Power, Knowledge and Reflexivity: Learning ‘from Experience’ in a Women’s Refuge

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Canterbury

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University of Canterbury 2002
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although PhD research is a ‘long and lonely road’, it is not one that I could have travelled alone. To the many people who have assisted me during the process of researching and writing this PhD, thank you.

I wish to firstly thank the women at the Women’s Refuge for sharing your time and stories with me during 1998-1999; without your generosity this research would not be possible.

Secondly, I wish to thank Missy Morton, for instilling in me a passion for qualitative research and supervising me during the early phase of the research. To my supervisors, Elody Rathgen, Rosemary du Plessis, and Judi Miller, thank you for your encouragement, ongoing support, and intellectual challenges. I also wish to thank the University of Canterbury for the financial assistance of a three-year doctoral scholarship.

To my friend Debra for your unstinting support, encouragement, and help to find the ‘right words’, I could not have done this without you. I want to acknowledge the assistance of members of the ‘Narratives Group’, Joce, Missy, Margie, Lucy and Nicola, thank you for providing intellectual challenge, and commenting on various versions of my work. Thank you to friends who commented on drafts, and proofed chapters: Mary, Ann R, Marie, Jan, Mo, Karen and Ann D.

Thanks to the members of the Wine Group, the Book Group, and my dancing partners for reminding me, that life is more than thesis writing.

To my brothers Peter and John for showing me that it is possible. Finally to my family, Nigel, Mark, David, and my partner Cheryl, thanks for your love and support.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about recognising and analysing learning from experience in community organisations. It critically examines not only the possibilities, but also the challenges and difficulties involved in that approach to learning. The thesis documents positive and innovative strategies for learning and providing services in a particular Women’s Refuge, while at the same time offering a critical engagement with those interventions. Women’s Refuges exist to support women and children victims of domestic violence, and to work towards the elimination of domestic violence, but like many voluntary organisations in New Zealand, they rely on volunteers to provide many of their services. This qualitative case study focuses on the induction and training of the Refuge volunteer advocates in one particular Refuge in Christchurch in 1998 – 1999. It examines the tensions inherent in a pedagogy of learning from experience, which operates in a wider context of state funding and state surveillance of the quality of services.

Within the Refuge, the notions of ‘experience’ and ‘learning’ were not neutral or value free. What counted as learning within the Refuge context was not generalised knowledge, but an ability to engage in certain practices and talk about these practices in particular ways. Throughout their training volunteer advocates were learning not just how to support women and children escaping violence in their homes, but how to manage their identities as learners and workers within the institutional regimes of the Refuge. The volunteer advocates had to learn to demonstrate reflexivity, and be ‘honest,’ but they also learnt to manage that honesty. They were learning about the Refuge work, what ‘experience’ was valuable, and how to demonstrate that they were learning in this particular environment by demonstrating a capacity for self reflective talk about those experiences. In this respect they had to engage in ‘experiential learning’ by overtly reconstructing their own actions, interactions and feelings.
PROLOGUE

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

I left school when I was 16 to attend Teachers’ College. I did this, not because I particularly wanted to be a teacher, but because it gave me an option to leave school. My parents who valued formal education highly, would not allow me to leave school to take up any job that did not include training and qualifications. I completed my three years at the College of Education and taught for one year, gaining my Certificate and Diploma of Teaching. By the age of 20, I had left the classroom both as a teacher and as a learner.

I began my university education when I turned 40. Prior to that my adult learning had taken place in the community, in my workplaces, and most importantly in the feminist organisations I had participated in for the previous 15 years. I had volunteered for women’s organisations like Women’s Refuge, Women Against Pornography and a sexual abuse counselling organisation because of my feminist convictions, and my desire to bring about change in my community. It was not until some years later that I realised what I had learned over these years. I learned by watching the other women, by asking questions and by trying things out. I learned from the failures, the conflicts and the disasters as well as from the successes and good times. The skills, experience and confidence gained through this volunteer work enabled me to succeed in public service management, and in my own business. I bring to this thesis a strong belief in the value of ‘learning from experience’ and ‘learning by doing’.

Two critical areas that I developed through involvement in feminist organisations were tools of political analysis and a commitment to social justice. The organisations I was part of called themselves ‘feminist’, but theoretical issues of feminism were rarely discussed. The discursive practices, for example operating as collectives, were theoretically informed, but within the organisations were ‘taken for granted’. It was not until years later when I completed a course of feminist studies at University, that I recognised all these organisations were founded on radical feminist assumptions.

My introduction to feminism was by an unusual route. In 1976, I was a mother of a new baby, living in a heterosexual relationship in a small town. I joined the local Plunket committee as a way of meeting other young mothers. Although I was not particularly interested in the work of the Plunket committee (mainly fundraising by baking cakes), I started attending the monthly meetings. I was delighted to discover that, following the formal meeting, most of the women stayed to talk, eat, and drink wine. It was at these post Plunket meeting sessions that I was introduced to feminist

1 Plunket is a New Zealand institution that offers health care for children from 0 to 5 years. Plunket was established in 1907 and its motto since its inception has been “Help the mothers and save the babies” (Olsen & Meia Smith, 1981, p 11). In 1976 Plunket nurses visited all new mothers in their homes, to monitor the health of the baby and support the mothers in their parenting role.
ideas. In many ways these meetings paralleled the feminist consciousness-raising groups that were happening around that time. In our group, unlike in consciousness-raising groups, we had no structured process, and no desire to build feminist theory. We talked about our lives, our experiences as women and mothers, and our status as paid and unpaid workers. But in a haphazard, unplanned way, we did make the connections between our specific experiences, and those of other women in the group. We could connect our common experiences with the structures and practices in society that disadvantaged women. There was a huge disjunction between the discourses that Plunket was promoting in terms of women's domestic roles, and the feminist discourse of women's liberation, but our group accommodated both.

I was recruited as a Refuge volunteer\(^2\) by a woman at Plunket who had been involved in setting up the Women's Refuge. The prime criteria for being accepted in the collective at that time was a 'feminist awareness'. When I joined the collective in 1979, it was run by women on a totally voluntary basis. At that time, the Refuge did not offer training to its members; we were expected as women to be able to relate to other women and provide them with the support they needed. The practices of the organisation were theoretically informed by radical feminism, although they were not made explicit. We did not discuss theory, but were expected to talk the 'the Refuge language' where, for example, seminars became 'ovulacs'. Patriarchy was a word that was often used in the Refuge to describe the institutions, structures and systems that maintained male advantage and female disadvantage. Within the Refuge 'patriarchy' was always prefaced with 'bloody' or 'fucking'. It was not until several years later, when I attended University, that I realised 'patriarchy' was a word that existed outside the Refuge context.

There was a 'Refuge way of doing things'; it was an organisation run for women by women, it embraced notions of 'sisterhood' and all women being equal, and identified patriarchy as the source of women's oppression. The practices of the organisation were shaped by these ideas; for example, the Refuge operated as a collective with no formal hierarchy of leadership. All collective members and the residents in the Refuge at the time were expected to attend meetings where decisions were made by consensus. One of the positive aspects of collectivity for me was that with no acknowledgement of 'expert knowledge' in the group, we were all expected to pick up a range of tasks and to learn as we went.

As I look back at some of the practices of the Refuge in the early 1980s I am amused by the consequences that arose from the strategy of 'for women by women'. No men were permitted on the premises, and we utilised the skills of collective members to meet most needs. However none of our members was a plumber, and the Refuge would cope with the inconvenience of blocked drains for several days until a woman plumber could be located, rather than allow a man to unblock the drains. At the time I supported keeping the Refuge as a safe space for women, but I also held a more pragmatic position. I had no objection to men carrying out the more 'shitty' maintenance jobs at the Refuge.

During part of my time as a volunteer at the Refuge I was employed by an agency that ran parenting programmes in schools and (for adults) in community organisations like

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\(^2\) I worked as a the Refuge volunteer from 1979 to 1986.
Plunket, Kindergartens and Play Centres. In these programmes we focussed on 'sex-role stereotyping' and the parenting practices that limited the opportunities for overall development of both girls and boys. Our programmes were based on the liberal feminist idea that providing equal opportunity for all individuals to develop fully, would allow sexism to disappear (Bunch, 1987; Friedan, 1963; Tong, 1989). By changing individual behaviours of parents and caregivers we sought to equalise the power relations between the sexes. These ideas conflicted with my Refugee radical feminist ideas on changing the structures of society, including that of the nuclear family. At the time I thought that both approaches were complementary and that we needed to take action on all fronts.

By the mid 1980s I was disturbed with what I saw happening in my community regarding some feminist organisations' difficulty in accommodating difference. In the organisations in which I was a volunteer, conflicts about lesbian visibility and sexuality had been played out for a number of years. In the early 1980s issues of racism were added as the awareness of racial and cultural issues between Maori and Pakeha¹ were impacting on the community. The organisations that saw gender as the primary (or only) cause of disadvantage and universalised this to all women, had difficulty in accommodating other kinds of difference in their policies and practices. In 1988 the National Collective of Independent Women’s Refuges (NCIWWR) incorporated a policy of Parallel Development¹ into its constitution that was binding on all member Refuges (Else, 1993, p 144).

During the time that the Refuge was working out its response to the challenges of biculturalism, I was employed by a Maori voluntary organisation. The focus of my work included anti-racism sessions and supporting Maori sovereignty. How as a Pakeha did I reconcile the narrative of all Pakeha as racist and oppressors? I knew from my involvement with the Refuge that as a woman I was oppressed; but I was being told by Maori that as a Pakeha I was also an oppressor. Although I worked through this on a practical day-to-day basis I had no theoretical tools to enable me to account for the complexity of being multiply positioned.

It was some years later that I was introduced to ideas of poststructuralism in a university course. I found the idea of multiply fragmented subjectivities resonated with the issues of difference, power and oppression that I had been struggling with in my life. Postmodernism as a way of thinking provided me with new intellectual and analytical tools. I realised that individuals and groups were not 'essentialist beings' but were constituted in discourse every time they spoke or acted (Alcoff, 1988;

¹ Non-Maori New Zealand residents usually with European heritage.
² Parallel Development refers to the separate development of both Maori run and Pakeha run organisations. Maori and Pakeha Refuges were funded equally and a separate structure was established within the NCIWR to support Maori Refuges. Roma Balzar, a Maori member of the NCIWR who had a big impact on the incorporation of this policy, described Parallel Development as a structure that ‘allows for both separate development and biculturalism but does not prevent either. As an organisation moves and grows, both arms [Maori and Pakeha] move and grow’ (Ash & Balzar, 1987). A discussion of the Refuge policy and practices of biculturalism are outside the scope of this thesis. The Refuge that is the focus of this research was a Non-Maori the Refuge that worked in a partnership with the local Maori Women’s Refuge. All self-identified Maori clients were referred to the Maori Women’s Refuge at the point of initial contact.
Davies, 1994, 1997; Foucault, 1972, 2000; Francis, 1999; Jones, 1997; Lather, 1992, 1993; Scott, 1988; Weedon, 1997). I understood that as a Pakeha woman in New Zealand I was shaped by, and variously positioned myself, within a discourse of women’s oppression, patriarchy, racism, anti-racism, Maori Sovereignty, class inequity, and community development. A postmodern analysis enabled me to recognise that the ‘taken for granted’ knowledge of particular discourses shaped not only the structures and the practices of organisations, but also the way that I made sense of my place in the world.

STORIES, EXPERIENCE AND ANALYSIS

I have chosen to begin this thesis with a personal narrative of my involvement in voluntary organisations. These are not naive narratives. I relate them for a particular purpose, to present important influences that have shaped the way I think, and the analytical tools I have available to me. Narrativity is not simply the retelling of ‘experiences’ but a strategy that enables us to see that we shape ourselves, and are shaped, by a range of often competing discourses. I present these narratives of my ‘experiences’ in a chronological way, but I do not intend them to be read as a progression from ‘unknowing’ to ‘knowing’. New ideas and understanding of experience do not necessarily replace existing ideas or ways of seeing things, but rather provide a juxtaposition of discourses that I draw on in various contexts. For example, my work with parents to develop new strategies for interacting with boy and girl children existed alongside my Refuge work that aimed at changing the structures of society including the nuclear family. For this reason I do not categorise myself as a particular type of feminist, but acknowledge that my view of the world has been shaped particularly by radical feminist, liberal feminist and poststructural feminist ideas, and that this throws up contradictory/paradoxical issues for how I present and discuss many issues within my thesis.

I see feminism as both politics and theory, or a range of theories. Every form of feminist politics, and there are many, implies a particular way of understanding patriarchy and the possibilities of social change. Theory informing politics is often


\[\text{See Chapter Two theoretical discussion on narrativity.}\]
implicit, and in the Refuge context, has involved assumptions about sexuality, femininity, masculinity, and change (see Chapter Four p 122). Like Weedon (1997, p 7), I argue that the relationship between experience and theory is critical for feminism. Feminist theory must not only challenge the dominant patriarchal discourses, but also create new ways of thinking about what counts as knowledge, who can know, and how that knowledge can be utilised to bring about social change. How we think about our world, and what we count as knowledge sets the parameters of how we can then act in that world, or resist and act to change it.

I also agree with Weedon (1997, p 6), that one of the strengths of poststructuralist approaches is that they enable us to attend to the practical implications of particular ways of theorising women’s oppression, and to recognise that feminist politics are crucial in determining which existing theories might be useful in the fight for change. I understand poststructuralism as an approach that provides me with useful tools to make sense of my life in general and this thesis in particular. Poststructuralism does not require me to give up the freedom to be what Middleton (1993, p 42) describes as “theoretically promiscuous”. I understand being ‘theoretically promiscuous’ to mean that I am able to draw on a range of different theories, both modernist and poststructuralist. In particular, in this thesis I utilise the modernist theory of radical feminism, alongside discussions of feminist poststructuralism.

A poststructuralist approach acknowledges that no research is objective or value free. Lather (1991, p91) argues that “…ways of knowing are inherently culture bound and researcher values permeate inquiry”. I acknowledge that the way I see the world, and what I count as knowledge, has shaped every stage of the research process. I made the decision to do this research in a Women’s Refuge because of my past experiences as a volunteer in the Refuge. I began this research not as an ‘objective observer’ but as a ‘passionate participant’. It was as a ‘passionate participant’ that I made decisions about what to include and what to exclude from this thesis, including how to represent myself and the participants. I made decisions about whether to appeal to a higher authority in the research, and who that higher authority would be. I was not always conscious of these decisions and did not realise that sometimes the decisions had already been made by the adoption of particular research protocols (Harrison,
MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). Throughout this thesis, I take up Harris’s (2001, p 756) challenge to do what is rarely done by scholars of the voluntary sector – to acknowledge that participation in voluntary organisations has been important in shaping my life, and that my experiences can provide useful data for constructing this research. At the same time I use poststructuralist theory to critically examine claims to authenticity and authority based on ‘experience’. I also deconstruct the notion of learning from experience. As a feminist researcher and a former volunteer, I enquire into the discursive practices relating to learning in a particular voluntary organisation.

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6 In Chapters Two & Three I discuss these research protocols in depth.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Focus of the thesis

This thesis is about recognising and analysing learning from experience in community organisations. It critically examines not only the possibilities, but also the challenges and difficulties involved in that approach to learning. The thesis documents positive and innovative strategies for learning and providing services in a particular Women’s Refuge. At the same time it offers a critical engagement with those interventions.

As a specific focus of study, I illustrate the complexity of learning from experience in a community organisation by presenting a case study of one organisation, a Women’s Refuge. Women’s Refuges exist to support women and children victims of domestic violence, and to work towards the elimination of domestic violence. The primary focus within the Refuge is to provide a social service. But like many voluntary organisations\(^7\) in New Zealand, it relies on volunteers to provide many of the services of the organisation. These organisations provide training for the volunteers to enable them to carry out their work. As in many other organisations, the induction and training of the Refuge volunteer advocates is critical to the life of the organisation. This thesis focuses on that induction and training of the Refuge volunteer advocates. I examine the tensions inherent in a pedagogy of learning from experience, which operates in a wider context of state funding and state surveillance of quality control of such services.

\(^7\) ‘Voluntary organisation’ is the term I use to refer to organisations or groups that operate in the community, providing services using predominantly unpaid labour. Voluntary organisations may also be referred to as Non Government Organisations (NGO) or the Third Sector (Gunn, 1995, pp 1-2). Voluntary organisations do not result from statute, but from people coming together because they want to address a perceived need in their communities (Cull, 1992). The defining characteristic of voluntary organisations is that of autonomy. The members elect their own leaders, determine their own directions and priorities, and largely direct their own fate (Ballock, 1990; Cull, 1992; Gunn, 1996).
Refuges train volunteer advocates to respond to women and their children at times of crisis in their lives. How do they do this? What can we learn from this research in terms of how such programmes might be different? These questions led me to explore knowledge production within the specific context of the Refuge. I examine the way that 'experience' is constructed by the organisation and by the new volunteer advocates, and look at the relationship between experience and subjectivity as the new advocates became members of the organisation. Throughout the thesis I return to themes of 'self-construction', 'power', and 'surveillance'.

Central to the analysis in this thesis is my understanding of Foucauldian notions of the relationship between power and knowledge. I draw on Foucault's (1980, p 52) work, which articulates that power "perpetually creates knowledge and conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power". It is in everyday practices that power can be observed. As Foucault (2000, p 87) explains

...the whole set of little powers, of little institutions situated at the lowest level... gave rise to a series of knowledges = a knowledge of the individual, of normalization, a corrective knowledge.

I take up this idea that power is produced through knowledge and practice, historically and in the present. In the Refuge, the context of this study, I explore the discursive practice of 'little powers' within 'little institutions' that shape the training and practices of volunteer advocates. I will examine the way that the production of knowledge within this context becomes, as Foucault terms it, 'corrective knowledge'.

Throughout the thesis I aim to make visible the power relations that were being created and re-created through the discursive practices of the organisation. I interpret 'discourse' not simply as ideas or knowledge, but in the Foucauldian sense of practices and ways of shaping the world according to that knowledge (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p 237). Central to the training offered were feminist discourses of power and empowerment that new volunteer advocates needed to adopt to work with

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8 The notion of discourse is more fully explored in Chapters Two & Five.
9 Discussed in depth in Chapters Four & Five.
the clients of the Refuge. For the new advocates, their empowerment was framed by
a need to accept the discipline of surveillance and to demonstrate their capacity to
engage in self-surveillance during all phases of training. In this thesis I trouble the
notion of empowerment by questioning who in the process of empowerment has the
capacity to empower? How did new advocates who contested the Refuge discourses
present themselves to the organisation, and did this change over time?

In 1998 and 1999 I followed a group of twelve trainee advocates through their first
eighteen months as Refuge advocates. This involved participant observations at an
induction training course, during supervised (mentored) rosters, at the Refuge
meetings, group supervision and while the women worked on the crisis line taking
calls for the Refuge. I interviewed all trainee advocates at the completion of the
induction course, after six months and again after twelve months, and also
interviewed more experienced advocates and paid staff at the Refuge. I accessed
official Refuge documents including training materials and funding accountability
documents. This thesis is based on a case study of one particular organisation, in the
city of Christchurch New Zealand, and one cohort of volunteers who joined the
organisation in 1998. I am not claiming that their experiences are representative of all
induction process at the Refuge, or induction processes in other voluntary
organisations. However, I do see their experiences as sufficient to enable me to use
this thesis to illustrate some of the benefits and the challenges of training based on
experience.

Few feminists have taken up the challenge of studying voluntary organisations as sites
of feminist learning or action. As Baldock (1990) acknowledges, there has been little
feminist theorising of volunteering, and I argue even less of the learning that occurs in
these sites. One study that resonates with my thesis is Rath’s (1999) PhD thesis. The
focus of Rath’s work is a concern with debates about the impact of postmodernism on
qualitative research practices; her study is based on Rape Crisis initial volunteer
counsellor training in Britain. Rath’s thesis tells a reflective story of carrying out
feminist inspired empirical research. In her thesis Rath uses a range of textual devices
including poetry to indicate different voices in her work. She explains that the poems
in her thesis use the transcribed words of her participants.
In crafting poems from the transcriptions of interviews, I do something with data, rather than saying something about it. (Rath, 1999, p 131 emphasis in original)

In this thesis I adopt Rath’s strategy of presenting participant’s words in the form of poems. I begin Chapters Six to Nine, with poems constructed from interview transcripts. The women’s words are used to frame the chapters that analyse the outcomes of this research. In some chapter I appeal to a ‘higher authority’ of other theorists, but in the substantive chapters I use the women's words to signal their centrality in this research.

**Positioning the study – issues of context**

This thesis is informed by ideas about knowledge production and learning outside the formal educational sector. It is located at the intersection of debates about learning from experience and debates about the empowerment of volunteers within the voluntary sector. I begin by discussing volunteering, and give a brief historical account of the Refuge movement in New Zealand. I then position this study within a wider socio-political context that has contributed to shaping the Refuge at the end of the twentieth century.

There is a large body of ‘how to’ literature that aims to provide community or voluntary organisations with the skills necessary to run their organisations (Bush, 2002; Dufar, 2001; Herman, 1994; Jackson, 1985; Jackson, 1995; Kennedy, 1991; Woods, 1998). Another group of studies focuses on why people volunteer and what they learn from volunteering (Abrahams, 1996; Barnett, 1996; Canterbury Volunteer Centre, 1997; Darville, Perkins & Unell, 1988; Deem, 1993; Elsdon, 1995; Percy, Barnes, Graddon, & Machell, 1988; Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995). These studies are largely descriptive rather than theoretical, and have some findings in common. They suggest that people volunteer for a range of reasons including altruistic wishes to help others, career development, and personal growth and development. All

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10 See discussion in Chapter Two (p 28).
11 I address debates about learning from experience in Chapter Five.
12 In each substantive chapter I introduce different fields of literature that are relevant to my findings. For example Chapter Eight includes a discussion of literature on mentoring.
studies found that, although participants may have learned specific skills though their volunteer involvement, what they valued most related to self development. Self development included, for example, tolerance, the ability to get along with others, diplomacy, collaborative skills, trust, and self confidence. These studies focus on the learning that occurs through doing the volunteer work. In contrast my thesis has a more specific focus: the particular teaching/learning interventions of induction training, mentoring and group supervision.

This thesis explores territory that has been largely uncharted. In New Zealand very little has been recorded about the Women’s Refuge, or other feminist based community organisations, apart from Crammock’s (1994) history of Dunedin Women’s Refuge and Gilson’s (2001) thesis, which explores the tensions between feminist organising and co-option by state agencies in a comparative study of Refuges in Canada and New Zealand. The tension that Gilson identified between the Refuge and the State as supplier of funding, is a theme that underlies my study.

The Refuge movement in New Zealand developed in an ad hoc way out of the Women’s Liberation movement (WLM). In the early 1970s women’s liberation groups were established in the main centres with the broad goals of promoting women’s rights and re-evaluation of women’s role in society (Dann, 1985). The Refuge that is the site of this study was one of the earliest Refuges established in New Zealand, and unlike some Refuges that were established later, had a very strong feminist base (Broadsheet, 1975). From its inception the Refuge had a strong emphasis on the radical feminist goal of changing a society that victimised women. The collective employed the WLM strategy of consciousness-raising about issues of violence against women and children, not only in the wider community, but also with the women who volunteered to run the Refuge (Broadsheet, 1975). Existing members viewed their efforts to increase feminist, social and political awareness of the volunteers as a major way of bringing about change in society (Ostrander, 2000, p 192). As Gilson (2001, p 50) stated “All women’s activity impacts on the institutions

13 The article quoted from in this section of the thesis was written by the group of women who ran the the Refuge. However, although the article is clearly written in the first person, there are no authors listed. For this reason I have referenced directly to the magazine ‘Broadsheet’, which was a feminist magazine produced monthly.
of society to some degree and women’s consciousness is raised by their very involvement in women’s issues”.

