The working lives of women social workers: a lesbian /feminist analysis.

CONSENT FORM

-I have read the letter with information about this study and have had the details explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I have the right to ask further questions at any time.

-If I agree to participate, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

-I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission and that the information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.

-I agree/do not agree to the interview (or interviews) being audio-taped.

-I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview (s).

-I understand that I will be asked to participate in a group discussion once the individual interviews have been completed and that my written consent will be sought for this separately once all the individual interviews have been completed.

- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information letter

Signed:.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

Interview Questions APPENDIX 3

- I'm interested in when and how you became a social worker?

  *how did you get started? * what was your previous work history? * when did you first become aware of social work as an occupation?
- Your career in social work- where have you worked/did you work and for how long?

- Could you described the <u>way</u> you practise(d) social work * what is/was important to you *what were your bottom lines?
- How do/did feminist ideas influence your work? *do you describe yourself as a feminist? *did you first begin to describe yourself as a feminist before or during your time in social work?

- What do you remember as the really key experiences during those years?
- I'm interested in the effects of doing this sort of work - what do you think have been the effects on you? *the effects of the work with clients? *the effects of relationships with colleagues? *the effects of working in the organisation? *the effects of how the public perceives social work?

- What about any issues to do with being lesbian/being heterosexual during your time in social work *doing care & protection work? *with colleagues? *with clients? *with the organisation? *how out are you/were you?
- What do you imagine the issues might be for a heterosexual/lesbian woman?
- What has enabled you to stay in social work? or why did you leave?
- Is there anything else that has been important to you during your time as a social worker that you haven't talked about?

Statement of Confidentiality APPENDIX 4

Project title: The working lives of women social workers: a lesbian feminist analysis

Statement of Confidentiality

I have been employed for the purpose of transcribing audio taped interviews which have been recorded for this project.

I undertake to keep confidential all information contained in the tapes and the transcripts.

Signed .....

Name .....

Date .....

Letter Sent With Interview Transcripts APPENDIX 5

----------1996

Dear

Here at last is the transcript of your interview. Everything in my thesis is taking longer than I thought! There will be a few typing errors, but hopefully no errors which alter meaning. If there are, please let me know. If there is anything you want to add, I am happy to do a second interview.

I hope within the next six weeks to finish analysing all the interview material into themes and to send you a draft of my findings. As I mentioned in my earlier letter, when this has been done, I hope to be able to discuss these with you in a group. I think that these "group discussions" will work best if they're informal and that the best way of meeting to do this would be round the table for dinner - at my place - in late September/early October. After transcribing most of the first interviews myself and learning how long transcription takes, I'm having second thoughts about doing this again. What I will probably do is tape the group discussions and listen to the tapes several times, but just transcribe any excerpts I want to use as quotes in the thesis.

One other thing which doing the first interviews has made me re-think is around labelling the division into two discussion groups, "one for lesbians, one for heterosexual women". What has come through really clearly in the interviews is that some women don't identify as lesbian but don't describe themselves as heterosexual (or any other term relating to their sexuality) and dislike the label.

The lesbians I interviewed all said things like "well I don't go round at work with "lesbian" on my T shirt but that's certainly how I describe myself ". For some women who I had assumed would describe themselves as heterosexual, the word was really problematic, so I need to acknowledge that this is all much more complex than I had anticipated when I drafted the consent forms. Maybe I should have written it as "lesbian" and "others" ! and if women want to alter the group discussion consent form in that way, please do so.

Thanks again for your time, energy and knowledge that went into the first interview. Would you please let me know about any errors in the transcripts; let me know if there is anything you would like to add; and if you are willing to participate in a group interview please return the consent form to me. I'll be in touch later about a date.

Best wishes,

Marnie

Consent To Group Discussion APPENDIX 6

PROJECT TITLE: The working lives of women social workers: a lesbian / feminist analysis.

CONSENT FORM

-I have had the details of the group interview explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

- I understand that the researcher is arranging two group discussions, one of which will involve the five lesbians who have been interviewed for this project and one of which will involve the five heterosexual women. I understand that the researcher will be the facilitator of both groups.

-I consent to my name being given to the other women in my group.

-I agree to the group discussion being audio-taped.

-I understand that I have the right to ask for the audio-tape to be turned off at any time during the interview (s).

-I agree to participate in the group discussion section of this project.

-I agree to keep information which is given in the group confidential.

Signed:.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

Dinner Party Recipes APPENDIX 7

Chicken with African Apricots and Grapefruit Sauce

6 boneless chicken breasts
200 g dried African apricots, halved
pinch each of cinnamon, nutmeg and freshly ground black pepper

Marinade:

4 cloves garlic
3 small hot green chillies
2 cups grapefruit juice
1/2 cup fresh orange juice
1 tablespoon allspice
olive oil
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon sugar

Puree all marinade ingredients. Place chicken and apricots in the marinade. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Lift chicken out of marinade and sprinkle with cinnamon, nutmeg and pepper, Sear chicken in hot olive oil.

Boil marinade hard until it thickens. Pour over chicken and cook in a covered dish at 200 degrees centigrade for 30 minutes.

Serves 6

Serve with boiled rice and a selection of salads.

Steamed green salad with mustard dressing

Steam a variety of fresh vegetables, generously sliced or cut into segments: courgettes , green beans, broccoli and celery, until just tender.

Cool and add sliced cucumber, green pepper and a small portion of capers.
Mix in dressing and keep at room temperature until ready to serve.

Dressing:

Mix 4 parts good quality olive oil with 1 part wine vinegar. Add a pinch of salt, generous amounts of freshly ground black pepper and a tablespoon of whole grain mustard.

Marinated mushroom salad

Five cups small button mushrooms, whole or halved
1 red and yellow pepper

Combine vegetables and dressing several hours (or the day before) you plan to eat. Mix gently several times before serving and serve at room temperature.

Dressing:

Mix 4 parts good quality olive oil with one part balsamic vinegar. Add freshly ground black pepper, 2 crushed garlic cloves and a generous amount of finely chopped soft fresh herbs (eg. tarragon, marjoram, parsley, basil).

Dried fruit salad based on an Armenian desert

250 gms dried figs
250 gms dried apricots
250 gms dried soft prunes
250 gms dried soft apple rings
250 gms dried sultanas
1/4 cup currants
strips of peel from one lemon
1/2 dessertspoon of a mixture of dried nutmeg, cinnamon, allspice and cloves
1 tablespoon brandy

Remove all the stalks from the figs. Wash all the fruit and place in a bowl with 4 cups water. Leave to soak overnight. Strain off the soaking water into a non-aluminium saucepan. Add the lemon rind and spices and let them simmer together for 10 minutes. Then add the fruit and continue to cook very gently until all the fruit is tender. This will take up to an hour. Leave to cool. When the mixture is cool, remove the lemon rind and add the brandy.

Serve with plenty of freshly whipped cream

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