The context of any organisation is critical to the development and practices of that organisation. Although most Refuges in New Zealand are affiliated to the National Collective of Women’s Refuges (NCIWR)\(^\text{14}\), they are all independently constituted and operate from a variety of models. Unlike many other Refuges, the one in this study did not have its “roots embedded in ex-battered women supporting each other” (Gilson, 2001, p 203), but in a radical feminist analysis of women’s oppression. The practice of recruiting volunteers and paid staff who had experienced domestic violence was a common practice for many Refuges (Everingham, 1996; Gilson, 2001). This was based on the idea that women who had been victims themselves were more likely to be empathetic to women and children using the Refuge.

However, for the Refuge in this study, as my personal narrative suggests, in the 1980s an adherence to feminist discourses was the criterion for acceptance as a volunteer. Throughout this thesis I examine the discursive practices of the Refuge in the late 1990s. I argue that many of the Refuge’s discursive practices were informed by feminist ideas from the 1970s and 1980s. I discuss issues of tension that arise when an organisation operates in a different political and social context, while employing practices based on the theoretical analyses of radical feminism.

The investigation for this research was carried out within a wider context of socio-political change that impacted on the voluntary sector. Following the 1984 election of the fourth New Zealand Labour Government, a neo-liberal discourse replaced the existing political discourse of welfarism. The neo-liberal model based on the economic analysis offered by theorists such as Hayek (in Frowen, 1997) focussed on the dominance of the capitalist market, and the superiority of the free market as a form of political economy (King, 1997; Lauder, 1990; Marshall, 2000). As part of the neo-liberal changes, Government departments were restructured and greater public accountability for finances was demanded with the introduction of the 1989 Public Finance Act.

\(^{14}\) The NCIWR was established in 1981 as a coalition of Refuges. Its purpose was to act as a spokesperson and to lobby for funding for Refuges (Gilson, 2001, p 66).
These changes had a direct impact on organisations working in the voluntary sector. With many government departments redefining their ‘core-services’, the voluntary sector picked up work previously undertaken directly by government departments. As a way of ensuring greater accountability, ‘contracting for services’ was introduced into the community sector. Under the contracting regime, government departments defined the services they were prepared to pay the voluntary sector to provide. This new relationship with the State put demands for increased accountability on voluntary organisations. With the increased demands for accountability came increased surveillance, and requirements that the organisations met certain standards of service laid down by the funding providers (Gilson, 2001; Nowland-Foreman, 1995). Although only 37% of the Refuge’s funding came from contracting for service, they had to provide evidence of accountability for 100% of their services. This meant providing extensive statistics on a monthly basis, and undergoing external assessments of the service by the funder on an annual basis. These annual assessments involved the funder visiting the Refuge and checking that there were written policies and practices, not only for the services provided, but for the management of the organisation (Gilson, 2001, pp 264 -269). Some writers argue that by contracting for services the Government forced fundamental changes on the voluntary sector that resulted in many organisations no longer having the ability to determine their own direction or define their own fate (Gilson, 2001; Nowland-Foreman, 1995).

At the time of this investigation, 1998 – 99, the Refuge had recently changed its structure from a collective to one with a separate Governance board. This was partly in response to pressures from funders, but also resulted from the Employment Contracts Act (1991) (ECA). The ECA, which covered all paid employment relations, had implications for the Refuge because paid staff were employed to work at the Refuge. The ECA demanded that the employees and employers be clearly identified in their specific roles. Within a collective structure it was not easy to define

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15 1999 the Refuge Annual Report
16 The change from collective structures to more bureaucratic structures, what Ostrander (2000, p 190) terms “pragmatic collectives” seems to have been an international trend, it was also evident in other Refuges in New Zealand and Canada in Gilson’s (2001) study.
the ‘employer/employee relationship’, as all members of the organisation, paid or
unpaid were members of the collective. By setting up a Governance board of
volunteers, the Refuge sought to make a clear distinction between the Governance
board, which became the employer, and the paid staff who became directly
accountable to them.

Although the Refuge had adopted the new structure, it sought to maintain its
philosophical base in radical feminism. I have found evidence, from the review of the
Refuge documents, that the philosophical approach to the training of new advocates
can be traced directly to a 1970s interpretation of radical feminism and ideas around
consciousness-raising (Lambourne, 1990). The Refuge training was directed not
only at giving the new advocates the skills and capacity to do the immensely
challenging work, but also at providing opportunities for personal transformation
through a consciousness-raising process. This thesis examines how women’s lives
were changed by the Refuge training. Not only did they learn new skills and
capacities, but they accessed a self-reflexivity that was not previously available to
them. But this process was not unproblematic. I discuss how conflicting discourses
of managerialism and formal accountability demanded by the funders combined with
radical feminist philosophy to shape the discursive training practices of the
organisation. These tensions were played out on a daily basis for the volunteers who
organised and ran the training, and the new volunteer advocates who went through the
training process.

Outline of thesis

The way I have organised this thesis is shaped by the chronological process of the
training received by the volunteer advocates. The first five chapters, including this
introductory chapter, are concerned primarily with methodological and theoretical
issues. The following chapters six to nine, explore how a cohort of new volunteers
move from being outsiders to becoming active members of the Refuge community.

17 This is discussed in detail in Chapters Five & Six.
I begin Chapter Two, THE CONSTRUCTION SITE with a discussion of qualitative research. In this chapter I draw on the metaphor of house construction to discuss the theoretical basis of my research method. I set the foundations for my research with a discussion of feminist research ethics that includes notions of reciprocity, emotionality, issues of power, and representation. I then introduce social constructionism as an epistemology that forms the foundation of this research.

Continuing with the construction metaphor, I then discuss the framing that shapes the analysis in this thesis. I draw on the theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism, discourse analysis and narrativity, and at the same time offer a critical engagement with these perspectives.

In Chapter Three, GETTING STARTED: OPPORTUNITIES, CHOICES, DECISIONS I begin with a discussion of participant observation, and interviewing as the key tools I used in this research project. I continue with the construction metaphor using the ‘Safe House’ as a way to describe the process I went through in gathering data for this thesis. I begin with “Getting in the gate” which is about negotiating access to the Refuge. Once through the gate, and past the gate keepers, I got “In the door” of the Refuge by being a participant observer at an induction course. I introduce the women who attended the 1998 volunteer induction course, and the key participants from the Refuge.

Chapter Four: ‘VISITING’ THE REFUGE: THE RESEARCH PROCESS continues the discussion of my research process. Once I had completed the induction training I, like the new volunteer advocates, had access to the Safe House. We spent time “Talking around the kitchen table” as I interviewed all new advocates, some of the paid staff and the more experienced volunteer advocates. “Being trusted with the house keys”, describes a range of activities that I attended as a participant observer including, hanging out at the house, being on roster with new advocates, attending volunteer meetings, group supervision, and sub committees. Another source of data for this thesis came from “Fossicking in the filing cabinets” as I went through boxes and files of written information. The final section of this chapter describes the process I used to ‘make sense’ of the texts I had collected.
Chapter Five, LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE, is where I engage with other theorists who have written about learning from experience and experiential learning. I begin with a discussion about the relationship between ‘learning from experience’ and ‘experiential learning’. I follow this with a brief discussion of two dominant discourses in adult experiential learning literature, a humanist discourse and a constructivist discourse, because they are ones that have shaped my thinking over the years. Following this discussion, I articulate the specific way that I use ‘experiential learning’ in this thesis to indicate, not simply ‘learning from experience’ but to describe a process of meta-cognition. I then bring a frame of poststructural theorising to a discussion of ‘experience’. Finally, I discuss a critical discourse of experiential learning, because it is the discourse that shapes the training offered in the Refuge. Within the critical discourse I discuss the particular practice of consciousness-raising, which I argue is rooted in the critical discourse of radical feminism.

Chapter Six CONSTRUCTING A REFUGE ADVOCATE is concerned with the various discourses that informed the way the participants constructed what it is to be a Refuge advocate. The women wanting to join the Refuge brought a number of understandings with them into their initial training. The Refuge promoted a specific understanding of what it meant to be a Refuge advocate, based on notions of empowerment. In this chapter I argue that women who wanted to become Refuge advocates had to adopt subjectivities based on ‘volunteering as empowerment’ and discard notions of ‘volunteering as helping or caring’.

Chapter Seven LEARNING TO ‘DO EMPOWERMENT’ builds on the discussion of discourse in the previous chapter. In this chapter I describe the strategies used in the Refuge induction training to encourage the new volunteer advocates to take on the Refuge discourses of power and empowerment. Some participants embraced the Refuge discourses, and some resisted. Within this context of knowledge production, I examine the way that ‘learning from experience’ or ‘consciousness-raising’ can result in both liberatory learning and what Foucault terms “corrective knowledge” (Foucault, 2000, p 87). I end this chapter with a brief discussion of the dynamics present when participants are asked to take part in consciousness-raising in a context where their suitability to be Refuge advocates is being assessed.
In Chapter Eight MENTORING: DOING IT RIGHT, I follow the chronological
progression of the new volunteer advocates into the second phase of their training. It
is in this phase that, under the supervision of a more experienced advocate, they begin
to answer the crisis line calls and take on work at the Refuge. In this chapter I draw
on literature on mentoring, to examine the practices at the Refuge which they
variously describe as “supervised rosters”, a “buddy system” and “mentoring”. In this
phase of the training the volunteer advocates learn by “doing it” and “trying it out”.
As they gain confidence and can demonstrate that they can “do it right” they move
from surveillance to self-surveillance as they begin to take the crisis calls from their
own homes. In this chapter I describe a circular process through which new
advocates are mentored and supervised on their rosters by more experienced members
of the organisation. I discuss the implications for knowledge production within this
process, which relies on the mentors drawing directly on their own experiences of
being mentored when they themselves joined the Refuge.

Chapter Nine, GROUP SUPERVISION: TELLING IT RIGHT is concerned with
examining the strategy of group supervision as an ongoing learning forum for the
Refuge advocates. In this chapter I am interested in the stories the women tell about
their experiences doing the work of the Refuge. The most usual story told at
supervision is what they term “stuff-up”, where things have not gone as they had
expected. I draw on a synthesis of Kadushin’s (1985) notions of the multiple and
sometimes conflicting functions of supervision, and Foucault’s (1977) ideas of
power/knowledge, surveillance, self-surveillance, and discipline, to theorise four
Refuge supervision narratives.

Chapter Ten ENDNOTES provides closure to this thesis. In Endnote One I provide a
theoretical discussion of the major themes of this research. In the second Endnote I
offer some imagined texts that articulate future possibilities for the Refuge. These
imaginings develop out of the material discussed in the thesis.
CHAPTER TWO

THE CONSTRUCTION SITE: THEORISING THE RESEARCH

As researchers, we also tell another kind of story; that is, we try to tell or represent the story of the research project... We try to gain experience of our experience through constructing narratives of that experience. It is here that we deal with questions of who we are in the field and who we are in the texts we write on our experience of the field experience. (Ryan, 2001, p 8)

Introduction

'Qualitative research' is a strategy for embarking on a process of knowledge production that can be pursued using a variety of theoretical orientations. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p 2) describe a wide range of foundations for qualitative research including traditions associated with foundationalism, positivism, post-foundationalism, post positivism, and poststructuralism. They argue that qualitative research has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own, with qualitative researchers working from a variety of paradigms, for example constructivist, cultural studies, feminist, Marxist and ethnic models of study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p 6). It is not my intention in this thesis to provide an overview of the history of qualitative research, nor to discuss the various traditions associated with it. Rather, in this chapter I discuss the theoretical foundations and framing that inform the thesis. These include feminisms, social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, discourse analysis and narrativity. This chapter attends to the ethical, ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research, and is a prelude to the next chapter which focuses in detail on the research process.

In Chapter One I introduced the ideas of the various feminisms that shape my world: my life, my work, and my research. As I wrote Chapter Two, I struggled to 'fit' feminism into the academic framework of epistemology, methodology and method. The more I struggled to force feminism into these 'boxes' the more it escaped messily
into other boxes. Feminism is central to my motivation to do this research, the way I defined the field of study and the way I carried out the research. For this reason, I begin this chapter with a discussion of ideas of feminist research ethics that form the foundation of my work. I begin with ethics because a primary concern in undertaking this research was that I would act in an ethical way. I then move on to lay out the other theoretical perspectives of social construction, symbolic interactionism, discourse analysis and narrativity that have shaped this research project.

At this point I wish to briefly signal my core ontological positionings. At the beginning of this research I was not actively aware of my ontological assumptions, although I did have a set of understandings of the nature of the world. I was clear that there is no absolute truth out there waiting to be discovered. I knew that I was interested in the participants’ perspectives, and I recognised that they were the ‘experts’ on their own lives and the process of teaching and learning in the Women’s Refuge. It is these assumptions that give coherence to the range of epistemologies and methodologies I discuss in this chapter. Feminism, symbolic interactionism, discourse analysis and narrativity are all compatible with my ontological foundations.

I have argued in the previous chapter that we make sense of our lives through narrative. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) claim that metaphor is one tool that assists in this sense making. In this chapter I use metaphor as a strategy for describing the epistemological and methodological ideas that have informed my research. This does not presuppose that there are concrete realities out there, but that metaphor is a tool that allows us to think of possibilities that we might otherwise miss. Metaphors can be multiple, can be interpreted in multiple ways and can be resisted, rejected or incorporated into our ways of thinking to open up possibilities for new understandings.

All research is shaped by theoretical orientations, and in this chapter I utilise the metaphor of constructing the house to describe the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. In the same way that foundations of a building anchor the building to the
ground and determine its shape, my epistemology\textsuperscript{18} provides a foundation for this research. I then move on to use the idea of framing to describe the methodological constructions that shape this thesis.

I could have chosen other metaphors, for example lenses, or my favourite, Richardson’s idea of crystals. Richardson (1994) uses the idea of the crystal as a way of challenging traditional notions of validity in research. She describes crystals as

\begin{quote}
...prisms that reflect externalities \textit{and} refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose. (Richardson, 1994, p 92)
\end{quote}

The crystal metaphor is attractive because it encourages me to think of ways to “reflect back to the reader the problem in inquiry at the same time as the inquiry is conducted” (Richardson, 1994, p 286). However, I have chosen to develop the metaphor of house construction because it has particular resonance for me. As I sat at my computer constructing this chapter, I looked out my window at the ever-changing scene of construction unfolding as two additional bedrooms and a kitchen/dining room were added to my house. In many ways this parallels the process of construction of this thesis. I worked with the builder to design the alterations (working out what I wanted to do in the research), submitted my plans to the City Council for building consents (getting access to the Refuge and Human Ethics Committee consents), and watched as the builder completed the foundations, framing, roofing and the interior ‘finishing’.

\textbf{The foundations}

\textbf{Feminist research ethics}

A considerable amount of feminist thinking today works across borders in ways that unsettle familiar philosophical and political frameworks. It cuts across the borders of traditional disciplinary configurations, borrowing, incorporating, and transforming the

\textsuperscript{18} An epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know (Crotty. 1998, p 3).
methodological approaches as well as the concrete concerns of the disciplines. (Narayan & Harding, 2000, p vii)

Even before the foundations of a building can be laid, boxing is put in place to shape the configuration of the foundations. Although in house construction boxing is removed once the foundations are completed, the ‘boxing’ of feminist research ethics remains with my foundations. All research strives to meet the ethical demand for informed and voluntary consent, respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality, and limitation of deception and minimisation of risk.\(^{19}\) However within feminist research there are additional imperatives. Christians (2000, p 142) argues that in feminist research, ethics “rests on a complex view of moral judgement”. It is with my view of feminist moral judgements that I begin this chapter and then I move on to discuss epistemological and methodological foundations that underpin my research.

Research is a political undertaking. As researchers, we make political decisions at every stage of the process: when deciding what we want to research, the focus of the research; who the participants will be; and the strategies that we employ to find out. As my colleagues and I wrote in a paper about reciprocity in research relationships\(^{20}\):

> We make decisions about whether we, the researcher, or the people the research is about or with will be the final authority on what is said. We make decisions about whether we will appeal to a higher authority in our research and who the higher authority will be. Sometimes we are not self-conscious about these decisions and do not realise that sometimes the decisions have already been made by the adoption of particular research protocols. (Harrison et al., 2001, p 324)

\(^{19}\) These are set out in the University of Canterbury: Human Ethics Guidelines. See Appendix 3 for my completed Human Ethics application.

\(^{20}\) My colleagues Missy Morton and Jane Harrison and I co-presented a symposium at the AQR Conference in Melbourne in July 1999. The paper we produced “Regimes of trustworthiness in qualitative research: The rigours of reciprocity” based on the material in the symposium was subsequently published in Qualitative Inquiry Vol 7, No 3, 2001. At the time I was still doing fieldwork for this thesis, and writing the article enabled me to work through at a theoretical level issues around reciprocity that were shaping my practice. The process of collaboratively writing this article provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my research process and focus on ethical concerns around my daily interaction with the women at the Refuge. In hindsight, the process of putting together the symposium and writing the article helped me clarify my ideas not only about reciprocity, but also about what makes research ethical. For this reason I draw heavily on this article in the following discussion of feminist ethics.
The recognition of the relationship between values and research is foundational to ethical feminist research, because it shapes the decisions we make as researchers. My use of 'foundations' as a strategy to describe my ontological, epistemological and methodological understanding does not imply that these understandings are rigidly fixed. Foundations need to be strong enough to sustain the building, but not so strong that they cannot flex in an earthquake. One of the challenges of feminism is to build a construction that is flexible enough to account for diversity and differing constructions of 'reality'.

Lather (1991) claims that feminist research has from its beginnings been preoccupied with the politics of knowing and being known. "Openly ideological, most feminist research assumes that ways of knowing are inherently culture bound and that researcher values permeate inquiry" (Lather, 1991, p 91). To do feminist research is to "use a lens that brings into focus particular questions" that put social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry (Lather, 1991, p 294). I think that it is a requirement of ethical research to be clear about the way that my own experiences, values, and use of a feminist lens have influenced my research interests, the way I chose to do this research and the way I chose to present these research findings (Harrison et al., 2001, p 324).

There is continuing debate amongst feminist researchers as to whether a specific feminist research method exists. However, at the epistemological and methodological levels researchers agree that there are characteristics that distinguish feminist research. These characteristics include addressing issues of power, emotion, notions of objectivity/subjectivity, researcher reflexivity, and power and authority in re/presentation (Stanley, 1992). Throughout this chapter I will come back to my understandings of the way that these characteristics of feminist research ethics have shaped my understandings and research practices.

Reciprocity

A central concern which is critical to feminist research (and to some other forms of qualitative research) is the notion of reciprocity. I use the term reciprocity to mean
the give and take of social interactions (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 323). From its inception, this research has been framed by notions of reciprocity. As I wrote in my research proposal, I wanted my involvement in the research process to directly benefit not only myself (gaining a Ph.D.), but the individuals and the organisation involved. Throughout this research project I struggled with questions of who might owe what to whom; who might hold whom accountable. I wanted to be clear to myself and with the participants about my obligations, what I hoped to give and what I was taking. I would gain personal benefit in the form of academic qualifications, but what would the participants get from the research?

My commitment to the Refuge and the women working in it went beyond the research process itself. On an individual level I wanted the women I interviewed to feel that it had been a worthwhile exercise for them personally, by providing the opportunity to reflect on their journeys through the Refuge. At an organisational level I wanted my time at the Refuge to be of benefit to the organisation; I have many skills outside the research arena that could be useful to the Refuge, for example mediation, facilitation, planning and networking. However, as I discuss in the section on participant observations later in this chapter, attempts at reciprocity may have unintended consequences for those involved and for the research process itself. I need to be reflexive about the way that my notions of reciprocity framed my research and shaped the day-to-day decisions that I made in the field. When did I offer too much, or too little? Was I silent when I should have spoken, and did I speak when I should have been silent? What possibilities did reciprocity open up for me in the research, and what did it close down? How did my particular involvement in the organisation shape my construction of the data?

**Emotionality**

By the end of my time ‘in the field’ at the Refuge I had developed friendships with many of the participants. I was also involved in another collaborative research project with one of the participants. In 1998 we were funded to complete an oral history and publication of the history of the Refuge in Christchurch. We carried out interviews during 1998 – 2000, and publication is pending.
relationship is also critical to feminist research (Cotterill, 1992; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, McCormack, & Steinmetz, 1991; St Pierre, 1997). When St Pierre (1997) questions what constitutes data, she identifies 'transgressive data' which includes emotional data. As we wrote in our collaborative paper:

What differences might it make that we are drawn to or repulsed by our participants, by their lifestyles? How are our senses of obligation affected when we feel our participants’ anger, their affection? (Harrison et al., 2001)

I felt a commitment to the women in the Refuge, as I watched them struggle on a daily basis to carry out their work in an environment of scarcity. I admired their dedication as they engaged in long hours of emotionally draining unpaid work. I recognised the value of their work, not just to the women who used the Refuge, but also in changing attitudes towards domestic violence in the community. I empathised with the challenges they encountered as they struggled to put together and deliver a training course to new volunteers whom they desperately needed to assist their dwindling and burnt-out pool of volunteers.

I am aware of the tensions and dangers in openly stating whose side I am on. How as a researcher could I meet the challenge of recognising this emotional involvement and re/present this research? In my efforts to honour the participants in this study I have had to deal with hard stuff; how to avoid romanticising and sentimentalising some participants, and demonising others. There are multiple readings possible for every one of our research interactions, some of which are much less flattering and less comfortable that others (Harrison et al., 2001, p 325).

**Issues of power**

Feminist attempts to make research emancipatory, non-hierarchical and mutually beneficial may be in danger of substituting one ‘regime of truth’ with another. Unless we are critical and self-reflexive we are in danger of imposing our desires and world views on others. I agree with Kirsch’s (1999, p 36) assertion that we need to ask some critical questions.
How can we ever know (and predict) whether the results of a research study will benefit women? Who chooses emancipatory goals and why? Whose desire is it to empower? What does the desire to empower others say about researchers?

Feminist research strategies and practices such as giving transcripts back to participants, inviting them to comment on researcher analysis and draft reports, are all aimed at equalising the power relationships between researcher and researched. At the same time, these expectations of participant involvement place heavy demands on the participants. It is important to recognise also, that researcher and researched do not necessarily share the same level of interest or commitment to the research project (Kirsch, 1999, p 36). In this study I was always aware that the participants were part of this research because they had joined the Refuge to work with women and children victims of domestic violence, not as co-researchers in this thesis. Initially I had hoped to include the participants in the analysis stage to a greater extent than I did. However, as I sat with them in group supervision I was made acutely aware of the stresses they were all under as they tried to run the 24 hour crisis line with inadequate numbers of volunteers. I was unwilling to place greater demands on them.

I think that it is at the analysis stage of research that researchers have most power. I concur with Limerick et al (1996, p 457) “In the final analysis, the written and conceptual product is controlled by the researcher”. I was aware that in this research project, the analytic tools I brought were different to those employed by most of the participants. Whereas they were positioned largely within discourses of radical feminism, my analysis is primarily informed by the ideas of social constructivism, symbolic interactionism and feminist poststructuralist ideas of discourse and narrativity. I agree with Opie’s (1992, p 63) statement:

Because a postmodernist analysis highlights competing voices and raises critical appreciation of the presence of ideologies within a text, accepting an interpretation which implies a single or unified representation of an event is problematic, especially since this implies that all participants are similarly located. A further implication, that participants and researchers occupy an identical relationship to the data is also problematic since participants may occupy a less analytic and more descriptive position, while researchers may be more aware of alternative interpretations.
Although I aspired to involve participants in the analysis of this thesis, this was difficult to achieve. As Opie identified in the quotation above, as researcher I did not occupy the same relationship to the data as the participants. During the feedback sessions I had with participants, they were more interested in descriptive analysis that could possibly inform their practices, than in theoretical analyses that interested me as researcher.

Re/presentation

The re/presentation of participants in feminist qualitative research is recognised as one of the principal areas of power imbalance in the research relationship. As Ferguson et al (1992, p 299) write:

As soon as we, as researchers, become involved in telling our stories of their stories, we present our interpretations of their interpretations. Not only are there multiple perspectives, then, but there are multiple layers of perspective as soon as one enters the reflective process of research. (emphasis in original)

Having recognised the possibilities of layered accounts, as researchers we situate ourselves and our research participants within our accounts. Fine (1992) discusses feminists’ choices with respect to how they situate themselves within the texts they produce. She describes the three possibilities, ventriloquy, voices and activism:

Ventriloquy relies upon Haraway’s God trick. The author tells Truth, and has no gender, race, class or stance. A condition of truth telling is anonymity, and so ventriloquy (p 212). Voices can be used to accomplish a subtler form of ventriloquism. Within such texts while researchers appear to let the Other speak, just under the covers of those marginal - if now ‘liberated’ voices - we hide, unproblematic (p 215). A third choice constitutes activist, feminist research, committed to positioning researchers as self-conscious critical and participatory analysts, engaged but still distinct from our informants. Such research commits us to the study of change, the move towards change, and/or is provocative of change. (Fine, 1992, pp 212 - 220)

My feminist positionings require that in the re/presentation of this research I work from the ‘activist’ perspective, by positioning myself as a ‘self conscious critical and
participatory analyst'. But I face a dilemma; how do I write myself into the research in a way that does not fall into what Lather (in McWilliams, Lather, & Morgan, 1997) terms "vanity ethnography"? While acknowledging that as researcher I am central to the construction of the narrative of this thesis, I want to keep the focus on my constructions of the experience and perspectives of the participants. I begin this thesis with a personal narrative, and write myself into the first five chapters where I focus on theory and research processes. In the substantive chapters, six to nine, I focus primarily on the prospective volunteer advocates and the women working within the Refuge, where as researcher, I strive to be "engaged but distinct from the participants" (Fine, 1992, p 17). I am also aware that feminist research, and indeed the various feminisms I use in this thesis, are themselves social constructions, and as such are open to scrutiny and challenge. I adopt feminist research principles, but know that I must be wary of substituting one regime of truth with another.

Social constructionism

Being constructionist has crucial things to say to us about the many dimensions of the research. It speaks to us about the way in which we do research. (Crotty, 1998, p 65)

Like many other qualitative researchers I use social constructionism as an epistemology to form the foundations of my research project (Crotty, 1998, p 9). According to social constructionists, meaning and knowledge about the world are not 'there' to be discovered, but socially constructed through knowledge producing practices (Crotty, 1998, p 9). There is no simple definition of social constructionism, but theorists agree that it includes any approach that has at its foundation one or more of the following assumptions: a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, the impossibility of separating knowledge and social action, historical and cultural specificity, and the construction of subjectivities (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1987; Hruby, 2001). I now discuss how the key assumptions of social constructionism intersect with the feminist political analysis that underpins this research.
A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge

Proponents of social constructionism insist that we take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves. They invite us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, and challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world (Burr, 1995, p 3). From a social constructionist perspective there is "no objective truth waiting for us to discover. Truth, or meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (Crotty, 1998, p 8).

This is not to argue that objects in the world are irrelevant. To construct meaning we have to have something to work with, and that is the world and objects in the world. Crotty argues that social constructionism brings objectivity and subjectivity indissolubly together (Crotty, 1998, p 44). Objects and people exist, but have no meaning until we constitute them through language. It is through language that the conceptual frameworks and categories that we use to make sense of our world and ourselves are constituted (Burr, 1995, p 6). Gergen (1987, p 2) noted that "...languages operate as the lenses or filters through which we determine what counts as objects". Social constructionism views not only objects, but also subjects as socially constructed through language. For this reason, I see language not simply as a means of communicating shared meanings of objects in our worlds, but as constitutive; it is through language that both subjects and objects have meaning. Therefore, paying attention to the way that language is used by the existing members and the potential volunteer advocates at the Refuge is a major focus of this thesis. In Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine, I will explore how the Refuge encouraged new advocates to take on the dominant discourses of the Refuge, and demonstrate this in the way they spoke about their practice.

Because all meaning is constructed, social constructionism cautions us to be very suspicious of our assumptions of how the world appears to be (Burr, 1995, p 3). The meanings that we use to make sense of our worlds have come out of particular social contexts and exist to serve what Crotty (1998, p 59) describes as hegemonic interests. All knowledge is derived from looking at the world from some perspective or other.
and is in the service of some interests rather than other interests (Burr, 1995, p 6). Although not all social constructionist research acknowledges the way that dominant discourses are constructed to support particular interests, this is a key feminist understanding that I bring to my project.

If we accept that our knowledge of the world is not based on some ‘reality out there’ (Burr, 1995, p 227), social constructionism leads us to conclude that there is no such thing as true or objective interpretations. Interpretations may be ‘useful’, ‘liberating’, ‘rewarding’, but not ‘valid’ (Crotty, 1998, p 48). This idea offers feminists the opportunity to challenge taken-for-granted knowledge. While acknowledging that feminism is also a construction, and not a ‘truth’, it encourages what I see as ‘useful’, ‘liberating’ and ‘rewarding’ analyses. Various feminist theorists (Haraway, 1989; Harding, 1987; Hekman, 1999) have explored the epistemological usefulness of social constructionism to feminism. By challenging taken-for-granted knowledge, feminists have developed alternative constructions or narratives, that make no claims to ‘truth’ but construct other narratives that are more liberating for women (Haraway, 1989; Harding, 1987; Hekman, 1999). In this thesis I tell many narratives about the women working and learning within the Refuge environment. What I attempt to do is to provide a range of narratives and analyses that are multi-dimensional and layered. These are my interpretations and constructions. They are not presented as objective ‘truth’.

**Historical and cultural specificity**

The ways that we understand the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific. Not only are ways of knowing specific to particular cultures and periods of history, they are seen as products of that culture and history, and are dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in the culture at that time (Burr, 1995, p 4). To give an example specific to this study, one need look no further than the construction of domestic violence within the Refuge.

When I worked in the Refuge in the late 1970s and early 1980s, domestic violence was constructed as a consequence of men’s essential capacity for violence. Whereas
women were characterised as being 'naturally' nurturing and caring, men were
characterised as inherently violent. This male violence was most often directed
against women. These discourses led to practices within the Refuge that suggested
that the only choice for women to escape from male abuse was to avoid relationships
with males. Over time, the discourse of men as essentially violent has changed within
the Refuge. In the late 1990s several of the women who worked for the Refuge also
worked for Stopping Violence Services, running courses for men with a history of
violence against women. Rather than constructing this violence as essentialist, the
women believed that the violent attitudes and behaviour of these men were learned
and therefore could be unlearned. At a theoretical level this marks a shift from a
1960/70s essentialist perspective where men and women's 'natures' were determined
by biology, to a 1990s social constructionist perspective where both masculinity and
femininity are recognised as social constructions.

**Subjectivities**

I find many of the ideas of social constructionism useful because they provide the
flexibility to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about women's lives and their
location in certain social relationships. But, like other theories, social constructionism
must not be adopted uncritically. If we accept that we are entirely constituted by
social forces, what agency does this leave us with as individuals and groups of
women? Hekman (1999, p 431) asks if "taken to its logical extreme, social
constructionism leads to what some critics have called the problem of the 'social
dupe\', an understanding of people that robs them of any capacity to act differently to
effect change. This interpretations of social constructionism is I believe overly
deterministic, portraying the 'social dupe' as a passive victim without agency.

I take a more optimistic view of agency because I believe that as individuals and
groups we do have some agency to act. Burr (1995, p 90) argues that, although the
subject is constituted by discourse, "this subject is yet capable of critical historical
reflection and is able to exercise some choice with respect to the discourses and
practices that it takes up for its own use". I understand Burr to be saying that while
we are always constituted in discourse, we do have some freedom to take up or resist
certain discursive positionings. Frye (cited in, Hekman, 1999, p 439) concludes that
“our conceiving cannot be independent of culture, though it can be critical, resistant, or rebellious”. As Lather (1991, p 118) explains:

While we are not the authors of the ways we understand our lives, while we are subjected to regimes of meaning, we are involved in discursive self production where we attempt to produce some coherence and continuity.

It is through the process of discursive self-production that we find the possibilities for alternative ways of constructing ourselves. Therefore, although we are constituted in discourses, we do have some agency to take up or resist the subject positions that are made available to us. Different discourses provide a range of possible subject positions which does offer some possibility for agency. Later in this thesis, for example (p,177), I discuss the way that new volunteer advocates presented themselves as strategic learners to the Refuge, but during interviews discussed their resistance to being positioned in the Refuge discourse of empowerment.

Social constructionism not only allows for individual agency in the discursive production of selves, but also as Hekman (1999) asserts, ‘social constructionism’ is itself a construction, and therefore open to challenge from other epistemologies and theoretical perspectives. I come back to issues of subjectivity and agency later in this chapter and discuss the ways that various methodologies I draw on can be used to address these tricky issues of subjectivity and agency.

**Framing the research: methodologies**

It is tempting if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail. (Maslow, 1966, pp 15 - 16)

Continuing with the metaphor of the house building, I now move from the foundations to the framing of the project. Just as framing in a building rests upon the foundation, the theoretical framing of this thesis rests on the epistemological foundations of feminisms and social constructionism. In a building, framing can consist of multiple materials, for example, timber framing, rolled steel joists or tilt
slab concrete. The use of particular materials for framing is pragmatic; the materials that are best suited to the purpose are used. But not just any old materials can be used; they must be compatible with the foundations. They also need to complement each other, and suit the climatic and geographical positioning of the house. Above all the framing and foundations must complement the form and function of the building.

Narayan and Harding (2000, p vii) claim that much feminist thinking is based on borrowing, incorporating and transforming methodological approaches. My methodological framing for this thesis does exactly that. I borrow and incorporate ideas from symbolic interactionism (meanings generated as a result of social interactions), constructivist hermeneutics (interpreting the multiple worlds constructed by people), discourse analysis (identifying discursive constructions that underpin the relationship between people and their social worlds), and narrativity (the understanding that narratives are not merely descriptive, but constitute social worlds). This range of methodologies provide the framing for my research project. As in building a house, I use forms of knowledge production that are compatible with my feminist and social constructionist epistemological foundations. I do not attempt to provide a full description of the history or development of these methodologies; rather I describe how I use them in this research. I argue that such an eclectic approach makes sense for my work, because I do not ascribe to the view that research can be forced to ‘fit’ within one particular theory or methodology.

**Symbolic interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that informs a range of methodologies, including some forms of ethnography (Crotty 1998, p 3). Symbolic interactionism has a long history, with contributions to its development as a research methodology by Mead (1909), Dewey (1938), Blumer (1969), the Chicago and Iowa Schools of sociology, Becker (1964), and Denzin (1988). Blumer coined the term ‘symbolic interactionism’ in 1937, and clearly delineated it in his landmark book *Symbolic Interactionism* (1969). In this writing, Blumer (1969, p 3) identified three central tenets of symbolic interactionism. Firstly that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning that these things have for them. Secondly, that the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of the social interaction that
one has with other people. Thirdly, that people derive meaning through an interactive process with the people and things they encounter.

In other words, the central assumption of symbolic interactionism is that human experience is mediated by interpretation. “Objects, people, situations and events do not possess their own meaning; rather meaning is conferred on them” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p 36). It is through interaction that people construct meaning. Symbolic interactionism recognises that the ‘self’ is not some essential quality that resides within individuals, but that the ‘self’ is a social construction negotiated through interaction with others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p 37). Symbolic interactionism deals directly with issues such as language, communication, interrelationships and community, identity and subjectivity – all of these are core components of this research project.

Central to symbolic interactionism as a methodology is the notion of “being able to put ourselves in the place of others” (Crotty, 1998, p 8). In this way, symbolic interactionism recognises the researcher as the ‘instrument’ of the research. Symbolic interactionism demands that researchers strive to understand the social worlds of the research participants by observing, interviewing and participating in meanings and interpretations that participants have in the research setting (Prus, 1995, pp 51 - 52). Symbolic interactionists often talk about the practice of ‘bracketing’ as useful in enabling them to enter the field as ‘naïve enquirers’. Bracketing involves researchers leaving their prior knowledge, pre-conceptions and biases ‘at the door’ when they enter the research site. I do not think that it is possible or even desirable to attempt to bracket our previous knowledge.

I agree that we need to be open to what we are observing in the research context, but also think that we need to acknowledge that neither participants nor researchers are blank slates prior to engagement in the research process. Feminist standpoint theorists, poststructuralists, and researchers who engage in constructivist hermeneutics all challenge the notion that as researchers we can ‘bracket’ out our prior understanding, theories and biases. Bogdan and Biklen (1992, pp 46-47) talk about the limiting of, rather than elimination of, biases in the research process. They argue that qualitative researchers try to acknowledge and take account of their own
biases rather than eliminating them. Thus I entered the research field not only with a
certain world-view, but also with specific understandings of feminism and learning
from experience.

I find that my theoretical research perspectives are closely aligned with the feminist
poststructuralist and constructivist hermeneutics notion that acknowledges the
embedded nature of the researcher’s frame as the beginning point in the research
process. This recognises that every research act is an act of interpretation, from the
questions we pose at the start of the research project, to the interviews and
observations, the data analysis and the re-presentation of the research. I agree with
Horn (1998, p 608) when he argues that in the research process “every observation is
made by an observer whose purest descriptions are purely interpretive. In other
words, the observer can never bracket her status as an observer”.

I bring to this project assumptions about working in a feminist organisation, about
learning and teaching for adults, theoretical understanding of feminisms, and a history
of working within the organisation in the past. These all shape the way I frame the
project, and what I ‘see’ when I am observing or interviewing. As Alvesson and
Skoldberg (2000, p 186) note, “…the boundaries between empirical material and
theory are very loose, so that the two ‘levels’ cannot be cleanly separated; empirical
material is theory-impregnated and theory is not empty of observations and
impression”.

This process of critically reflecting on the self as researcher is termed reflexivity.
Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000, p 183) argue that reflexivity forces us to come to
terms not only with our choice of research problems and those with whom we engage
in the research process, but also with the multiple subjectivities we bring and those we
create in the field. Reinharz (1997, pp 3-5) suggests that although there are many
selves we bring to the research field, these fall into three categories: research-based
selves, brought selves, and situationally created selves. I discuss these more fully
later in this chapter under the heading ‘participant observations’. Reflexivity
demands that we interrogate each of our selves regarding the ways in which research
projects are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions and paradoxes that
form our lives. We need to examine how these shape not only our interactions in the field, but also our analyses and representations of our research.

Symbolic interactionism pre-dates poststructuralism by many years, and provides some valuable theoretical tools for a qualitative research project such as this one at the women’s Refuge. However, I do not adopt the ideas of symbolic interactionism uncritically. Symbolic interactionism emphasises the way that meaning is constructed through negotiation with others in the social context, and that the social group provides the individual's context (Horn, 1998, p 59). In my framing of this project I also draw on poststructuralist ideas that we are not free just to construct reality and meaning through interaction with others, but that we are all already positioned and positioning ourselves within a range of discourses.

Poststructuralism

There seems to be a degree of flexibility in the use of the terms ‘postmodern’ and ‘poststructural’. Some writers use the term ‘postmodern’ to mean the larger cultural shifts of a post-industrial, post-colonial era, and ‘poststructural’ to mean the working out of those shifts within the areas of academic theory (Lather, 1991, p 4). However, as McWilliams et al (1997, p 8) argue “terms and theories are slippery, sliding they can't be fixed in time or in definition”. Many writers use a variety of terms, ‘postmodern feminisms’, ‘poststructuralist feminism’, ‘feminist poststructuralism’ and ‘feminist postmodernism’ to identify similar frameworks of thought.

It took me some time to grasp that postmodernism or poststructuralism as a range of theories do not seek to replace modernism or structuralism. As Lather (1991, p 5) reminds us, postmodernism and poststructuralism are not ‘successor regime[s]’. They do not replace one set of assumptions with another set of propositions. Instead they provide the theoretical tools to question the basis of our knowledge, our ‘taken-for-granteds’. Access to poststructuralist theorising has made me aware of the ways in which social reality is constructed through language, and more specifically discourses. It is through language that we construct the conceptual categories we use including categories of self. Burr (1995, p 44) explains:
There is nothing about the nature of the world or human beings that leads necessarily to the conceptual categories present in any language. But in its insistence upon the shifting, transitory and contestable nature of the meaning of language and therefore our experience and identity, poststructuralism has identified language as a site of struggle, conflict and potential and personal social change.

In this thesis I draw on these notions of the shifting changing unstable nature of our worlds, as they are constituted through language. For this reason I use ‘poststructuralism’ rather than ‘postmodernism’. I take up Ryan’s (2001, p 8) idea of a feminist poststructuralism as one that refers to “opposing and subverting power relations, by revealing the vested interests and social construction process that lie behind them.” I agree with Ryan when she claims that generating new theoretical perspectives from which the dominant discourses can be criticised and new possibilities envisaged is especially important.

It is not my intention to review the various perspectives and interpretations of poststructuralism, but to describe the way that paying attention to the ways that discourses operate has been used to frame this thesis. My adoption of poststructuralist ideas of discourse and the constitutive nature of language, does not supplant epistemological understandings that I bring from social constructionism or symbolic interactionism, but adds another dimension to the framing of this thesis. It provides me with the opportunity to pay attention to the language and discourses used by the Refuge and the volunteer advocates as they progressed through the training. How did the Refuge use language to construct particular versions of what it means to be a Refuge advocate? How did the Refuge shape the discursive possibilities of doing the work of the Refuge? It is questions such as these that form the basis of Chapters Six to Nine in this thesis.

**Discourse**

Discourses, in Foucault’s work, are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them... Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourse constitutes the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider
network of power relations, often with institutional bases. (Weedon, 1987, p 108)

The social constructionist and symbolic interactionist ideas that I have discussed above acknowledge that there are multiple meanings constructed through language. As I have previously described, these understandings of language as social constructions are also central to poststructuralist thinking. We constitute social reality and are constituted through language; how we think about our world, and ourselves in that world depends on the particular conceptual frames available to us through language. Meanings of words are multiple. Meanings do not exist prior to their articulation in language and language is always socially and historically located in discourse (Weedon, 1997, p 40). Within a poststructuralist framework, nothing exists outside socially constructed discourse; all ways of constituting knowledge, social practices, subjectivity and power relations are constructed discursively. Discourses are sets of meanings but they are also practices, ways of producing knowledge, and ways of shaping the world according to that knowledge (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p 237). Discourses do not simply describe our world, they are central in the constructions of our worlds. In other words, the way that language is structured through discourse, shapes the possible understandings of ourselves and our worlds. Language is never neutral, it is always discursively framed. As Foucault (1972, p 57) puts it “Discourses are practices which form the objects of which they speak”

If we accept that a multitude of alternative meanings is potentially available through language, this means that there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different way of representing itself to the world (Burr, 1995, p 48). Not all discourses are of equal power, some are more dominant than others at particular times and places; they are always historically and locally specific (Richardson, 1994). In the following chapters I identify discourses operating in the Refuge context. I will explore the way that new volunteer advocates were encouraged to discard discursive understandings of volunteers as ‘helpers’ and take up the more powerful Refuge discourse of volunteers as ‘empowerers’.

Different discourses provide for a range of modes of subjectivity, and the ways in which particular discourses constitute subjectivity have implications for the process of
reproducing or contesting power relations. Weedon (1997, p 88) argues that in order to understand these implications it is necessary to ask what assumptions a particular discourse makes about language and consciousness. For example, a range of discourses relating to domestic violence were identified by advocates attending the Refuge training. They identified a range of discursive positions including ‘husband’s rights’, ‘men as essentially violent’, ‘women as essentially non-violent’, ‘women as victims’, ‘women as survivors’, ‘patriarchy’, ‘wife battering’ and ‘violence in any form is unacceptable’. Each of these discourses provides possible subject positions, and is associated with particular discursive practices. The discourse that men are essentially violent, for example, offers few subject positions to women other than ‘victim’ if women wish to be in relationships with men. Within this discourse, separatism is seen as offering the most positive option for women; women ideally live alone or in relationships with other women, who are by nature, not violent. In this way, this particular discourse can be seen to both limit and provide options for how we think about ourselves, and our possible actions or discursive practices to challenge domestic violence. If men are constructed as ‘essentially violent’ then change at a personal level becomes impossible. Different discourses constitute subjectivity and make certain practices more or less likely. Discourses therefore have implications for reproducing or challenging power relations (Weedon, 1999, p 91).

Subjectivity

The self[is] as verb, always in process, taking its shape in and through the discursive possibilities through which selves are made. (Davies, 1997, p 69)

Poststructuralist theories have led to a questioning of the concept of a coherent subject moving through history with a single identity. Instead they suggest the constant creation and negotiation of selves emerging from competing and contradictory discourses within structures of material constraint (Weiler, 1999, p 46). Davies focuses on the self as a verb rather than a noun. It is shifting, changing and always in process, depending on the particular discourses available to the person and utilised in different contexts.
Davies (2000, p 138) uses the palimpsest metaphor to explore poststructuralist understandings of the subject. This metaphor is derived from the image of writing on parchment, writing which was only partially erased to make way for new writing, each previous writing therefore bumping into and shaping the reading of the next layer of writing. This metaphor is often used to explain the ways in which the subject is written and overwritten through taking up positions in multiple and contradictory discourses. Davies warns the reader not to think that the parchment once started out as a blank - it was always inscribed. I develop this idea later in this thesis when I discuss the way that the Refuge training encouraged the new volunteer advocates to take up subject positions within certain discourses. The advocates beginning the training were not ‘blank parchment’, and already occupied a range of discursive positionings, some of which were contradictory to the Refuge discourses.

In addition to being multiple, the construction of subjectivities is, in the poststructuralist view, unstable. As Weedon (1997, p 85) argues, an individual’s subjectivity is constituted in language for her every time she speaks. In other words, the way we think about ourselves, and therefore the possibilities of action that are available to us, are already constituted by the discourses available to us, for example, victim, survivor, nurturer. These discourses pre-exist individuals, but they are also fluid and shifting not only between contexts, but also within particular contexts. This is particularly relevant for my study, because as poststructuralists suggest, ‘experience’ is an unstable construction open to various interpretations from different subject positions. This poststructuralist understanding of ‘experience’ contests the ideas of experience as something to be mined in a ‘learning from experience’ pedagogy. I develop a critique of modernist notions of experience in Chapter Five (p 116).

As I describe in Chapter Five ‘learning from experience’ is a powerful discourse that has developed particularly in the adult education sector as a form of resistance to book learning and formal teaching. While it ‘frees’ subjects from the constraints of the formal teaching model it still locates them in a set of possible practices that arise out of the meanings and social positions that become ‘real’ through that discourse. In Chapters Six to Nine I examine the agency and constraint of learning from experience in the Refuge context.
I embrace Lather’s notion of agency as ‘wiggle-room’; the space that we can find for reproducing or contesting particular subject positions offered by various discourses (McWilliams et al., 1997). This ‘wiggle-room’ is only possible if we are exposed to alternative discourses and if we are made aware of ourselves as products of discourse. Not all forms of subjectivity are open to all people. As Weedon (1997, p 91) explains, individual access to subjectivity is governed by historically specific social factors and the forms of power at work in a particular society.

Social relations, which are always relations of power and powerlessness between different subject positions, will determine the range of forms of subjectivity immediately available to any individual on the basis of gender, race, class, age and cultural background. Where other positions exist but are exclusive to a particular class, race or gender, the excluded individual will have to fight for access by transforming the existing power relations. (Weedon, 1997, p 91)

The idea of multiple and shifting subjectivities liberates me as a qualitative researcher from the need to determine which of the many and possibly conflicting stories or versions of accounts in the field is the ‘truth’. I believe that there is no absolute ‘truth’, and when participants talk about their lives and their experiences in the Refuge these will be multi-layered accounts told from various discursive positions, for example, ‘helping discourse’, ‘feminist discourse’, ‘personal development discourse’. As Weiler (1999, p 46) writes:

Subjectivity...implies the struggle and contest over identity, the ways in which selves are unstable, shifting, constructed through both dominant conceptions and resistance to those conceptions and suggests the incomplete and sometimes contradictory quality of our lives both in the present and as we construct our past through memory.

In other words, poststructuralist ideas of subjectivity provide me as a researcher with the opportunity to explore myself and my participants as complex, sometimes contradictory selves. These selves, and my attempts to analyse them, are embedded in discourse.
Agency

Through a concept of discourse which is seen as a structuring principle of society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity, feminist poststructuralism is able, in detailed, historically specific analysis, to explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyse the opportunities for resistance to it. (Weedon, 1987, p 41 emphasis in original)

The issue of agency is highly contested by feminist theorists. For example, Alcoff (1988; 1998) argues that ideas of multiple constructed subjectivities may undermine analysis of the agency of individuals. She fears that a focus on our construction through discourse may diminish the power of the individual and groups to act in any coherent way to challenge oppression. Rather than seeing the notion of multiply constructed subjectivities as a threat to feminist action, I believe that because discourses are multiple, contradictory, and provide multiple modes of subjectivity, we can sometimes resist our positioning within certain discourses and take up alternative discursive positions. While we can find some social spaces to reflect on how our subjectivity is shaped by discourse, Weedon reminds us that individuals are both the site for and subjects of discursive struggle for their identity.

The interpellation of individuals as subjects within particular discourses is never final. It is always open to challenge. The individual is constantly subjected to discourse. In thought, speech or writing individuals of necessity commit themselves to specific subject positions and embrace quite contradictory modes of subjectivity at different moments. (Weedon 1997, pp 93 – 94)

While we can appear to have some agency to determine our subjectivity, this is always limited. We are often positioned by others within discourses that are not of our choosing. Discourse analysis provides me as researcher with the tools to examine ways that the Refuge advocates negotiated the discourses of the Refuge, both resisting them and at other times embracing them. It allows me to account for the contradictory ways that they constructed their subjectivities as trainee advocates. Trainee advocates are located in multiple and at times contradictory discourses. This enabled them to reflect critically on aspects of the subjectivities constructed for them through the training process. It also led to them at times to act in ways that were not consistent with the Refuge rules (see Chapter Nine, p 228).
**Analysing discourses**

In this thesis I adopt what **Burr (1995, pp 165 - 167)** describes as discourse analysis: the examination of texts, interview transcripts, fieldnotes of participant observations, and ‘official’ documents from the Refuge, to identify the discursive constructions that underpin the relationships between individuals and social contexts. I use discourse analysis as a strategy to gain insight into the discourses operating in the Refuge context. I am interested in examining the subject positions that the Refuge advocates adopt and modify over time.

In Chapters Six and Seven I examine the ‘taken-for-granted’ of radical feminism that shape the way the Refuge constructs what it means to be a volunteer advocate, and the way that the new advocates took up or resisted those discourses. How are the participants in this research constructed, and how do they construct themselves? What discourses do they take up and which do they resist? What possibilities does the Refuge open up for them? What possibilities does it close down? How does their involvement as Refuge advocates change the ways they think about themselves and their worlds? And how is the Refuge organisation itself shaped by the discourses of the new advocates?

Discourse analysis, through the notion of being constituted and reconstituted within various discursive frames, acknowledges that we are always already positioned within discourse. But by bringing a frame of discourse analysis to this thesis I am able to argue that, although people do construct meaning though negotiation, they do not have unlimited ability to do this. When individuals begin the process of negotiating meaning they are already inscribed by discourse. Individuals may position themselves in various ways, but at the same time they are also positioned within discourses that may not be of their choosing. Symbolic interactionists also inquire into the process whereby people acquire knowledge about social meanings of interaction, and some like **Plummer (1995)** whom I discuss next in this chapter, have a sophisticated understanding of how social meanings are produced and predate social actions. What is particular to discourse analysis is the recognition of the embeddedness
of language in particular discourses which accounts for the shaping of the way we construct ourselves and our worlds.

**Narrativity**

The theory and systematic study of stories and narratives has traditionally been termed narratology (Currie, 1998; Plummer, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993) and was primarily the domain of literary criticism. Currie argues that, in the mid 1980s, there was a shift in the field of narratology, from literary criticism to the wider social sciences. Studies after that date were more interdisciplinary, preferring the terms narrative theory or narrativity to the traditional term narratology. These new approaches developed by sociologists, political philosophers, psychologists, legal theorists, feminist theorists, social workers, organisational theorists, and anthropologists often linked the question of narrative to particular identity groups (gender, race, and nation) or types of discourse (Currie, 1998, p 6). The use of narratives as a way of understanding human experience was reconceptualised from the use of narratives as representations of stories, to encompass both social epistemology and social ontology (Plummer, 1995; Somers, 1994). In this thesis I use the term narrativity to refer to the social use of narratives; the ways that we shape and are shaped by narratives of our lives and our worlds.

Plummer (1995) is a symbolic interactionist who has written extensively about the social use of narratives. Plummer argues that stories are not simply representations of life. He argues that they are socially produced in social contexts by embodied concrete people experiencing the thoughts and feelings of everyday life. He states that:

> We are it seems, homo narrans: humankind, the narrators and story tellers. Society itself may be seen as a textured but seamless web of stories emerging everywhere through interaction: holding people together, pulling people apart, making societies work. (Plummer 1995, p 5)

Plummer argues that stories are always contextual and relational, and certain stories can only be told in some times and cultures but not others. He poses a number of
questions about the relationship between narratives and social worlds. For example, he asks what functions might stories serve in the lives of people? How might they work to maintain dominant orders, and how might they be used to resist and transform lives and cultures? What are the links between stories and the wider social world? (Plummer, 1995, pp 19 - 25). I take up these questions in this thesis when I ask: what narratives can be told in the Refuge? What narratives are silenced? How do women learn to frame their narratives of their Refuge experiences in particular ways?

In Plummer’s (1995) analysis there is less attention to language, and greater attention to regimes of story telling and forms of stories. Plummer’s ideas about the use of narrative are relevant to this thesis because during their training the women were asked to offer stories about their lives. In interviews I asked them to offer narratives about their lives, their training journeys, and their work as volunteer advocates. Through telling these stories they actively created and recreated themselves. Plummer is critical of ‘poststructural social theory’ and argues that to recognise “the importance of stories in social life is never to suggest that stories are all there is ... there is more, much more, to life than stories” (p 168). He is suspicious of social scientists who suggest that all we have are stories (Plummer, 1995, p 167). He also resists the notion of multiple subjectivities leading to a range of narratives coming out of different discursive positions, and sees this as a challenge to the veracity of the stories told. In this respect, Plummer adopts an ontology that constructs ‘the life’ as something that exists irrespective of the stories through which selves are constructed.

I argue that narrative analysis can be used as a form of discourse analysis that encourages us to consider the materiality of people’s lives within a discursive framework. I disagree with Plummer’s assertion that poststructural analysis only involves attention to text. I consider the writing of Somers provides a possible link between narrativity as conceived by Plummer and by poststructuralists. Somers does not write as a poststructuralist, but her attention to ontological narratives resonates with poststructuralist assertions about how people are constructed discursively. In accounting for the complexity of subjectivities, Somers (1994, p 606) argues
... all of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple or changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making.

The emphasis is on how human agency is limited by pre-existing narratives or narrative genres through which we are constituted, and although Somers suggests that stories can guide and help us make sense of the world, she also notes that we “are limited by our repertoire of stories” (Somers, 1994, p 614). People can only be shaped by the narratives available to them in the time and place they are located. These stories or story repertoires are socially rather than individually defined, but also need to have some connection to our biographies. I began this thesis with stories of my engagement with feminist ideas in the 1970s and 1980s. The storylines and my positioning within them were shaped by discourses of motherhood, women’s oppression, radical feminism, liberal feminism, racism, and biculturalism. Somers does not use the language of ‘discourse’, but is clearly drawing on similar ideas when she talks about individuals locating themselves and being located in social narratives.

Somers (1994) argues that narrativity is not simply epistemological, a way of knowing about the world, but also an ontological condition of social life; a way of being in the world:

...that stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that ‘experience’ is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narrative. (Somers, 1994, p 614)

A poststructuralist analyst might substitute ‘discourse’ for Somers use of ‘narratives’. I agree with Somers notion that ontological narratives are used to define who we are, and that this in turn can be a precondition for knowing what to do. These forms of self-definition in turn produce new narratives and new actions. In my study I am interested in the ways that the various participants at the Refuge constructed their
subjectivities as advocates, and the ways that these changed over time. They often did this through stories and I used research techniques that encouraged them to engage in this self-construction through narrative.

In this thesis I draw on discourse analysis and narrativity as analytical tools. It is through participants’ stories that I access people’s ontological constructions of themselves as new advocates learning how to be Refuge advocates using the discursive resources of the Refuge training programme. I draw on Somers (1994) notion of ontological narratives as a way of accessing the participants’ shifting and multiple constructions of themselves. It was through the telling and retelling of stories during group supervision that the Refuge advocates constructed alternative storylines and illustrated these in the discourses of victim, survivor and empowerment. They needed some of the storylines provided through the Refuge training and supervision to know how to act, and by acting they created new storylines of what it meant to be a Refuge advocate. I take these storylines to be enmeshed in discourse and engage in an analysis of some of the dominant discourses of the Refuge; discourses of radical feminism, volunteerism, and empowerment.

I end this thesis with three imagined stories, which offer different possibilities for the Refuge in the year 2005. I am mindful of Plummer’s (1995) argument that stories are always social, contextual, and relational, and that my imaginary stories can only be told as a result of my experiences researching this thesis. The stories are imaginary but draw on the material discussed in this thesis.

**Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have laid out the theoretical research ‘plans’ I use in constructing this thesis. My framing of symbolic interactionism, discourse analysis and narrativity rest on the epistemological foundations of feminist research ethics and social constructionism. As in house building, the foundations and framing offer both possibilities and constraints to the shape of the finished product.
At the foundation of my thesis are certain understandings about the nature of the world and how we know about it. I do not think there is an ‘absolute truth out there waiting to be discovered’. I recognise that the social world is constructed, and that necessitates taking a critical stance towards my taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world. How I perceive the world, and how this shapes my sense of self, are both possible because of discourse, and constrained by my discursive positionings. All ways of constituting knowledge, social practices, subjectivity, and power relations exist in discourse. Discourses do not simply describe our world, but through language and social practices, constitute it.

I have sought to make visible the foundations and framing of this thesis. Much research, like the construction of a house, does not expose the foundations or framing once the project is completed. Keeping this visible provides a bridge between the general principles of this chapter and the specifics of the next chapter. Having laid out the plans and theoretical bases of my research I move onto the specifics of what I did in the following chapter. I continue to use a building metaphor as I discuss the research tools I used in this project: interviewing and participant observations. I employ a metaphor of the ‘Safe House’ as I describe how I moved from being an ‘outsider’ to being able to enter any room in the Safe House and even ‘fossick in the filing cabinets’.
CHAPTER THREE

GETTING STARTED: OPPORTUNITIES, CHOICES, DECISIONS

[For Qualitative researchers] to state exactly how to accomplish their work would be presumptuous. Plans evolve as they learn about the setting, subjects, and other sources of data through direct examination. A full account of procedures is best described in retrospect, a narrative of what actually happened, written after the study is completed .... Qualitative researchers have a design; to suggest otherwise would be misleading. How they proceed is based on theoretical assumptions ... and on data collecting traditions ..... These provide the parameters, the tools, and the general guide of how to proceed, it is not that qualitative research design is non existent; it is rather that the design is flexible. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, P 58)

Introduction

In this section of the thesis I will describe the beginning of the research process. There are many possible tellings of this story, but here I focus on providing a narrative that will enable a critical assessment of the trustworthiness of my research strategies. My research activity was shaped by the values and assumptions that I have discussed in the previous chapter, and was embedded within feminist notions of caring, reciprocity, and mutuality. The way that I negotiated access, attended training courses, interviewed participants and became involved in the activities of the Refuge was largely pragmatic and serendipitous. Denzin (1994, p 2) suggests that attention to the pragmatic is not unique to this study. He argues that qualitative research methods and techniques are shaped not only by the researcher and the research questions, but also by "what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting" (p 2). I begin this chapter with a discussion of the research "tools" I utilised in the study. I employed strategies of participant observations and interviewing to encourage "increase the subjects' level of comfort, encourage them to talk about what
they normally talk about and to eventually confide in the researcher” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p 79). I then provide a detailed narrative of how I negotiated access to the Refuge and the opportunities, choices and decisions this involved. I end this chapter by introducing the Refuge participants who are central to this research.

**The qualitative researcher’s toolkit**

Often theorists discussing the way researchers ‘do’ research draw on the metaphor of bricoleur. “A bricoleur is a ‘Jack of all trades’ or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person” (Levi-Strauss 1966, cited in Denzin, 1994, p 2). Denzin and Lincoln state that the researcher-as-bricoleur practice is pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive. They argue that the choice of research practice depends on the questions that are asked, and that the questions depend on their context. A bricoleur uses a range of tools to achieve her purpose; “if new tools have to be invented or pieced together, the researchers do this” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p 2).

The metaphor of researcher as bricoleur also has resonance with my metaphor of house construction. As I have watched the extensions to my house progress, I have been impressed with the range of tools the builders have used. I have also observed that their use of tools is pragmatic, at any time they use the particular tool that they deem best suits their particular need. For example, sometimes they used gas assisted nail guns, but at other times when the work was more intricate they used the more traditional hammer and nails. When I asked the builder why he wasn’t using the nail gun on the roof framing he said “It is too heavy to hold up here above my head for too long. It is easier to get the angles with a hammer and nails”.

The two main research practices, or tools, that I employed were participant observations and interviews because I considered that they would be most effective as I attempted to find about the Refuge from the participants’ perspectives. As Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p 79) wrote:

> Researchers go to the subjects and spend time with them in their territory.... The researcher’s goal is to increase the subjects’ level
of comfort, encouraging them to talk about what they normally talk about and to eventually confide in the researcher.

I discuss the strategies of participant observation and interviewing, that I used to encourage the women to confide in me, and some of the ethical concerns that this created for me during my time at the Refuge.

**Participant observations**

‘Participant observation’ refers to the ‘intensive observing, listening and speaking’ that occurs when the researcher spends time in the field. Participant observation covers a continuum from primarily observation with minimal participation, to the researcher being a full participating member of the group that is being researched. In this section, I look at how my ontological and ethical position shaped my involvement as a participant observer at the Refuge.

‘Participant observation’ is as Tedlock (2000, p 465) terms it, an ‘oxymoron’. The term simultaneously implies that the researcher can be both a passionate participant and a detached observer at the same time. Spradley (1980) seems to be writing from this perspective when he gave this advice to researchers entering the field as participant observers:

> You will have to maintain a dual purpose: You will want to seek to participate and to watch yourself and others at the same time. Make yourself explicitly aware of things that others take for granted. It will be important to take mental pictures with a wide-angled lens, looking beyond your immediate focus of activity. You will experience the feeling of being both an insider and outsider simultaneously. (quoted in Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991, p 44)

As I have argued previously in this thesis I do not believe that it is possible to ever observe ‘objectively’ as all our observations are filtered through various lenses of our own past experiences and theoretical understandings. In relation to Spradley’s idea of being both an insider and an outsider simultaneously, I would argue that the participant observer relationship is one of greater complexity. There are various degrees of ‘insiderness’ or ‘outsiderness’, and these are shifting and relational...
qualitative researchers, (for example Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p 85; Ely et al., 1991, p 45) talk about researchers choosing the participant observer’s role and of observing varying levels of participation. I agree that while we do variously position ourselves as researchers, this is a two way process as the participants are also active in positioning as (Bogdan & Biklen 1992, Denzin & Lincoln 2000, Ely et al 1991). In this way fieldwork requires a constant process of negotiation. The details of this process are discussed in the next chapter.

As I struggled with the complexity of shifting and permeable locations of both researchers and participants, I found that Reinhartz (1997) offered a useful framework to explore the complexity of researchers as “the key fieldwork tool”. She argues that

... we both bring the self to the field and create the self in the field. The self we create in the field is a product of the norms of the social setting and the ways in which the ‘research subjects’ interact with the selves the researcher brings to the field. (p 3, emphasis in original)

Reinhartz argues that ‘being a researcher’ is only one aspect of the researcher’s self in the field and although the researcher may consider ‘being a researcher’ one’s most salient self, community members may not agree. When Reinhartz analysed her fieldnotes she identified approximately 20 different selves that she categorized into three major groups: researcher-based selves; brought selves; and situationally created selves. I will use this framework to discuss how my constructions and my participants’ constructions of my ‘brought selves’ provided a forum not only for reciprocity, but became integral to the design of the research itself.

Like Reinhartz I can identify a number of ‘researcher selves’ which include being an academic, being a good listener, being an interviewer, being a participant observer, being giver of feedback, being a ‘temporary member’. My ‘brought selves’ I identify in two overlapping categories - personal and professional selves. Personal selves include being a feminist, being a Refuge ‘fore-mother’ and being a person who can be trusted. In terms of my skills, and previous experience of twenty years working in the area of community development, I also brought a number of ‘professional selves’ into
the field. From my fieldnotes I have identified these as mediator, facilitator, strategic planner, evaluator, adult educator, and a person with access to resources.

It is in the ‘situationally created selves’ in the field where the participant construction of my ‘brought selves’ as a resource for the Refuge, and my construction of myself as a researcher intersect in a particularly rich, productive, and potentially problematic way. It required constant negotiation throughout my period of fieldwork, as the organisation which is struggling to meet the needs of battered women and children operates in an environment of scarcity - not enough time, money, paid staff or volunteers. The organisation is constantly trying to find resources to enable it to work more effectively, including utilizing the resources I brought to the organisation as researcher. In the following chapter (p 90 - 93) describing the research process I discuss an incident that occurred during my participant observation fieldwork, of how I positioned myself, and how I was positioned by the participants at the Refuge.

**Interviewing**

During the interview narratives emerge that are related to experiences of Rape Crisis pedagogy, but... they are also imbricated with the generation and presentation of the self. Or rather, the self-in-process as the interview progresses. These [stories] are told by an individual in the context of a specific set of experiences... they are literally stories of and about the self in relation to an event of an experience. (Rath, 1999, p 226)

Interviewing is one of the principal tools used by qualitative researchers to explore their participants’ perspectives. My practices of interviewing were informed by the theoretical framings of symbolic interactionism, poststructuralist discourse analysis and narrativity. Therefore I did not embark on the interviewing process expecting participants to tell the one ‘truth’ about the intersections of their lives and the Refuge training. Rather, I wanted to provide space for multiple constructions of subjectivity by both myself as researcher and the participants. I wanted the participants to talk about their Refuge experiences in ways that were meaningful to them.
Negotiating power

Interviews can provide researchers with thick, rich data for their research, but the process of interviewing is not unproblematic. Feminist and poststructuralist researchers have written about the need to address issues of power inherent in interviews (for example Limerick et al., 1996; Oakley, 1981; Ribbens, 1989; Stanley & Wise, 1993). These writers argue, however, that the interview relationship is a complex social construction that cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy of powerful researcher and powerless research sources. In this section I explore my understandings of issues around interviewing that shaped my practice.

Many feminist theorists writing about issues of power in interviewing have taken as their starting point the traditional masculinist model of interviewing and argue that we need to pay attention to the power imbalance inherent in this model. While I do not disagree with them, I take as my starting point a model of interviewing that recognises that power is discursively constructed between the interviewer and the participants. I begin with an understanding of what Limerick et al (1996, pp 458 - 459) describe as a 'dynamic model'. This model acknowledges an underlying ascribed power of the researcher, but argues that "the balance of power ebbs and flows through an interview and across interviews as it does in any social interaction" (p 459).

Cotterill (1992, p 599) argues that the balance of power within interviews depends, to a large extent, on the perceptions of the person being interviewed. I would agree with this statement, but like Rath (1999, p 209) I root these perceptions not only in the intersubjective relationships but in the wider discursive domains. For example, even though I endeavoured to set a friendly relaxed atmosphere for my interview with Vicki, which involved disclosure by both of us, comments by Vicki at the end of the interview indicated that she had constructed the interview as an 'examination' or 'test'. Her understandings of what constituted an 'interview' were shaped by her past experiences of job interviews and interviews with teachers at her children's school. Her comments at the end of the interview clearly indicate that her perception of the interview constructed me as the interviewer in a very powerful position relative to herself.
I was worried about you coming here to interview me. I thought about getting out my files and swotting up before you came. [laughter]. It is good that nobody else gets to hear or see this interview. I thought that if [training co-ordinator] saw what I had said she might think "Oh that Vicki, didn't she learn anything on the course?"

Vicki and myself ascribed very different understandings to the interview process. She did talk about her experiences as a trainee advocate, but I am left wondering what I could have done, or not done to make the process less threatening to her. It was not until the end of the interview that she disclosed her fears about the process. I had assumed that because we had talked about the interview being informal, and conversational, and we met at her house and sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee and eating biscuits, I had in some way equalised the power relationships between us.

In a rather simplistic way I employed a number of strategies recommended by feminists discussing interviewing processes (for example Bloom, 1997; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1997). I interviewed all participants who were willing to be interviewed; I arranged the interviews at a time and place that suited the participants; I took food to all interviews; and most interviews took place around the kitchen tables or in the lounges of the participants. From the beginning I tried to make the interview process a negotiated one, but found that it was not until second or third interviews that participants took greater control over the interview. This may have reflected the increased rapport and trust established over time, the confidence of the advocates in their work and therefore their ability to construct stories about it, or it may have been their acceptance of a different way of being interviewed. The second and third interviews were largely unstructured and elicited a wide range of narratives from the participants. I am left wondering if this resulted from my willingness for the participants to set the direction of the interview, or was it that they had worked out what I wanted, and were giving me an appropriate story?
Fostering intimacy

In all interviewing, the establishment of rapport and trust between interviewer and participants is critical. Feminist researchers have written about the way that this can be developed through establishing ‘friendship relationships’ which foster reciprocity within the interview context. As Oakley (1981, p 41) states:

The goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewees is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.

I began my research as a participant observer on the Refuge induction training course, and developed interpersonal relationships with participants through the conversations and shared activities we had during the training. I found as Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p 96) noted, this previous contact with the participants made it easier for the interviews to be like “a conversation between friends”. However, although the interviews may have seemed like conversations between friends, research interviews have additional layers of complexity and meaning. Cotterill (1992, p 599) neatly identifies a critical difference between a conversation with friends and a research interview:

One indicator for friendship is having someone to confide in knowing that person will listen sympathetically to what you have to say. Another indication is reciprocity, in that confiding and listening are usually shared activities of close friends... [But] close friends do not usually arrive with a tape-recorder, listen carefully and systematically to what you have to say and then disappear.

I was always aware that as researcher I had another agenda in wanting the women to share their stories, because I wanted their stories to use in this thesis. One of the dangers in creating an environment of intimacy in a research interview is that participants may be encouraged to share more than they feel comfortable with. Providing interview transcripts can go some way towards overcoming this, but my experience with one of the participants at the Refuge indicated that this is not always an adequate safeguard. I had interviewed Jill and sent her a copy of the interview transcript. The next day Jill left the following message on my answer phone: “Thanks
for the transcript. When I read it I was shocked at the stuff I shared with you. I have never talked about some of this before”. I phoned Jill and asked if she wanted me to delete some of the material from the transcript. She said that she did not want to withdraw any material and that it was “OK for you to use anything, because I feel I can trust you not to hurt me through your writing”. As a researcher I felt some level of discomfort at this response, because I was aware that what Jill had shared with me was the result of a ‘friendship’ relationship, but it was not a private conversations in the usual sense of a discussion between friends. I encouraged her to share intimate details of her life so that I could have a greater understanding of her world. I have not used Jill’s intimate stories because they fall outside the parameters I have set for this thesis. If they were central to this thesis would I have included them? Would I have ‘hurt’ Jill by using these stories? I have subsequently read a statement that has resonance with the way I felt following this incident.

I have also emerged from interviews with the feeling that my interviewees need to know how to protect themselves from people like me. (Ribbens, 1989, p 587)

Ribbens (1989, p 587) also warns that it may be the most vulnerable women who are most likely to be drawn into intimate talk, and who then look for a caring response. I felt confident that during the interview I was able to respond to Jill in a caring way, and she clearly trusted me to use her information in a way that would not be damaging to her. But I am left wondering if she really understood the difference between a conversation between friends and an interview. Whereas a conversation between friends is a private matter, “research relationships are in some sense public, which creates inescapable tensions if we seek to regard them as purely private ones” (Ribbens, 1989, p 579).

It is important to remember that friendship and intimacy is a two way process, not a one-dimensional one (Kirsch, 1999; Ribbens, 1989, p 585). As researchers we may have expectations about the type of relationship we will foster with our participants, and may strive for a level of intimacy that is rebuffed by our participants. Bloom (1998) found in her research that the levels of intimacy and friendship that she desired were not reciprocated by her participants, who had different perspectives of what constituted a research relationship. I agree with Bloom’s (1998, p 32) statement that
we need to avoid “having a rigid idea of what a feminist, feminine, or woman-to-
woman conversation should be”.

**Positioning**

Even when researchers follow feminist principles of research and engage in interactive, non-hierarchical, and open-ended interviews, the interview process itself remains a performance, with both interviewer and interviewee playing culturally determined roles. (Kirsch, 1999, p 31)

In the previous section on participant observation I described a range of subjectivities that I both brought to the field and negotiated during my time in the field. A similar process occurs during interviewing, where the subjectivity and understandings of the interview process are both brought and negotiated. I initiated interviews in a non-hierarchical conversation manner, but this was not what some of the participants expected of a research interview. Their expectation were of a much more formal process, where I as researcher would ask the questions and they would provide the answers. At the end of her first interview Suzanne stated “That was easy – just sitting around talking about our lives. I thought that you were going to ask me lots of difficult questions”.

A feminist poststructuralist understanding encouraged me as an interviewer to expect multiple, contradictory and layered accounts of the participants’ lived experiences. By asking them to tell me stories of their lives, I was encouraging them to “construct and reconstruct themselves and contribute to this by exchanging stories of my own” (Collins, 1998, p 7). But it is important to remember that although we have agency to construct and reconstruct our subjectivities, we are always already constituted through various discursive positions. As socially produced individuals, the stories we tell about our lives and experiences perpetuate or contest a range of discourses. In other words, I come back to the quote that I used to begin this section: “the constantly reconstituted selves of socially produced individuals... focuses on language in use (particularly on the formation and perpetuating of discourses speaking about and to each other through the stories told by individuals)” (Rath, 1999, p 226). In interviews (as in other social contexts) individuals construct their selves every time they speak; they become through the telling. They have certain discursive positions available to
them, and therefore tell different and sometimes contradictory stories. In this thesis I explore the narratives that participants used at the beginning, middle and end of their process of learning how to be advocates. These stories changed as the women positioned themselves and were positioned in a range of different discourses promoted by the Refuge.

**The Refuge: The Safe House**

I started to analyse my data when I was still ‘in the field’ at the Refuge. One of the ways I made sense of the quantity of information in the form of interviews, field notes, and ‘official’ Refuge documents was to employ a metaphorical understanding of the Refuge Safe House. The Refuge was set up 25 years ago to provide shelter for women and children needing to escape from domestic violence. The Refuge house is a physical entity that provides Refuge for those in emergency situations. When the Refuge was first set up the social conditions were such that domestic violence was considered a private matter, something that happened with the sanctuary of the home and not a public issue. Women and children who were abused did not receive the support or protection of the police, the courts or other statutory social services. The main way of keeping the women and children in the Refuge safe, was to keep the address of the Refuge house secret. Women and children who stayed in the Refuge could then be confident that their violent partners would not be able to track them down to the secret address. The women who stayed in the Refuge were told, “The only protection that we can offer you is that he won’t be able to find you. If you tell anyone the address of the house, you will not be able to stay here”.

Although the legal protection and the operational practices of the police have changed over the years, the Refuge still maintains the secrecy of the house. Only active members of the Refuge can visit the house, and then only after they have completed an induction course and been accepted into the organisation as volunteer advocates. For the protection of the women staying in the Safe House, the Refuge has a number of criteria that volunteers must meet before they are given the address of the Safe House. As I discuss in Chapters Six and Seven, these include adopting the talk of the Refuge, adopting the Refuge discourses of power and empowerment, and
demonstrating a knowledge of domestic law, and listening and communication skills. In using the idea of the safe house as a metaphor for representing my data gathering, I am drawing parallels between the process that the volunteers go through to have free access to the Refuge, and those that I went through as a researcher seeking access to information about learning from experience. My access to the organisation was incremental, but also pragmatic and to some extent serendipitous. By using this metaphor, of entering the Safe House, I tell my story of access into the Refuge, to the induction course, the training committee, the volunteer meetings, various subcommittees and group supervision.

Safe House metaphor

When I started thinking about using the Refuge house as a metaphor in my research I drew a safe house and used it as a visual way of presenting my early findings to the Refuge participants (see Appendix 6 for details). In this chapter I employ the metaphor of the safe house to describe the research process for this project. I had been inside the house as a volunteer and paid worker in the early 1980s, but in the later 1990s I was definitely outside the fence which protects the Refuge from 'outsiders'. To begin my research I needed to get in the gate, past the gatekeepers.
Once through the gate, I gained access through the door of the house by completing the induction course, along with the participants in the research. Like all other members of the organisation, I had to participate in the induction course to progress from the gate through the door and into the house.

As time went on I negotiated my way into various forums within the Refuge: volunteer meetings, group supervision, various subcommittees and governance. My diagram above represents these as the various windows into the organisation. The windows on one side of the door represent the research strategies of participant observation and interviewing that I used to find out about the organisation. The ‘door’ of the induction course, and the windows of mentoring and group supervision form the basis for Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine, in this thesis. The window of the work of the Refuge underpins all of the thesis, because it provides the context within which the participants were situated. I recognised that what I glimpsed through these windows was local, situational, and always partial. What was I able to see? What was hidden from me as researcher? What did the organisation ‘display’ for me to see? The glimpses that I got through the various windows were coloured by my own understanding, and the theoretical (window) frames through which I was viewing what was happening. I brought to this research a theoretical and practical background in various feminisms, community development and social justice, education and adult learning, and notions of postmodernism. These perspectives shaped what I could see through the ‘windows’. It was as though I was looking through these windows from different angles, distances and perspectives.

Although as researcher I was standing outside the windows looking in, I had also entered the door and was part of the group. I was part of the group I was looking at, and as part of the group I was influencing what happened within the group. Here my metaphor becomes much more complicated. I participated to a greater or lesser degree in different forums, but I was always an active participant in the group. My involvement in the funding committee, which I discuss later in this chapter, is an example of being strongly at the participant end of the participant observer continuum, yet simultaneously I was looking at myself as a member of this funding committee. I was present as an observer outside the various windows framed by various academic and philosophical and theoretical understandings, but I was also a
member of the group struggling to understand the complexities of the Refuge ways of working, and the interpersonal relationships of all participants.

Just as a house is constructed, this research was constructed by myself and the participants I interviewed, observed and worked with for an 18 month period of fieldwork between March 1998 and November 1999. I present my narrative of data collection under the following headings: getting in the gate, getting in the door, talking around the kitchen table, holding the keys to the safe house, and fossicking in the filing cabinets.

**Getting in the gate: Negotiating access**

It is quite common in qualitative research projects that interest in studying a particular topic is shaped by the researcher’s experiences. In my thesis proposal in 1998, I recognised that my volunteer work within feminist organisations had a significant influence on the political analysis, skills and knowledge that I brought to this research project.

Most of what I have learned throughout my life I have learned from other women. I have learned, not in the classrooms or halls of academia, but through my involvement in feminist groups in the community. I learned by watching other women, by asking questions and by trying things out. I have learned from the failures, the conflicts and the disasters, just as much as I have learned from the successes and the good times. I have found that the skills, experience and confidence gained through my volunteer work enabled me to succeed in Public Service management, academia, and in my own business. (Thesis proposal 1998)

I started work as a volunteer at the Women’s Refuge in 1979. At this time I was in my late 20s, a young mother living with my male partner, baby, and ‘toddler’. I had been introduced to ideas of feminism by a friend who was one of the women who started the Refuge organisation in New Zealand. It was through her that I became involved in the Refuge. I remained a member of the Refuge until 1986 working as a volunteer, a paid staff member, and a representative on the National Collective of Independent Women’s Refuge Collective.
When I left the Refuge, I remained involved in other feminist organisations in the community. I often met women from the Refuge at meetings and on social occasions. However, over time the nature of my involvement with the Refuge as an organisation changed. Between 1986 - 1994, when I worked for a Government Department, members of the Refuge regularly attended courses that I ran on management, financial management, and funding. When I set up my business as a self employed Community Development Consultant, my relationship with the Refuge changed again. I was called upon by the organisation several times throughout the period 1994-1996 to work with them as a paid consultant. I was usually approached when the organisation was experiencing internal difficulties, or had problems with other agencies operating in the city. As a trained mediator, I acted in this role for the Refuge on several occasions. I also worked with the organisation to facilitate ‘teambuilding’ activities.

**Negotiating with the gatekeepers**

When I first considered doing research at the Refuge, I anticipated that I would have difficulty in gaining access. Because the Refuge runs a secret house, only active members of the Refuge may visit the house. The identities of volunteer advocates are kept confidential to the organisation as a way of protecting them from possible repercussions from partners of women staying in the safe house. When I had been involved in the Refuge in the 1980s, the organisation had a strong anti-intellectual bias. At that time my experience in the Refuge was that women running the Refuge thought that feminists working in universities were ‘inferior’ to feminists working in the community ‘doing the real work’ of running Refuges and rape crisis centres. I did not know if these ideas persisted in the Refuge in the late 1990s. I had some contact with the organisation after I left, but by 1997 most of the women who knew and trusted me had also left the organisation.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p 81) use the term ‘gatekeeper’ to describe influential individuals within the research field who, because of their status within the organisation, can grant or withhold permission for the research to proceed. I believe that my access to the Refuge was contingent on establishing relationships of trust with key gatekeepers within the organisation. I am also struck by the degree of serendipity
in this process. At the time I was beginning to think of possible sites for my PhD study (July 1997) I was contacted by a member of the Refuge who asked me to work with the Refuge as a consultant to redesign job descriptions and do staff appraisals. I was unable to take up this work at that time because of my existing work load, but I indicated that I was interested in establishing a reciprocal relationship with the Refuge. I put a written request to the Governance Committee, but did not hear back from them for several months (Appendix 2).

Throughout October and November 1997 I mediated and facilitated a number of meetings for the Refuge. It was during this time I got to know all members of the Governance Committee and established a trust relationship with them. I anticipated that a group whose members had worked with me, and trusted me, would look more favourably on my research proposal. I also thought that an organisation that was operating reasonably smoothly was more likely to agree to be the site of a research project. Finally, in January 1998 I received notification from the Refuge Governance committee that they agreed to my research proposal.

**An academic as a key gatekeeper**

My acceptance into the group as a researcher was assisted by the presence of Jen (pseudonym) who was working within the organisation as volunteer co-ordinator. Jen had completed a PhD, and was at the time researching Samoan Women’s experiences of domestic violence. Not only was Jen supportive of my project, she also eased my entry into the organisation by carrying out research within the Refuge. As far as I have been able to ascertain, Jen was the first woman with a PhD to be involved as a volunteer advocate/paid staff member within the Refuge. It was serendipitous that one of the key gatekeepers to the Refuge had a good understanding of academic research, and was supportive of women gaining further academic qualifications.

When I asked for permission to conduct research within the Refuge I was not specific about the research strategies I would use. In my letter to the Refuge Governance in August 1997, I stated the following: “Exactly how that is done will of course be negotiated between the organisation, the women involved and myself, but I would envisage some form of interviews with women over a period of time”
Jen informed me that a new induction course would be starting on 1 March and that it would be appropriate to attend that training. We discussed this course as giving me the experience of going through the training, allowing me to access the potential advocates, and the opportunity for me to build trust with a group of women who would, if accepted by the Refuge as advocates, form approximately half of the volunteer group working at the Refuge. We talked about my access to other parts of the Refuge organisation, but agreed that I would negotiate further access at the end of the induction training course. At that stage we were not sure what would be appropriate, or acceptable to members of the organisation.

Before moving to discuss in detail the story of the data construction for this thesis, I present a pictorial re-presentation of the research design of this thesis. In what I have titled ‘Site Plan: Data production as a glance’, I have once again employed the ‘safe house’ metaphor. Unlike most house construction, this plan evolved as the research project developed and I gained access to more sites within the Refuge. Also unlike most housing plans, I constructed this diagram ‘after the event’ as a way to present information about the research process, and to signal some of the ‘rooms’ that I will be talking about in the remainder of this chapter.
Site plan: Data construction at a glance

**Interviews**

Volunteer co-ordinator
July 1998
May 1999

Mentors/training committee
4 participants Aug-Dec 1998

Supervisor Sept 1998

Volunteer advocates from March 98 Training

2nd interview: 6 volunteer advocates
Oct-Dec 1998

3rd interview: 2 volunteer advocates
July 1999

4th interview: 2 volunteer advocates
July 2002

**PO: New Advocates on Roster**
3 volunteer advocates
average 3 hours
July-Aug 1998

**PO: Funding Committee**
12 meetings
Sept 1998-June 1999

**PO Training Committee**
32 meetings
2 planning days
June 1998-Jan 2000

**PO: Governance**
10 monthly meetings
Nov 1998-Aug 1999

**PO: Hanging out at the Refuge**
Average 1/2 day fortnight
36 times
May 1998-Sept 1999

**PO: Volunteer meetings**
Monthly
1 hour
June 1998-Oct 1999

**PO: Group supervision**
Monthly
2 hourly session
10 sessions
July 1998-Sept 1999

**INTERVIEWS**
12 participants who completed course April 1998

Volunteer co-ordinator
April 1998

**PO: Induction Course**
50 hours
March/April 1998
13 trainee advocates

**GATE**

Initial concept plans: research questions, participant observations, interviews
Getting in the door: Participant observations at the induction training course

When I had received Governance Committee approval for my research project, Jen negotiated my access to meetings of the training committee. I attended a training committee meeting and talked about my research project. Following the immediate granting of training committee consent, I negotiated my entry as a participant observer to the induction course starting on 1st March 1998. I anticipated that the induction course would provide me with a rich source of information. I also considered my participation in this course was a way of building trust with the women who would be working at the Refuge as new volunteer advocates. I thought that the relationships established during the induction course would ease my entry into other parts of the Refuge organisation. The induction course was held at a venue other than the Refuge because of perceived security issues. Only when the potential advocates had been approved to work in the organisation were they given the address of the Refuge house.

I produced an information sheet that Jen circulated to all prospective members of the training course prior to the first session (Appendix 3, p 5). She also negotiated on my behalf with all trainers/facilitators who would be running the various sessions. At the first session of the induction course, Jen introduced me and I explained not only the purpose of the research, but the research strategies of participant observations and interviews. All participants agreed to sign the consent form (Appendix 3, p 7). I emphasised that all information gathered was confidential to me, and that all participants would be given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. At this time I

22 As a participant observer I also attended a course in August 1998 that was run by the the Refuge Volunteer Co-ordinator through the Continuing Education Department of the University of Canterbury. This was a new venture for the Refuge and was aimed at raising awareness of domestic violence and at the same time recruiting volunteer advocates to work at the Refuge. This course was deemed unsuccessful by the Refuge because only one of the 15 participants on this course ended up volunteering. Most of the participants on the course were paid staff from social service agencies who wanted to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of domestic violence. I have decided that an analysis of the second course is outside the scope of this thesis and will be pursued at a later date in the form of a journal article.
also signalled that I wanted to interview participants at the end of the training course. I told participants that although I wouldn’t take notes during the sessions, I would write up everything I could remember after the session. I explained that these ‘field notes’ would not be read by anyone else (apart from my academic supervisors if requested), and that I would not be reporting back to the Refuge about the participants’ suitability for work at the Refuge. I was clear with the volunteers and the Refuge training committee that I would not be acting on their behalf by providing information on the suitability of potential advocates.

Participant observation covers the continuum from ‘fly on the wall’ type of observations to full participation. During the induction course I participated in the activities of the course. Like other members of the course, I listened to guest speakers, discussed issues in small groups, large groups and took part in role plays. I was careful not to shape the focus of discussions, but I did contribute when I felt that I had something to say.

On one occasion one of the guest tutors/facilitators, Trudi, challenged my presence at the session. Prior to the session Trudi had given verbal consent for me to be present as a participant observer. At each session I introduced myself to the tutor/facilitator prior to the beginning of each session, and checked that my presence at the session was still acceptable. At this session as she entered the room, Trudi saw me sitting in the group,\(^\text{23}\) and questioned loudly “What is she doing here?” I talked to her individually and she expressed concerns that I was a “quality control mechanism for the Refuge”, and she didn’t feel comfortable “with you watching my every move during the session”. After I had assured her that this was not the situation she agreed that I could stay and participate in the session. Later in the course Trudi facilitated another session and did not question my presence on the course. This raises issues about the need to secure formal consent with all those participating in the research, both trainers and trainees. I had a formal written process for trainees, but relied on Jen to get verbal consent from the trainers. Requesting that all trainers also sign a written consent form would have prevented this situation arising.

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\(^{23}\) Trudi worked for a social service agency in the community. She recognised me because I had worked with her organisation in the past when it was experiencing difficulties. During that work we had what I thought was a harmonious relationship.
I was aware that because group members and some course tutors/facilitators knew of my previous work as a volunteer advocate they also might construe me as the 'expert'. On several occasions this did happen in small, or large group discussion, when I was asked how something worked at the Refuge. I explained that my involvement was historical and much had changed within the Refuge, the legal framework, and relationships with statutory agencies such as the Police. I emphasised that I was present to learn about how the Refuge operated in 1998.

**Introducing the participants**

I am presenting the narrative of my research process in the way that reflects the journey of the prospective advocates to full membership of the Refuge. It was during the induction training course that I met and got to know the volunteer advocates and members of the training committee. I introduce the participants at this point of my research narrative because I want to acknowledge the centrality of their narratives to this research. During the training course the volunteers spoke of their motivation to join the Refuge as volunteer advocates. The information presented about each participant is gained from a combination of sources: their written application forms, their discussions at the induction course, and interviews at the completion of the induction course. All names are pseudonyms. I present the participants in two groups, the 1998 induction training cohort, and existing advocates and training committee members.

**1998 Induction training cohort**

**Alix** (aged 27)

Alix was working full time in a professional position as a clinical psychologist and completing post graduate studies at University. She decided to do voluntary work because she wanted to “give something back to the community.” It was serendipitous that Alix volunteered at the Refuge. Her first choice had been working for Meals on Wheels, because she had an elderly grandmother in Auckland who she

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24 See Appendix 1 for a summary of time spent volunteering for the Refuge.
was unable to support. Alix’s work schedule made working for Meals on Wheels impossible. In her application Alix stated that she wanted to work as a Women’s Refuge advocate because she wanted “work in an area which helps to empower and support women and children who lack that support and choice in their lives”.

Amy (aged 34)
Amy was working full-time as a trainee chef when she joined the Refuge training. She had previously applied to be a rape crisis trainee, but dropped out of the training “because it didn’t feel right at the time”. She joined the Refuge because she wanted to “gain a wider knowledge of other women’s experiences, and to help others”.

Bridget (aged 27)
Bridget was working part time in the disability area when she started the Refuge training. At the time she was having a ‘year out’ from post graduate study. She had recently moved to Christchurch and saw this work as a way of getting to know people. The Refuge had not been Bridget’s first choice for volunteer work. Initially she had been interested in joining Search and Rescue, but they were not taking on new volunteers at that time. Her ‘goals’ for working in the Refuge were to “help women find their inner strength and move on to better lives for themselves and their children”.

Dawn (aged 57)
At the time of her participation in the induction course Dawn had no previous experience with domestic violence, and stated on her application form that she wanted “to help women in unfortunate situations”. She joined the Refuge despite negative comments about the organisation by her friends and extended family. Dawn saw the advertisement for the Refuge volunteers and explained:

I wanted to do something that I wasn’t paid for to start with. I wanted to do something for women. There were three alternatives that I thought of, one was meals on wheels, one was working in a hospice and this. Meals on wheels was too easy and too nice. Working in a hospice, I wasn’t quite ready yet to deal
with the dying. Then I thought about this. I decided to see if I was suitable for the Refuge.

**Julie (aged 23)**

When she started the Refuge training, Julie had just begun a four year postgraduate programme. She joined the Refuge because she said that there was a strong family expectation that she would “contribute to society in an altruistic way”. She was very clear that she was not looking to the Refuge as a career path, but hoped that her involvement would be a “learning experience”.

The learning is going to be huge. We are going to see all sides to everything and have to deal with everything that comes up. It will be really great, when you get to that point, maybe when you leave the Refuge, and you can reflect “Wow, I learned so much”.

**Karen (aged 41)**

When she joined the Refuge training, Karen was working part time as a carer for people with intellectual disabilities. She was interested in volunteering for the Refuge because she wanted to “Help others in need”. She had recently ended her marriage and was supporting her teenage daughter. Karen had lost 20 kilograms of weight which she said “Makes me so much more confident and able to get out into the community and do something”.

**Kate (aged 22)**

Kate was supporting herself and her baby son on the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB)\(^{25}\) when she joined the Refuge. She said that by doing volunteer work she was earning her DPB. She wrote in her application that because of her own life experiences she wanted to help other women and children “in such vulnerable times”. She also saw her time as a Refuge volunteer as an opportunity to try out social work with a view to applying to attend the social work training programme the following year.

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\(^{25}\) State benefit available to sole parents.
Lena (aged 60)

When she started the Refuge training Lena was working full time in the communications industry. Before she completed the training she had left her job because of stress, and because she wanted to have the time to work as a volunteer for the Refuge. She had experienced domestic violence in her own life and wanted to be able to support other women and children. She also hoped that working as a Refuge volunteer might lead to career opportunities for herself.

This is the beginning of what I hope will develop eventually into a paid position where I can be working either in the Refuge or with an aligned organisation. Part of the reason for starting off in the Refuge was to get an idea of what is out there and where I would be able to go.

Pip (aged 38)

Pip had recently moved with her family from another New Zealand city where she had been working as a school teacher. She joined the Refuge as a way of getting to know other people in Christchurch. She did not have a teaching job in Christchurch, and looked on her Refuge volunteer work as a way of moving into another career in counselling.

I hope to use the experience of working at the Refuge to see if I could have a career in counselling in the future.

Maria (aged 42)

Maria was working full time nursing when she joined the Refuge training. She applied for the Refuge training after she had seen the advertisement in the paper. Maria stated that she had wanted to do volunteer work for some time, but that her interest in the Refuge to that point had been “only casual”. She wanted to volunteer to “assist others to be able to come through a crisis in their life – to be that ‘someone’ that person who will listen”.

Sandra (aged 40)

Sandra had recently moved to Christchurch with her extended family. She had owned a business which she sold when she moved to Christchurch. She stated that it was the first time in her life that she was financially secure and did not need to work. She joined the Refuge because of personal experience with domestic violence. In her application form she stated that she could “help women and their families by being compassionate and non-judgemental”.

Vicki (aged 41)

Vicki had been widowed with two small children and now that her children were at school she wanted to “offer something to women who are less fortunate than myself”. She was not in paid employment, and was “financially comfortable”. Vicki looked on her volunteer work at the Refuge as “something that I should do. I have always wanted to help people”. She stated that her first priority for volunteer work would be working with people in a hospice for the dying, but that she wasn’t ready for that yet, but it was something she would do in the future.

Having introduced the prospective Refuge advocates, I now introduce the more ‘experienced’ advocates that the new volunteer advocates interacted with during their training and work at the Refuge.

Existing volunteer advocates, paid staff and training committee members

Aliessa (early 30s)

Aliessa had been a volunteer at the Refuge for two years. She completed rosters, did community speaking engagements, and worked with new volunteer advocates. She set up the children’s advocacy team of staff and volunteers, and during the time of this research started work in a part time position at the Refuge. She also began a post graduate course of study at University.
Christine (early 40s)
Christine had been a member of the Refuge for four years and was, during the period of this research, in a paid position. Christine had a teaching background and was heavily involved in the Refuge training group. In addition to her paid position, Christine also completed telephone rosters for the crisis line on a voluntary basis.

Jen (early 40s)
Jen had been a member of the Refuge for three years in a number of different capacities. At the time the course began she was working in a part time position as Volunteer co-ordinator. In addition to organising training for new volunteers, Jen was responsible for filling the phone roster slots for the crisis line. Often if she was unable to fill the slots, she had to take the calls herself. Jen, who had a PhD, was completing some independent research at the Refuge. As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, Jen was supportive of me doing this research at the Refuge.

Jess (mid 50s)
Jess had a very long involvement with the Refuge and had been on the paid staff at the Refuge for several years. Because of her knowledge and position within the organisation Jess was involved in all aspects of Refuge work. In addition to her paid work, Jess made herself available ‘on call’ for any other paid or voluntary staff at the Refuge.

Lucy (late 30s)
Lucy had been a volunteer at the Refuge for three years. She completed regular roster slots and assisted with new volunteers. She was the volunteer representative on the Governance committee. During the period of this research Lucy began work in a part time paid position at the Refuge. She was also completing a Polytechnic social services course.
Chapter summary

I began this chapter with a discussion of the ‘research tool’ of participant observations and interviewing that I utilised in this study. I then employed a ‘safe house’ metaphor to discuss the opportunities, choices and decisions I made as a researcher constructing the thesis. My research design was flexible, but was informed by the theoretical foundations and the data collecting tools. I have explored the way that this research was shaped by the decisions and choices I made about the opportunities that presented themselves to me as I engaged with the Refuge. I negotiated access with a ‘gatekeeper’ and gained entry to the Safe House by completing an induction course as a participant observer. I concluded this chapter by introducing the participants who attended the March 1998 Refuge induction training, and other key participants from the Refuge.
CHAPTER FOUR

‘VISITING’ THE REFUGE: THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Fieldwork refers to being out in the subjects’ world... not as a person who pauses while passing by, but as a person who has come for a visit; not as a person who knows everything, but as a person who has come to learn; not as a person who wants to be like them, but as a person who wants to know what it is like to be them. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p 79)

Introduction

In Chapter Three I described the opportunities, choices and decisions I made as I negotiated my way into the Refuge as a researcher. In this chapter I continue with the metaphor of the ‘Safe house’ as I discuss ‘talking around the kitchen table’, ‘being trusted with the house keys’ and ‘fossicking in the filing cabinets’ at the Refuge. Later in this chapter (see page 93), I discuss the extent of my integration into the Refuge. Although I was involved in many Refuge activities, I was aware that as a researcher I was as Bogdan and Biklen describe above, “a visitor”. I was the only non paid member of the organisation, except for the members of the Governance Committee, who did not complete crisis-line rosters. I held an ambiguous position in the organisation: I had completed the induction course, therefore becoming technically a ‘member’ of the Refuge. In the previous chapter I discussed the multiple positionings I held during my time at the Refuge, and in this chapter I detail my involvement in the various activities of the Refuge (See Appendix 4 for diagram of the structure of this Refuge). I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the process of analysis, where I worked to construct this thesis from the fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and documents from the Refuge.
Talking around the kitchen table: Interviews

I wanted to interview the prospective volunteer advocates, because I was interested in finding out more about why they had volunteered for the Refuge, and how they presented themselves as Refuge advocates on the completion of the course. I was interested to know how they saw themselves in relation to the organisation, and to discuss their perceptions of ‘empowerment’, and ‘oppression’. I offered to interview the participants at the venue of their choice: the Refuge, in their own homes, or at my home. Although two women chose to be interviewed at the Refuge, and two women chose to be interviewed at my home, most women chose their own homes as the venue for the interviews. At each interview I provided chocolate biscuits, and in many instances the interviews were literally conducted at the kitchen table. Interview times varied between 45 minutes and three hours. On average, interviews took an hour-and-a-half.

I carried out informal semi-structured interviews with 12 of the 13 participants of the March 1998 induction course at the completion of their course. I interviewed the participants during the time they were completing their ‘supervised rosters’ with mentors and before they actually started working as Refuge advocates. Six months after the induction course began, I re-interviewed the six participants who remained active within the Refuge. I later completed interviews with the two participants from the March induction course who were still active in the Refuge 18 months after starting their training. In addition to working as volunteer advocates, these two women were acting as mentors to new Refuge advocates.

The interviews with the new advocates were semi structured and conversational in nature. I asked open questions such as: What in your life has led you to volunteer for the Refuge? Why the Refuge? How do you see the work of the Refuge? What does being a Refuge Advocate mean? What have you learned from this training/involvement in supervision/doing the work? (Appendix 5). Subsequent interviews with the volunteer advocates were unstructured: I simply asked participants

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26 One participant on the training course was a new administration worker from the Refuge. I did not interview her because she was not training to be a volunteer advocate, but was attending the course as background training for her paid position.
to tell me what it was like being a Refuge advocate. I asked them to tell me stories about their first supervised roster, unsupervised rosters, crisis calls, and emergency call-outs.

I interviewed three members of the training committee, all of whom had acted as mentors to the women on the March 1998 induction course. I also interviewed one mentor who was not a member of the training committee. These interviews were largely unstructured as I encouraged the participants to talk about their lives and their involvement in the Refuge. In each of these interviews we focussed on their own induction to the Refuge organisation and their involvement in mentoring new advocates.

I also interviewed the external Supervisor who facilitated the monthly group supervision for the volunteer advocates. This was also an unstructured interview where we discussed her involvement in the Refuge, her philosophy of learning, and her supervision strategies. I interviewed the Volunteer Co-ordinator (Jen) three times between April 1998 and May 1999. In addition to discussing Jen’s experiences of being a member at Refuge over several years, I was interested in the way that she had gone about organising the training courses, the resources she had to draw on and what she described as “the Refuge way of doing things”.

I taped all interviews and transcribed them myself. I felt it was important to do the transcription myself because it familiarised me with the data I had collected. I provided copies of transcripts to all participants with an invitation to contact me if there was anything in the transcript they wanted to discuss, and/or clarify or change. The three women who did contact me regarding the transcripts commented that the transcripts fairly represented the interviews, and that they did not have any issues about me using their information as long it was presented anonymously.

When I first contacted the women for an interview I suggested that they might like to choose a pseudonym. Several did choose their own pseudonyms but most said that they were happy to have a name assigned to them by me.
Being trusted with the house keys: Participant observations at the Refuge

Access to the Refuge house was contingent on the volunteer advocates completing the course and being assessed as suitable to work at the Refuge. The final session of the training course was held at the Refuge, whereas all previous sessions had been held at another venue in the city. The first visit to the Refuge house was seen as a rite of passage into the organisation. Consistent with the late twentieth century technologies, new advocates were given the security code for the touch pad rather than the actual key to the door.

Once I had completed the induction course, I too was free to visit the Refuge at any time. It was at this time that I negotiated access to the sites where new advocates were involved in a variety of activities. These included hanging around at the Refuge, volunteer meetings, social events, and group supervision. In some ways, as a researcher, I was able to access sites in the Refuge that were not generally available to new advocates. The Refuge has a rule that volunteer advocates must be involved in the organisation for 12 months before they are eligible to join committees. Not all committees complied with this rule, and the child advocacy and funding committees welcomed new advocates.

In the following section, I detail the various sites within the Refuge where I negotiated entry as a participant observer. The level of observation or participation varied from site to site, and changed over time. Initially, I had a more low key presence, but towards the end of my time at the Refuge, when I had almost completed data gathering, I participated to a much greater degree. I constructed this greater participation as reciprocity, as I agreed to take on a ‘teaching’ role in the funding committee, and to facilitate planning days. My desire to have a reciprocal relationship with the Refuge shaped many of the decisions I made as a researcher.

Hanging out at the Refuge

I did not have a specific day of the week, or time, that I spent at the Refuge, but often went in for half a day if I knew that the new advocates would be at the house. I
wanted to see how the new volunteer advocates and ‘mentors’ worked together. Space is of a premium in the Refuge Office, and the staff and volunteer advocates were usually busy on specific tasks – doing supervised rosters or being involved in other activities. Because the Refuge was so stretched for resources, I offered to do something helpful for the organisation each time I was present. This often involved photocopying, or assisting people with computer problems. Very quickly I found that each time I arrived at the office I was asked to complete a task or join in a discussion of some issue facing the organisation. I found that being actively involved in the work of the Refuge assisted me to build trust relationships with the participants.

On roster with the new advocates

At the completion of the induction course I asked the new advocates if they would be willing for me to come to their houses when they were doing rosters, so that I could have first hand experience of them doing the work of Refuge advocates. All agreed to this, and once they had completed their mentored phase of training, I spent time with three advocates. These advocates were chosen for the pragmatic reason that they were doing rosters at times when I was available.

Two of the participants received only administrative type calls during these roster sessions. I was present on roster shifts for an average of three hours, so the participants and I spent a lot of the time chatting, drinking tea and coffee, watching TV, and playing cards. The roster with the third participant was very different as it involved a crisis call-out. I arrived at Pip’s house as she was preparing to leave to pick up a woman and take her into the Refuge. I went along with her to do the pickup and admission to the Refuge. We briefly discussed the ethical issues of me being present when Pip was involved with a client, but reached the conclusion that because the focus of the research project was on the volunteers and the organisation, not the clients, I would not use the client’s story in my research. Pip introduced us

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27 The Refuge house has a direct telephone line, but the number is confidential and unlisted. If members of the public, including lawyers and social workers, want to contact residents at the Refuge, they need to go through the roster. A large proportion of the calls during roster times are these administrative type calls.

28 ‘Client’ is the term used in the Refuge to refer to women and children who use the Refuge services.
both as “the women from the Refuge”, and because the client was in a distressed state we did not elaborate further. I assisted on the pick up by helping the client gather some food and essential documents together and helped carry her bags to the car. When the woman had been settled in at the Refuge, Pip and I had a coffee together and talked about what had happened.

Volunteer meetings

Volunteer meetings were held once a month prior to supervision. All volunteers were supposed to attend, but there were seldom more than ten women present. I asked to attend volunteer meetings because they are the forum for the volunteers to discuss issues of importance to them and to formulate recommendations to the Governance committee. The meetings I attended predominantly involved the volunteer representative on Governance providing information to the advocates.

At the completion of the induction course, all new advocates were expected to go to volunteer meetings. At the end of the course I put a formal written request to the first meeting that I be permitted to be present as a participant observer. This was approved unanimously and I started attending meetings the following month. I continued to attend volunteer meetings from June 1998 until November 1999.

At one meeting the group could not find anyone willing to take the minutes of the meeting, so I volunteered. For several months I was asked to take minutes, type them up and email them to the Refuge. I considered this as another form of reciprocity.

Group supervision

Once volunteer advocates were doing ‘solo’ rosters in their own home they were expected to attend the monthly sessions of group supervision. There had been considerable discussion at training committee meetings about whether new advocates could be included in group supervision on completion of their induction training. The final decision was that they could only attend when they were doing solo rosters and that this was seen as another rite of passage into the organisation. I particularly wanted to be able to attend group supervision because I anticipated that it would be a
rich source of stories from the advocates about their work and learning in the organisation. Supervision was also constructed by the training committee as a site of ongoing learning for all volunteer advocates.

I wrote another letter to the Refuge requesting access to group supervision. This was put on the agenda to be discussed at the next volunteer meeting. By that time I was attending volunteer meetings, so I absented myself from the room during the time the group discussed the issue. They agreed that I could attend group supervision, but that I would need to clear this with the supervisor. I contacted the supervisor by phone, described my project and asked for permission to attend sessions. The supervisor was very supportive of research in general, and feminist focussed research in particular. It was again serendipitous that a key gatekeeper to supervision was herself writing a master’s thesis and was familiar with the practice of participant observation. I forwarded an information sheet and consent form to the supervisor and arranged to attend supervision the following month.

At the beginning of my first group supervision session I talked to the supervisor before the session started. She suggested that I participate on the same basis as other members of the group, and that each month I take my turn to talk about my involvement and research. She stated:

I think it will be much better if you participate like everyone else, then no one will feel they are being watched. I know that you won’t be working with the clients, but you will probably have things that you want to talk about. It could be a good time for you to check what you are thinking with the group.

I attended ten supervision sessions over the next year, and participated by taking my turn to share stories and joined in discussion of issues. At two sessions I checked out analyses of learning within the Refuge that I was planning to present at conferences.

The membership of supervision changed as new women came into the organisation, so whenever anyone new was present I asked to begin each session with a brief
explanation about my research, and asked the new participants to sign the informed consent sheets.

Committees

A lot of the work of Refuge is carried out by various committees. After I had been through the training course and gained access to the volunteer meeting and group supervision, I requested access to various subcommittees. I wanted to attend the various subcommittees because when ‘experienced’ advocates spoke about the committees, they framed their involvement in terms of ‘learning experiences’. Unlike other new advocates, I did not have to wait the set 12 months to join these committees. During my time at the Refuge I was not refused access to any site.

**Training committee meetings:** Training committee meetings were held monthly until September 1998, when the part time paid position of the training co-ordinator was disestablished because the salary grant had run out. At that point the training committee decided to take over the responsibilities for organising and running courses and supervising new advocates themselves. The training committee then started meeting fortnightly. I acted as minute secretary for this committee but did not take on any of the tasks of the committee.

At the end of my time at the Refuge I facilitated two planning days for the training committee. During these meetings my role in the group was different to when I was primarily gathering data. I did not provide information about any of the women who had attended the induction training, but did provide general feedback about the training, for example how the enthusiasm of new advocates diminished if they did not begin supervised rosters immediately on completion of the induction course. I recognised that these meetings would be a time when the members of the training committee would be reflecting on the training offered in the past year and planning for the following year, so I asked that what they discussed be available to me as researcher. They agreed, and I wrote field-notes on one session and taped the second full day session. The training committee members were not interested in seeing the lengthy transcript of the session, but later I forwarded to them quotes from the
sessions that I wanted to include in the thesis. All members of the training committee who had been present were consulted and all agreed to my use of the quotes.\footnote{Two members of the training committee from 1998 – 99 were overseas and were not contacted.}

**Funding committee:** The funding committee provided me with the greatest challenge to being multiply positioned as researcher/participant in this organisation. It was in this committee, which was established in September 1998 and operated until mid 1999, that I experienced the greatest challenges as researcher, researched, teacher, and learner.

For example, when I was a participant observer at a regular monthly volunteer meeting, it was identified that the organisation was short of money and a sub committee needed to be set up to write funding applications. The volunteer who did this in the past had left and no grant applications had been made for several months. As none of the women at the meeting offered to pick up this task, the facilitator suggested that a request for people to do this be put in the monthly newsletter. At this point I said that, if at some future time a committee did form, I would be interested in talking with them. I include the following discussion from my fieldnotes:

Lesley: If there are people who are not here tonight who want to form a funding committee, I would be interested in meeting with them to set up a grant writing system. I used to do that sort of stuff when I worked for [Government Department]. I’ve got lots of information about where to get funding from that I can pass on.

Lucy: Oh that changes it for me, because under those conditions I would like to be a member of that subcommittee.

Alesha: Yes, I would as well, you can put my name down.
Lesley: Lucy you said that changes things for you. What do you mean?

Lucy: I would like to learn how to do funding applications, and if you are part of the group, I think that I can learn a lot from you.

Vicki: I don’t know how much I would have to contribute to the group at this stage, but I would like to join it too and learn about funding.

Aliesha: That’s great. Looks like we have subcommittee after all.

At the end of the meeting we had a committee with four members including myself.

The members of the new funding committee constructed my ‘brought’ selves as a person with knowledge and resources about funding, and also as a potential teacher in this area. As a group we started meeting independently of the volunteer forum and over the next six months completed a number of funding applications together.

What started as an example of reciprocity on my part, the offer of knowledge on funding applications, became an exemplar of the way in which members of the group utilize available resources as learning opportunities. It also moved me into my research as a subject. At one of our meetings, a deadline loomed, and it turned out that I was the only member of our funding group with immediate access to a computer. Therefore, I was the one who typed out the final application, editing and rewording the information from the group in a way that I knew would be acceptable to the funders. An unintended consequence of my attempt at reciprocity, was that initially rather than demystifying the process, my actions did little to enhance the understanding of the process for the members of the committee.

As researcher I viewed the funding subcommittee as a site to examine the teaching and learning which included myself as both teacher and learner. This gave me direct access to a greater understanding of the realities and constraints on teaching and learning in this forum. I learned as an ‘insider’ some of the difficulties faced in
establishing a teaching and learning environment in the face of competing demands. I wanted to model an emancipatory and empowering way of learning within the subcommittee, but the imperative to get funding application in by certain dates, compromised those ideals. For me as researcher, this provided an insight into the difficulties faced by an organisation that wants to empower its members, but for which teaching and learning are not primary objectives.

**Governance meetings:** One of the new advocates had been asked to attend the Governance meetings once a month as a minute secretary. After three months she developed repetitive strain injury and was unable to continue, and I offered to take her place. As Governance meetings are where policy decisions in Refuge are made, I was interested to observe what happened at these meetings. I attended the monthly Governance meetings for a year acting as minute secretary. Governance meetings were informal, with the committee sitting around the table sharing food and drinking coffee during the meeting. I was often asked to join the discussion of issues that governance was addressing. I saw my participant observation at Governance meetings as the opportunity to see another side of the Refuge that is not open to most of the volunteer advocates.\(^\text{30}\)

**Other events:**

During my time 'in the field' I participated in a number of other events and occasions. These included three planning days, two annual street appeals, two Refuge dinners, the blessing of the Refuge house following renovations, and the Christmas party. It was when I was asked to be Mother Christmas at the children's Christmas party, that I realised how involved with the organisation I had become. The party was held at a local park, with party food and presents for the children. I purchased a Santa Suit for the occasion and enjoyed my time ‘Ho ho hoing’, and giving out presents.

\(^{30}\)Governance was made up of a representative of each committee, a paid staff member, and three ‘external’ women who had specialist legal, accounting and management skills and experience. Volunteer advocates were not eligible to stand for election as volunteer representatives on Governance until they had completed at least twelve months working at the Refuge.
Acting as “Mother Christmas” to the children who had been in the Refuge, felt like a significant marker of my integration into Refuge. I had been deeply involved in the Refuge movement in the early 1980s, but had many years with little contact. Coming back to the Refuge as a researcher and going through the induction course to gain entry to the organisation was a very different experience to when I had first joined in 1979. I have discussed earlier in this chapter the extent of my involvement in the Refuge, where I started as an observer, but quickly became a participant in the activities of the Refuge. I felt that I was part of the group, at times positioned as a contributor to the work of the Refuge, but at the same time positioning myself as a researcher. My involvement in the work of the Refuge gave me insights into the discursive practices of the organisation, but left me with little time to reflect on the research process.

_Fossicking in the filing cabinets: Accessing official documents_

When volunteer advocates complete the induction training course they are free to ‘fossick in the filing cabinets’. All information held at the Refuge is, in theory, accessible to all members. When I checked with the manager of the Refuge she stated that, as I had completed the induction course, I had access to all documents at the Refuge and that I could access whatever I needed for my research. The major problem I encountered in accessing written documents and information was finding it in the files and the numerous file boxes that line the office walls.

The files with volunteer advocate application forms, self assessments and information about the current and previous courses were particularly useful, as were the minutes of the training committee, and ‘official’ documents such as the Training Manual and the “Human Resource and Operational Systems (HROS).”

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31 HROS was a requirement from the Community Funding Agency (CFA) which partially funded the Refuge. The HROS document is based on the 16 audit standards of the CFA. These include: Paramountcy, Cultural Appropriateness, Assessment (of clients), Planning, Discipline in the Programme (of children at the Refuge), Safety procedures for programmes, Recruitment of Staff and Volunteers, Vetting of Staff and Volunteers, Staff and Volunteer Training, Staff and Volunteer Supervision, Procedure for complaints, Management Structure, Financial Management, Monitoring, Disaster Management, Occupational Health and Safety.
The HROS report, prepared annually for the New Zealand Community Funding Agency (NZCFA) as an audit mechanism listed the document paper trail for the sixteen standards NZCFA assessed on an annual basis. The HROS document was very helpful for this research because it let me know what documents existed, and what documents the Refuge thought were important. I found Standard 7: Recruitment of Staff and Volunteers, Standard 8: Vetting of Staff and Volunteers, Standard 9: Staff and Volunteer Training, and Standard 10: Staff and Volunteer Supervision particularly relevant to this study.

The HROS document detailed the documents that the Refuge could supply to NZCFA to demonstrate that they met the standards. This document listed the relevant reports, and the source of data. The Refuge had set out its HROS report using the terminology of the standards as supplied by the NZCFA. For example, the “Vetting of Staff and Volunteers” document had direct notions of surveillance. It also focussed on assessing the suitability of volunteers to work as Refuge advocates. Under this standard the Refuge needed to demonstrate that they had systems in place for “Vetting the Staff and Volunteers”. The Refuge claimed to do this by providing NZCFA with the Annual Training Report, and the Employment Committee reports. In the HROS they listed the source documents as: Completed criminal declarations; Training committee minutes; and Training committee reports to Governance. The Refuge did not have to provide these documents to NZCFA, but they had to be available if requested.

The training manual was also a very valuable document. It had been prepared by the National Collective of Independent Women’s Refuges (NCIWR) in 1990 and was used by all affiliated Refuges as the basis for training new volunteers/advocates. Although the Refuge still based induction training on the manual, they had, over time, introduced new sessions to meet what they perceived as local need and had changed the order of the sessions. New sessions were focussed around drug and alcohol and mental health issues. The training committee explained that these sessions were introduced because the clients using the Refuge were far more likely to have drug and

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52 This is a Government Department that distributes funding on a contract for service basis to community organisations. In 1999 it changed its name to the Contracting Group of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services,
alcohol or mental health problems than those clients using the Refuge when the training kit was developed in 1990. During 1998 – 99 the Refuge was awaiting a new training kit that was being developed by the NCIWR.

**Analysis: Making sense of the texts**

I began my analysis while I was in the field (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). After each participant observation I wrote up my fieldnotes giving as much detail as I could remember. I wrote these fieldnotes in the present tense using the words of the participants as I remembered them. Consequently my field-notes looked like a script of a play with participants talking directly to each other, and my notes on non verbal action are like ‘stage directions’ from me as author. When I first started completing field-notes, I was worried that I would not remember what had happened during the sessions/meetings/supervisions. However, I was surprised that I could ‘remember’ almost ‘verbatim’ long passages of dialogue between the participants. I was, however, conscious that what I ‘remembered’ was not necessarily what others would remember from the sessions. My recollection of events and conversation was filtered through my own political and theoretical lens, and was not a record of events, but my interpretation of the events. As author of the field-notes, I constructed a particular account of events as I ‘saw’ and ‘remembered’ them.

Following interviews I transcribed the tapes, usually within 48 hours of the interviews, as I wanted to give the completed transcripts back to the participants as soon as possible, so that they could engage with the material and give me feedback if they wanted to change the transcripts in any way. I had hoped for feedback from the participants, but this generally did not happen, although I did meet on one occasion with one participant who was also completing a PhD, and discussed my early analysis with her. She raised issues about how I could maintain confidentiality of participants, particularly in the context of critical incidents, because she could recognise the participants even though they had pseudonyms. Unfortunately this ‘key informant’ left town after six months to work in another part of New Zealand.
I printed out copies of all interviews and participant observations and re-read them several times. I had planned to use Nud\textsuperscript{*}ist\textsuperscript{33} to assist me with my data management and coding, but found that it was not easy to use and made inductive analysis of the data difficult. About this time NVivo\textsuperscript{34} came on the market and I purchased a copy. I found NVivo to be excellent as it allowed me to import documents in ‘rich text format’ and to work with these documents in an intuitive and flexible way. Unlike Nud\textsuperscript{*}ist which required pre-selected units of text for analysis, and pre-created coding categories, NVivo was much more flexible. Essentially I worked from the imported documents and inductively created coding categories, and sub categories as I went. Although I found NVivo extremely useful for coding and for managing large amounts of data I used it primarily as a data management tool. I coded and recoded continuously for several months, and printed out coding reports and recoded from them. (See Appendix 7 for a coding example).

NVivo has the capacity to assist with theory building, but I preferred to work directly with my data, and process my findings manually by drawing out large ‘pictures’ in word and diagrammatical form on ‘butchers’ paper. I used these sheets of paper to write a series of ‘analytical memos’, some of which eventually became the basis for chapters in this thesis. When I began writing analytical memos they were largely descriptive. It was not until I began interrogating the texts, by asking ‘so what’ questions that my analysis became overtly theoretically informed. I drew on ideas of learning from experience and experiential learning, feminist knowledge production, and poststructuralist notions of surveillance and self-surveillance. I continued to develop my analysis throughout the writing process.

\textsuperscript{33}Nud\textsuperscript{*}ist is a computer programme. Nud\textsuperscript{*}ist stands for Non-numerical unstructured data indexing searching and theorising. The Nud\textsuperscript{*}ist handbook (QSR, 1997, p 2) states that "Nud\textsuperscript{*}ist is a computer packaged designed to aid users in handling non-numerical and unstructured data in a qualitative analysis, by supporting processes of coding data in an index system, searching text or searching patterns of coding and theorising about data”.

\textsuperscript{34}NVivo is produced by the same company as Nud\textsuperscript{*}ist, and is referred to in the title page of the NVivo manual as “QSR Nud\textsuperscript{*}ist Vivo”, but is generally referred to as NVivo, the term that I use in this thesis.
Writing as collaboration

People talk about thesis writing as being ‘a long and lonely road’, and to some extent I agree with this statement – it has certainly been a long one. However, I have been hugely assisted in my analysis of the research by my supervisors whom I met on a monthly basis to discuss my emerging ideas about the study, and later to discuss drafts of chapters.

The second group of women who have assisted with my analysis is the ‘Narratives Group’, a group of thesis writers, most of whom were completing their PhDs through overseas universities. The membership of our group changed over time as some members completed their theses and new members came on board. The narratives group was committed to reviewing each other’s work and giving feedback, not just on the writing, but on ethical concerns, theoretical issues, as well as support and encouragement. Our substantive interests were very different, for example, rural women, lesbian soap operas, ethics and domestic violence in the church, disability politics, and early childhood curriculum, but we all had a strong commitment to feminist scholarship. This group encouraged me to ask “What else does this remind me of?” and to explore literature in non-related fields.

During the time of writing this thesis I presented papers at a number of conferences: Australian Qualitative Research (AQR) in Melbourne in June 1999; Crossing the Threshold Conference in Melbourne in December 1999; New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE) in Hamilton in December 2000; Women’s Studies Association Conference in Christchurch in June 2001. Through the process of writing these papers I worked on my analysis in a number of different ways. I presented data from a ‘community practitioner’ perspective; an educational perspective; a feminist perspective; and a feminist research perspective. All of these papers explored issues relating to learning from experience, or research issues of reciprocity. Presenting papers at conferences was part of my agenda of making visible the ways in which feminist organisations facilitate learning.

Data analysis is a process that continues throughout the research project. As I write this, one of my final chapters for this thesis, I am aware that my thinking about what I
present in this thesis is still in process. I cannot yet describe an ‘end-point,’ but I can give an example of the way that I developed the themes and argument of this thesis. For example, as part of my commitment to the organisation in terms of reciprocity, on two occasions I had ‘feedback’ sessions with the Refuge where I presented my emerging findings. Both of these meetings produced considerable discussion among the participants, who were interested in how they could “apply the findings to our work”. The participants did not, however, wish to engage in theoretical discussion.

At the first feedback session in December 1998, after I had been in the field for eight months, I was focusing primarily on the Refuge as a learning organisation. Within this focus I identified six themes: learning is contextual; tension between individual/organisational benefit; the Refuge as an organisation is learning; political/feminist learning; what it means to be a Refuge advocate; skills development and personal development (see Appendix 6).

As my analysis has developed, I have discarded the idea of the Refuge as a ‘learning organisation’ as an organising principle for this thesis, although it is still implicit. The theme of what happened at the Refuge as contextually driven is central to this thesis. Rather than develop context as a chapter I have chosen to weave this through the entire thesis. I have maintained the structure of focusing on the induction training, mentoring (buddied system) and group supervision as ways of organising chapters, but I have gone beyond the merely descriptive nature of these sites to explore ideas of discourse, surveillance and learning from experience.

This early analysis included interesting themes that I have chosen not to pursue in this thesis. For example the idea of training as personal or private benefit is something that I will explore at a later time in a different forum. Similarly, one of the critical incidents identified in this early analysis related to the relationship between the organisation and the newly imposed Government Community Wage (‘work for the dole’ scheme). At the time the Refuge was desperately short staffed. They could not afford to hire more paid staff, and the number of volunteers was dwindling. Some members of the Refuge saw the ‘work for the dole’ scheme as a way that the Refuge could get more personnel at no cost to the organisations. Some members had philosophical concerns about utilising the scheme, while others had concerns about
the difficulty of keeping the address of the Refuge safe-house confidential. This critical incident in the Refuge provided a rich source of information relating to the complexities of the issue, but it was not one that I chose to pursue in this thesis.

**Chapter summary**

In this chapter have I continued with the ‘Safe house’ metaphor to describe interviewing and participant observation at the Refuge. Central to my actions as researcher was my concern for maintaining ethical relationships. In my desire to establish a reciprocal relationship with the Refuge, I became involved in a range of activities within the Refuge that placed me at the participant end of the participant observer continuum. I found that my contributions to the organisation, such as being a member of the funding committee, and facilitating planning sessions for the training committee provided me with a depth of understanding of the way the Refuge operated, that I would not otherwise have been able to access.

In Chapter Five I engage with other theorists who have written about learning from experience and experiential learning. I see Chapter Four as a bridging chapter to Chapters Five to Nine where I explore the ways in which the Refuge, as a feminist organisation, facilitates learning for its members. The Refuge based its induction, mentoring and ongoing supervision on particular forms of learning from experience and experiential learning. An analysis of these ideas and strategies is therefore crucial to this thesis.
CHAPTER FIVE

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE: A CONVERSATION WITH OTHER THEORISTS

Nothing is perhaps more sacred to adult educators than the ideas of learning and experience. Nothing may be more problematic either. (Wilson & Hayes, 2002, p 173)

Introduction

When I began this thesis my understanding of ‘learning from experience’ was based on the dominant discourse of adult experiential learning theory, which places the interpretation of experience as central to the learning of adults. In this discourse the learner reflects on lived experience and then interprets and generalises this experience to form mental structures. These structures are what we call knowledge. They are stored in the memory as concepts that can be represented, expressed, and transferred to new situations (D Boud, R Keogh, & D. Walker, 1985; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). Within this discourse, experience becomes the raw material for knowledge creation.

 knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.
Experience is a raw material to be acted upon by the mind through the controlled and self-conscious use of the senses (observation) and the application of reason (reflection). (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997, p 101, emphasis in original)

I uncritically adopted this dominant discourse of adult learning; the notion that experience plus reflection equals knowledge. But once I started paying attention to what the participants at the Refuge were doing and saying about learning and
experience, I looked more critically at the ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions about experiential learning. I found that Refuge legitimised certain experiences as evidence of learning, but not others. Within the Refuge, the notions of ‘experience’ and ‘learning’ were not neutral or value free. What counted as learning within the Refuge context was not generalised knowledge, but an ability to engage in certain practices and talk about these practices in particular ways.

My interviews and observations suggested that part of what the advocates were learning was not just how to support women and children escaping violence in their homes, but also how to manage their identities as learners and workers within the institutional regimes of the Refuge. Throughout their training, the volunteer advocates had to learn to demonstrate reflexivity, and be ‘honest,’ but they also had to learn to manage that honesty. They were learning about the Refuge work, what ‘experience’ was valuable, and how to demonstrate that they were learning in this particular environment. In formal institutions of learning people have to learn to do the things required of them, for example tests, essays, bibliographies. At the Refuge the learning that occurred for advocates was structured by a discourse of learning from experience. During and after the training programme, advocates had to demonstrate ability, not only in the work of the Refuge, but in the things that were defined as evidence of learning. The advocates had to experience certain situations, and demonstrate a capacity for self reflective talk about those experiences. In this respect they had to engage in ‘experiential learning’ by overtly reconstructing their own actions, interactions and feelings.

In the following discussion, I am attempting to make visible the analytical tools that I have used in the following chapters. I begin by discussing poststructuralist ideas of discourse, positioning and subjectivity, because central to the analysis of this thesis is the idea that through the training, the Refuge made available certain forms of subjectivity, but not others. I describe the way I draw on Foucault’s notions of power/knowledge, surveillance and self-surveillance, and regimes of truth to analyse the teaching and learning processes that this particular group of volunteer advocates experienced.
I then move on to a conversation with other theorists who have written about learning from experience and experiential learning. I begin with a discussion about the relationship between ‘learning from experience’ and ‘experiential learning’. I follow this with a brief discussion of two dominant discourses in adult experiential learning literature. I focus on these two discourses because they are ones that have shaped my thinking about experiential learning over the years. Firstly I discuss what I have termed the ‘humanist’ discourse where knowledge and experience are assumed to be authentic and directly accessed by a unified coherent subject. Secondly I discuss a ‘constructivist’ discourse of experiential learning, where the learner is understood to actively construct her experience. Following this discussion, I articulate the specific way that I use ‘experiential learning’ in this thesis to indicate not simply ‘learning from experience’ but a process of meta-cognition. I then bring a frame of poststructural theorising to a discussion of ‘experience’. Finally, I discuss a critical discourse of experiential learning, because this is the discourse that shapes the training offered in the Refuge. Within the critical discourse I discuss the particular practice of consciousness-raising, which I argue is rooted in the critical discourse of radical feminism.

**Poststructural tools of analysis**

In this thesis I adopt forms of poststructuralist theorising influenced by the writings of Foucault. In my analysis I use the term ‘discourse’ in its Foucauldian sense to refer not simply to ideas, but also practices, ways of producing knowledge, and ways of shaping the world according to that knowledge (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p 237). For example, the discourses operating at the Refuge constituted what counted as knowledge and the discursive practices within that context. The notion of discourse is important to this study, because each discourse represents political interests and, as a consequence, they constantly vie for status and power. The site of this battle for power is the subjectivity of the individual (Weedon, 1997, p 40). I will argue that the discourses at the Refuge promoted certain subject positions and not others. For example, throughout their training volunteer advocates were encouraged to position themselves as ‘empowerers’ rather than ‘charity workers’. In poststructuralist theorising, ‘positioning’ refers to the process by which our
subjectivities come to be produced by discourses (Burr, 1995, p 140). As Weedon (1987, p 32) writes:

Subjectivity is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relations to the world.... Poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being constituted in discourse each time we think or speak.

In this thesis I conceptualise subjectivity as multiple, dynamic and continuously changing. I explore the way that the new volunteer advocates position themselves, and are positioned in various discourses as they negotiate the Refuge's training and practices. As Davies (2000, p 91) points out, positioning is both an interactive process in which others position us, and a reflexive one in which we position ourselves. Although we are always already constituted through discourse, not all subject positions are available to all people. With positioning, the focus is on the ways in which discursive practices constitute subjectivities, and at the same time offer the possibility of resistance through negotiation of new or alternative positions (Burr, 1995, p 142). Like Ryan (2001, pp 3-4) I find the poststructuralist ideas of subjectivity particularly useful tools of analysis for this thesis, because they supply ways of thinking about complexities, and contradiction, that are helpful when exploring the process of learning what it means to be a Refuge advocate.

Central to analysis in this thesis is my understanding of Foucauldian notions of the relationship between power and knowledge. I draw on Foucault's (1980, p 52) assertion that power "perpetually creates knowledge and conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power". It is in the everyday practices that power can be observed, including the practices whereby trainee Refuge advocates acquire the 'experience' that legitimises their status as 'qualified' advocates. I examine the way that the production of knowledge within this context gives rise to, as Foucault terms it, "corrective knowledge" (Foucault, 2009, p 87).

Foucault (1977) describes the shift in western societies away from 'sovereign power', in which the sovereign controlled the populace by the power to punish, coerce or kill them, and towards 'disciplinary power'. Through 'disciplinary power' people are
disciplined and controlled by subjecting themselves to the scrutiny of others, and to their own self-scrutiny (Burr, 1995, pp 62-68). Foucault describes the way that anticipation of invisible surveillance leads to self-surveillance. It is through assumed surveillance by others and self-surveillance that Foucault (1980, p 155) argues that discursive practices are maintained.

An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself.

In this thesis I develop the argument that the Refuge training, mentoring and supervision provide opportunities for surveillance by others, and self-surveillance. Throughout the initial training course the potential volunteer advocates are assessed on their willingness and ability to take on the discursive practices and language of the Refuge. Volunteer advocates are encouraged to be self critical about their own practice and to discuss this at group supervision. In this way I argue that it is possible to see disciplinary power function through the Refuge practices of surveillance and self-surveillance (Edwards & Usher, 1994, p 5).

An idea closely linked to that of surveillance and self-surveillance is that of a ‘regime of truth’. A regime of truth as Foucault explains, involves a circular system of power that is maintained through the discursive practices of the organisation (in Rabinow, 1984, p 74).

‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. A ‘regime’ of truth

Regimes of truth can be found anywhere, including in organisations that started out as counter-discourses or reverse-discourses (Brine, 1994, p 201). When the Refuge was established it was a counter-discourse to the dominant discourse that domestic violence was an individual problem (Broadsheet, 1975). In this thesis I develop the idea that the Refuge has generated its own regimes of truth that are maintained by the
discursive practices of the organisation. In Chapters Six to Nine I explore the ways that the initial training course, and the processes of mentoring and group supervision can be seen as mechanisms for maintaining the Refuge's regimes of truth.

Setting parameters of the discussion of experiential learning

An epistemology of knowledge based on experience can be traced back to the Enlightenment, when Locke challenged the then dominant epistemological discourse of the rational mind constituting the "sole mechanism for the creation of knowledge" (Michelson, 1996, p 442). While Locke shared the Enlightenment belief in human reason, he argued that the senses, through observation and experimentation, could produce knowledge that was as reliable as that constructed purely within the mind:

Whence has [the mind] all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience. In that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operation of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understanding with all the materials of thinking. (Locke, 1698 cited in Michelson, 1996, p 422 emphasis in original)

I understand Locke to be claiming that knowledge comes not just from the activity of the reasoning mind, but from experience that is acted on by the reasoning mind. I take this understanding as the starting point for a discussion with some of the theorists who write about learning from experience and experiential learning. What follows is a critical review of how others have developed this view that knowledge begins with experience.

Dewey is often credited as being a seminal influence in the development of experiential learning theory (Fraser, 1995, p 4; Griffin, 1992; Merriam & Clark, 1991, p 129). When Dewey was writing in the early/mid twentieth century, the discourse of learning from experience was a counter discourse to the general educational discourse of received knowledge. Dewey promoted experience and reflection on experience as the basic building blocks of knowledge.
To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meaning which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organisation and of the disciplined mind. (Dewey, 1939 cited in Merring, 1984, p 16)

Dewey's ideas were influential throughout the school system in New Zealand, but more importantly for the focus of this thesis, in adult education theory and practice. The idea that adult learning is based on a process of reflection on experience has become a key discourse for adult educators in many western countries including New Zealand (Wilson & Hayes, 2002, p 173). Kolb (1993, p 138) argues that:

This perspective is called 'experiential' for two reasons. The first is to tie it clearly to its intellectual origins in the work of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget. The second reason is to emphasise the central role that experience plays in the learning process.

Within adult education literature there are a number of discourses that frame experiential learning. They range from positivist humanist, to phenomenological constructions and to those rooted within critical and post-structural pedagogies (Avis, 1995; Johnston & Usher, 1997; Lather, 1991; Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997). Although the term ‘experiential learning’ can be applied to a wide range of perspectives, models and activities, they all share the assumption that experiential learning involves the active transformation and integration of different forms of experience (McGill & Warner Weil, 1989, p 246). Two key ideas of experiential learning are that the ‘learner is central’ to the process, and that experiential learning involves ‘reflection’ (Brah & Hoy, 1989 p 73). It is the systematic inclusion of ‘reflection’ in the process of learning from experience that distinguishes this learning as ‘experiential’ (Johnston & Usher, 1997; Kenny, Ralph, & Brown, 2000; Knights, 1992; Pearson & Smith, 1985; Powell, 1985; Wilson & Hayes, 2002; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Weil and McGill (1989, p 248) make the following distinction between ‘experiential learning’ and ‘learning from experience’:

Experiential learning [is]...the process whereby people, individually and in association with others, engage in direct encounter and then purposefully reflect upon, validate, transform, give personal meaning to and seek to integrate their different ways of knowing. Experiential learning therefore enables the
discovery of possibilities that may not be evident from direct experience alone (emphasis in original).

In Boud et al (1993a, p 9) ‘reflection’ is presented as “those processes in which learners engage to capture, notice and re-evaluate their experience to turn it into learning” (Usher, 1993, p 169). I argue that it is the systematic inclusion of a process of reflection that differentiates ‘experiential learning’ from ‘learning from experience’.

Throughout the 1980s experiential learning became a dominant discourse in adult learning. Writing in 1989, Weil and McGill and Warner Weil (pp 245 – 246) argue that experiential learning is simultaneously an educational philosophy, a range of methodologies, and a framework “for being, seeing, thinking and acting, on individual and collective levels”. Theorists have categorised different perspectives/paradigms/discourses of experiential learning in a variety of ways including, for example, the often cited “Four villages” of Weil and McGill (1989). In their typology of experiential learning, Village One is concerned particularly with assessing and accrediting learning from life and work experiences, as the basis for creating new routes into higher education, employment and training opportunities, and professional bodies. Village Two focuses on experiential learning as the basis for bringing about change in the structures, purposes, and curricula of post-school education. Village Three emphasises experiential learning as the basis for group consciousness-raising, community action and social change. The Women’s Refuge Movement would fall into this category. Village Four is concerned with personal growth and development and with experiential learning approaches that increase self-awareness and group effectiveness (W. S. Weil & I. McGill, 1989, p 3).

Boud (1989, pp 40-42) developed “Four Traditions” of experiential learning. The first tradition, “Training and efficiency in learning”, aims to make learning tasks as straightforward as possible to ensure that all learning is directed efficiently towards a goal. The second tradition, “Self-directed learning and the andragogy school”, differentiates between the teaching/learning of children and adults, and draws attention to the unique goals and interests of the adult learner. The third tradition, “Learner-centred education and humanistic educators”, recognises that learners may
be constrained by their own early negative experiences of learning, and they need the context of a highly supportive environment to recognise and explore their own needs. Boud’s fourth tradition of experiential learning is “Critical pedagogy and social action” Freire is an often quoted proponent of this approach. Educators in this tradition recognise that learning is never value free, and education can be a means to emancipation. I discuss Freire and critical pedagogy later in this chapter.

Fenwick (2000, pp 248-256) provides an another typology: “the five currents” of thought about experiential learning. The five currents are “Reflection”, (a constructivist perspective); “Interference” (a psychoanalytic perspective); “Participation” (a situative perspective); “Resistance” (a critical cultural perspective); and “Co-emergence (an enactivist perspective). From the typologies of experiential learning, offered by Weil and McGill, Boud, and Fenwick, it is clear that ‘experiential learning’ can be constructed in many different ways.

To sum up, there are many discourses of ‘experiential learning’, but all are founded on an understanding of learning from experience based on constituting experience as a form of knowledge. I have argued for a distinction between discourses of ‘learning from experience’ and ‘experiential learning’ based on the inclusion of a systematic process of reflection. I now move on to discuss two major discourses of experiential learning, a humanist discourse and a constructivist discourse, before establishing my own use of experiential learning as an analytic tool. I focus on these two discourses because they are ones that have informed my thinking over the years.

**Humanist discourse of experiential learning**

I began this chapter with my humanist understanding of experiential learning. In the following discussion I begin to trouble this notion of experiential learning as an unproblematic process of ‘experience’ plus ‘reflection’ equals ‘knowledge’. I focus my discussion of the humanist discourse of experiential learning on the work of David Kolb.
In the 1980s Kolb was a key figure in the development of humanist notions of experiential learning theory and practice. He developed a four-stage learning cycle in which the learner begins with concrete experience, then reflects on that experience. This is followed by generalising, and the final step is acting or testing the new knowledge (Fraser, 1995; Henry, 1989, p 26). I think Kolb’s learning cycle has been hugely influential in shaping adult educators’ thinking about experiential learning. For example in an edited book *Making sense of experiential learning: diversity in theory and practice*, edited by Susan Warner Weil and Ian McGill, published in 1989, there are forty-two separate references to Kolb in the index. At the end of the twentieth century, Kolb’s model of experiential learning still informs much theorising in adult education (Wilson & Hayes, 2002, p 175).

I was introduced to Kolb’s ideas in what I now recognise as an experiential learning process. In the mid 1980s I was present at a workshop for adult educators (at the time I was working as a community development worker), who had gathered to hear a speaker from Scotland talk about ‘experiential learning’. Very early in the speaker’s delivery it was obvious that he was talking about ‘learning from experience’, as he described the practical work he did with his students as a woodwork teacher. At the end of the address some members of the audience stated that they had been expecting the speaker to describe a process of learning based on Kolb’s experiential cycle of learning. In the discussion that followed I acknowledged not knowing Kolb’s writing, but argued that I was using ‘experiential learning’ processes in my work in the anti-racism movement. I was asked to demonstrate my approach. I set up a role play where members of the group examined issues of immigration in relation to the Treaty of Waitangi.\(^3\) When we finished the role play a member of the group asked me what I would do next – I stated that I would move onto the next activity. What was missing from my process in terms of Kolb’s cycle was the systematic inclusion of reflection. If participants were to make new understanding of race issues in New Zealand, and then to act on the new understandings, a process of reflection needed to be built into

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\(^3\) The Treaty of Waitangi which was signed in 1840 between representatives of Maori (Indigenous) tribes and the British Crown is the founding document in New Zealand. There has been much criticism of the Crown (now New Zealand Government) for breaches of the Treaty.
the learning experience. I now see this incident as an example of 'experiential learning' as described in Kolb's model, because not only was it based on my experience, but following reflection and generalisation, I changed my teaching practice.

Although Kolb's learning cycle was a strategically useful tool to me in the 1980s, I no longer think it is useful as a theory of experiential learning. I now argue that this humanist discourse is problematic because it assumes a reality that is waiting to be uncovered by experience. It also assumes that this reality is fixed, and that by a process of reflection the learner can uncover the true meaning of the experience (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997). In this discourse, both knowledge and experience are assumed to be authentic, to be directly accessible, and to be based on the assumption that the world is open to direct observation. Within a humanist discourse of experiential learning, experience is privileged as "... at the very centre of knowledge production... the 'bedrock' of knowledge" (Johnston & Usher, 1997, p 137). This 'bedrock' of experience is then 'mined' and transformed into knowledge through a process of reflection (Johnston & Usher, 1997, p 287; Michelson, 1996, p 442). The expression that experience is something to be 'mined' is a common metaphor of the humanist discourse of experiential learning (Michelson, 1996, p 444; Usher & Solomon, 1999, p 161).

I find this humanist discourse of experiential learning inadequate as an analytic tool because I think it portrays the learner not only as a unified coherent rational self, but also because it portrays the learner as an independent constructor of her own 'true' knowledge (Avis, 1995, p 176). Within the Refuge context, the trainee volunteer advocates found that when they reflected on their experience, they had to do this using particular frames of reference. They discovered some experiences were more 'valid' than others, as were some interpretations. Only certain interpretations counted as learning. This suggests that learning from experience entails more than simply reflecting on experience. The humanist discourse of learning from experience does not take into account the context within which the learning is occurring, nor the socially constructed nature of knowledge.
Constructivist discourse of experiential learning

Unlike in a positivist humanist discourse of learning from experience/experiential learning, where experience is represented as authentic and directly accessible, a constructivist discourse recognises that 'experience' is socially constructed. At the end of the 20th century, a constructivist discourse was also a dominant discourse of experiential learning. Theorists writing from within this discourse include, for example, Mezirow (1990); Boud, Cohen, & Walker (1993); Schon (1983); Boud & Miller (1996). Boud & Miller (1996, p 8) define experiential learning as

... the totality of the ways in which humans sense the world and make sense of what they perceive. Learning is the process which takes this experience and transforms it in ways which lead to new possibilities, which may involve changes in actions, ways of viewing the world or relationships.

Constructivist discourses of experiential learning developed alongside humanistic discourses. Constructivist theorists argue that, while learners construct their own experience, they do this in the context of particular social settings, cultural values and economic and political contexts (D. Boud, R. Cohen, & D. Walker, 1993; Boud & Miller, 1996). As early as 1985, Kemmis (p 147) was arguing experience was not foundational, but was shaped by reflection. He describes reflection as "... an action orientated, historically embedded, social and political process". Whereas a humanist discourse of experiential learning is individualistic, Kemmis argues that experiential learning, particularly the reflection component, is not purely an individual process, but like language, a social process.

Sometimes we say that reflection is [the] mind's conversation with itself... The ideas and understandings which give form and content to our reflection are socially given: they come from a socially constructed world of meanings and significances... The fruits of reflection - action - have their meaning and significance in a social world, in which others understand us through our actions (including our utterances), and... in which we can invest meaning in our actions only by reference to the forms of life we share with others. (Kemmis, 1985, p 143)

Fenwick (2000, p 259) writes that much early constructivist discourse neglected to analyse the social relations of power exercised through language or cultural practices.
In his analysis, Kemmis (1985, p 149) clearly recognises power relations when he claims that "...reflection is not value-free or value-neutral; it expresses and serves particular human, social and cultural and political interests". Other more recent constructivist theoretical writing also acknowledges that the power of language and cultural practices need to be theorised as part of knowledge construction. For example Boud and Miller (1996, p 10) argue that:

> It is not possible to step beyond the influence of context and culture, although critical reflection can expose some taken-for-granted assumptions. The most powerful, and generally invisible, influence of context occurs through language. The words which are available to describe experience frame it powerfully.

Although they do not use the language of discourse, I think that what Boud and Miller (1996) advance is the idea that the discursive positioning of the learner will frame the way that the 'experience' will be interpreted. Boud and Miller may be indicating that not all discourses are available to all learners at any one time, when they acknowledge that the words which are available to describe experience frame it powerfully. I think a useful discourse of experiential learning must also recognise, as Kemmis and Fenwick do, that "experience and knowledge are mutually determined, and that experience itself is knowledge driven and cannot be known outside socially available meanings" (Fenwick, 2000, p 250).

In the following chapters I argue that what was valued as experience and as knowledge within the Refuge context, was reconstructed by the learners as they progressed through the training and became aware of the culture that operated in that context. What was valued at the Refuge was often not considered of value in other contexts. For example, experiences of domestic violence were, in the Refuge, considered valuable as a source of knowledge.

I share with some recent writers, (for example, Edwards & Usher, 1996, p 217; Johnston & Usher, 1997, p 138; Michelson, 1996, p 439; 1999, p 147. Tennant, 1998, p 368; Usher, 1993, p 173) a critique of the way that constructivist discourses of experiential learning, as described above, construct the learner as a stable, unitary self. In this thesis I argue for a more complex understanding of subjectivity, where
individuals' subjectivities are multiply constructed within different discourses. This is a key issue that I raise in this thesis when I examine forms of subjectivity that were available to the new volunteer advocates who wanted to work at the Refuge.

Discussion of experiential learning

The term 'experiential learning' is increasingly being used to refer to learning from experience in a wide range of contexts outside the formal education sector (Fenwick, 2000; Johnston & Usher, 1997). Theorists writing about experiential learning at the end of the 1990s increasingly recognised that much adult learning is commonly understood to be located in everyday workplace tasks and interactions, home and family activity, community involvement, and other sites of non formal education (for example, Fenwick, 2000; Michelson, 1996, 1999; Usher et al., 1997; Usher & Soloman, 1999). Whether the terms 'experiential learning' and 'learning from experience' can be used interchangeably has been discussed for many years (for example D Boud et al., 1985; Brah & Hoy, 1989; Fenwick, 2000; Usher, 1993). At the same time that 'experiential learning' is being used in a more inclusive sense, some theorists who previously used the term 'experiential learning' have begun to frame their discussions in terms of 'learning from experience'. For example, Boud and Walker (1993, p 77), who have written extensively about experiential learning, produce a model of "reflection processes in learning from experience". Their model includes a process of the learner returning to the experience, attending to feelings, and re-evaluating the experience. This model is very similar to those they developed previously to describe 'experiential learning'.

Fenwick challenges the distinction between experiential learning and learning from experience, when she asks "What manner of learning can be conceived that is not experiential, whether the context be clearly educational or not?" I agree with Fenwick that all learning includes some form of experience, and argue that all adult learning involves some form of reflection. However, in this thesis I do make a distinction between 'learning from experience' and 'experiential learning'. I argue that the Refuge training includes both 'learning from experience', and 'experiential learning'. In this thesis I use the term 'experiential learning' to indicate a very
specific form of learning. I adopt Kemmis’s idea of ‘experiential learning’ as ‘meta-thinking’ or thinking about thinking. Kemmis (1985, p 147) describes this interpretation as:

... meta-thinking (thinking about the relationship between thoughts and actions in a particular context) reflection expresses quite definite ideological commitments, taking certain aspects of social life for granted or treating them as problematic....

In the Refuge context, advocates had to learn from their experiences in various ways. They had to ‘reflect’ on their past experiences and present them in particular ways. They had to learn from their experiences of doing the work at the Refuge during the time they were mentored by other ‘more experienced’ advocates. The volunteer advocates also had to continue learning from their experiences as they worked ‘solo’ on the crisis line. They had to be able to demonstrate this learning by telling ‘learning stories’ at monthly supervision sessions. I interpret the volunteer advocates’ ability to be reflexive about their practice, and tell stories at supervision about what they had learned, as examples of ‘experiential learning’ as ‘meta-thinking’, or ‘meta-cognition’.

In arguing that the volunteer advocates had to demonstrate a degree of reflexivity about their practices, I differentiate between the terms reflection and reflexivity. I use the term ‘reflexivity’ to draw attention to the fact that, “when someone gives an account of an event, that account is simultaneously a description of the event and part of the event because of the constitutive nature of talk” (Burr, 1995, p 161, emphasis in original). Reflexivity recognises all narratives or stories have been constructed within discourse which makes some narratives possible but not others. In this thesis I will discuss the way that the Refuge advocates constructed their learning stories within certain discourses and not others. In Chapter Nine, which focuses on group supervision, I discuss in detail an incident that occurred in the group where a volunteer advocate constructed her story from a discursive position that was resisted by the other members of the group (see p 228).

Both humanist and constructivist discourses of experiential learning have been critiqued for adopting an uncritical acceptance of the idea of experience (Michelson,
1996; Usher & Solomon, 1999). In the following section of this chapter I develop a poststructuralist critique of the notion of ‘experience’ that forms the basis of my understanding and use of experiential learning.

**Poststructuralist ideas of experience**

The meaning of experience is perhaps the most crucial site of political struggle over meaning, since it involves personal, psychic, and emotional investments on the part of the individual. It plays an important role in determining the individual’s role as social agent. (Weedon, 1999, p 76)

While some educationalists who write about learning from experience and experiential learning tend to take ‘experience’ for granted, I take up Weedon’s idea that the notion of experience is highly contested. The way that we construct our understandings of ‘experience’ shapes understandings of who we are, and our place in the world. We have particular ideas about ‘experience’ that are shaped by discourse, and in order to have these experiences we have to occupy certain discursive positionings (Johnston & Usher, 1997, p 137).

For poststructuralist theorists experience is not a coherent, consistent and accessible ‘given’ (Johnston & Usher, 1997, p 138). As I discussed in Chapter Two, experience does not exist outside the culturally given representations of it, but is mediated by those representations (Stone-Mediatore, 1998, p 117). In other words, our ‘experience’ is always framed by the discourse that we are situated in at that time. Those discourses, in turn, determine the interpretations it is possible for us to bring to our ‘experiences’. In this way experience is constituted by language and discourse. We are able to reconstruct our ‘experiences’ in a variety of different ways at different times and contexts. Within the Refuge context, various meanings were given to ‘experience’. At times it was seen as something that new volunteer advocates could reframe to fit the Refuge discourses. Sometimes it was used to describe the ‘process of doing’ that the new volunteer advocates completed during their mentored phase of training. At other times ‘experience’ was used as a marker of competence; ‘experienced advocates’ who had worked at the Refuge for more than twelve months took on the responsibility for training new volunteer advocates. ‘Experience’ also
formed the basis for the ‘learning narratives’ that volunteer advocates told at group supervision.

The idea that meanings of experience are multiple and the meaning given to them is context specific is explained in greater detail in Chapters Six and Seven, when I discuss the way the new volunteer advocates were encouraged to reframe their experiences using a radical feminist discourse of ‘women’s oppression’. As not all discourses are available to all people at all times, access to the number and type of frames of meaning is contextual. By paying attention to the different discursive interpretations of experience, I acknowledge that experience may be invested with many meanings, some of them conflicting and contradictory (Johnston & Usher, 1997, p 141). Even within a particular discourse, since meaning is never fixed and people have differing investments in the positionings offered, experience is always open to re-interpretation. We construct different ways of understanding, theorising and representing experience at different times, for different audiences, contexts, and positionings within different discourses. Johnston & Usher (Johnston & Usher, 1997, pp 141-142) argue that

Experience is always ‘in process’, in a sense always out of control, exceeding any capacity to be read definitively and brimming over the social contexts in which it is represented.

If experience is always mediated and constantly being constituted by discourse, then it can be represented in many ways, although some representations may be more dominant (or powerful) than others. I agree with Johnston and Usher (1997, p 141) when they posit that the key question for experiential learning becomes. not how is experience present, but how is experience framed and constituted as experience in the first place? In the Refuge context the volunteer advocates discovered that not all interpretations of experience had the same value. They needed to re-present their experience in particular ways for it to be recognised as learning.

I argue that experience and subjectivity are inseparable; experiences shape our subjectivities, and our subjectivities shape and are shaped by our interpretations of experience. Just as our interpretations of our experiences are multiple, sometimes contradictory, shifting and always embedded in discourse, so are our subjectivities.
The possibilities for interpreting experience and creating subjectivities are constrained by the discursive resources available, and by our capacities to have certain experiences.

A modernist discourse of the learner is one of a rational coherent self, whereas a poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity posits the 'self' as constantly in process. Like Fraser (1995, p xiii), I question the modernist notion common in adult education literature, that adults are the 'sum of their experiences', or 'adults are what they have done'. That understanding assumes a coherent and unified subject 'I', an essential self who can reflect on experience, extricate the learning gained and use that learning in a progressive linear way.

If we accept the idea of multiple subjectivities positioned in and positioned by discourse, we must pay attention to the process of 'reflection' as a strategy of knowledge production. Michelson (1996, p 449) argues that reflection is a spatial metaphor. Where precisely are we standing when we 'reflect' on experience, and what kind of self is constructed in the process? Does reflection require that we stand 'outside' ourselves, and if so how can we do that? What is our angle of vision? How do we frame our own experience? How do other people position us, and what frames are available for us/them to do this positioning?

In the following discussion of the women's learning experiences at the Refuge, I will be using a strategy of interpreting 'experience', including learning from experience as socially constructed and embedded in discourse. I am framing both experience and subjectivities to be multiple, and shifting, and dependent on the discursive resources employed by the individuals and the organisation. This approach to experience and subjectivities provides me with the opportunity to embrace multiplicity and complexity in the stories of those training as advocates and of others involved in the Refuge. There is resonance with the epistemological framing of my thesis and Ryan's (2001, p 41) study of self-improvement courses in Ireland:

The language and politics of subjectivity are particularly useful for my project, because they supply ways of talking and thinking about complexities, contradictions and emotional responses that
people experience in their engagement with political and with critical theories.

Like Ryan, I am interested in the way volunteer advocates engage with political and critical theories as they go through their training. Ryan asks “Under what conditions is self-reflection a politically radical act for women?” (Ryan, 2001, p 3). I apply her question to the context of women training to be Refuge advocates.

Learning from experience and critical discourses

In the following discussion I will argue that the discursive practices of the Refuge formed a “regime of truth” (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, p 74)) based on discourses of critical pedagogy and radical feminism. Although the Refuge training committee did not articulate a specific form of pedagogical practice, there was an implicit “Refuge way of doing things”. At the Refuge the planning and delivery of training for volunteer advocates was the responsibility of a training committee comprising paid staff and volunteer advocates. None of them was specifically employed for her educational qualifications or experience, and each came from a different background. It emerged in discussion with them that they did not seem to be aware of any theoretical assumptions underlying their training course. They had a kit of pre-prepared sessions and they followed those to deliver training in the “Refuge way”. The only requirement to be on the training committee was at least twelve months active involvement in the Refuge.

Although the training committee may not have been aware of the discourses behind the way they delivered their training, I saw them as clearly rooted in the critical discourse of experiential learning. I begin this discussion of the Refuge’s philosophical and pedagogical practices with a brief discussion of critical discourses of learning from experience.

Critical discourses of learning from experience see experience as socially constructed rather than unmediated (Michelson, 1996, p 439). Unlike liberal humanist and constructivist discourses, critical cultural discourse places power as a central concern. Critical educational theory, as its name implies, rests on viewing the existing society
using a critical frame or perspective. It argues that the society is both exploitative and oppressive, but also capable of being changed. Learning from experience from a critical cultural perspective, involves learners in analysing the mechanisms of cultural power and domination. Writers in critical cultural pedagogy (Flax, 1993; Freire, 1970; Weiler, 1988) claim that when these mechanisms of cultural power are named, ways and means to resist them appear. The Refuge Movement in New Zealand is an example of a form of resistance that originated from the early consciousness-raising groups of the Women’s Liberation Movement. The establishing of Women’s Refuges at that time challenged the authority of the patriarchal power structures (Broadsheet, 1975).

Although critical pedagogy is most often written about as happening in classrooms, it is also largely acknowledged to unfold in many nonformal sites of learning, for example, in consciousness-raising groups and movements of social activism (Fenwick, 2000). In the following chapters of this thesis I will be discussing the way that the Refuge worked to construct a radical feminist awareness of women’s oppression with the new volunteer advocates, and some of the contradictions and complexities that this created. Freire is often cited as providing a critical model of teaching. He contends that through a process of conscientisation people learn to see through dominant social discourses.

The term conscientizacao [conscientisation] refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality. (Freire, 1970, p 17)

Freire’s theories have had a huge influence on the thinking of adult educationalists, both inside and outside formal learning institutions, in the twentieth century. Central to his pedagogical work is the understanding that both teachers and students are agents, and both are engaged in the process of constructing and reconstructing meaning (Weiler, 1988, p 17). Barr (1999, p 15) argues that according to this approach, people are ignorant of their needs and the true nature of their social relationships under capitalism and patriarchy. This ignorance, or ‘false consciousness’ can be removed through the intervention of the critical educator and through using strategies such as consciousness-raising. In Freirean theory, once
individual or groups of individuals are aware of injustice and oppression they will work to change them.

Freire’s educational method rests, crucially, on developing within people a notion of themselves as active subjects. Active subjects are able to take on new identities and actively work to change their situations rather than being passive objects within existing systems. Freire constructs agency as unlimited, and as a ‘natural’ outcome of conscientisation. There has been considerable critique of emancipatory views of experiential learning (Fenwick, 2000; Lather, 1992; Michelson, 1996; Ryan, 2001; Tennant, 1998; Tisdell, 1991; Usher et al., 1997; Weiler, 1991). As Michelson (1999, p 141) argues, “it is by now a commonplace understanding that experience, liberatory or otherwise, cannot be considered apart from ‘received’ meanings that evolve within material structures and culture and discursive norms”. In other words, we are inscribed by our cultures in such a way that our agency cannot be separated from “our shifting implications and investments in the multiple communities and discourses of our everyday lives” (Fenwick, 2000, p 259).

I agree with Barr (1999, p 15) that critical pedagogy’s assumptions that when the oppressed perceive themselves in relation to the world they will act together to change it, fails to recognise the possibility of the contradictory and plural nature of subjectivities. Writers aligning themselves with poststructural discourses have provided thorough critique of the emancipatory understanding of learning proposed by critical theorists (Ellsworth, 1992; Flax, 1993; Johnston & Usher, 1997; Lather, 1991; Michelson, 1996; Usher et al., 1997; Usher & Edwards, 1994; Weiler, 1988). Their questions tend to focus on the irreconcilability of fixed positions of subjectivity, culture of transformation, with the complexities of plurality and ambiguity of human activity and meaning making. Like Lather (1992), many of these writers work within the critical cultural tradition to refine and expand this perspective, without losing its commitment to resist oppression.

In the final section of this chapter I examine the feminist practice of consciousness-raising, which is very similar to Freire’s notion of conscientisation. Both have common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness, and historical change. Both pedagogies recognise oppression not just in people’s material
conditions, but also as part of consciousness. Both pedagogies construct active subjectivities, and maintain a commitment to justice and liberation (Weiler, 1991, p 450). However, rather than drawing directly from Freire, I argue that despite these similarities, feminist consciousness-raising groups developed as counter-discourse to established educational systems. While there are similarities, there were fundamental differences, for example the leaderlessness in feminist consciousness-raising groups as a strategy for overcoming the power relations inherent in teacher-learner relationships.

Before moving on to discuss feminist consciousness-raising as a specific form of critical discourse of experiential learning, I take a short detour to radical feminism. I do this because throughout this thesis I argue that many of the practices in the Refuge at the end of the twentieth century were shaped by early radical feminist discourses, which are rooted in the critical discourse of resistance to oppression.

**Radical Feminism and the Refuge**

In New Zealand, radical feminism has been the predominant theoretical form of feminism. During the 1970s and 1980s there had been debate between proponents of socialist, liberal, and radical feminisms, but by 1978 Jones and Guy (1992, p 304) argued that “the formative struggle to define what to count as feminism – an ideological struggle [that was] won decisively by radical feminism”. Radical feminism is not a unified coherent theory, but a range of theories and interpretations. Like feminism itself, there are many strands of radical feminism, but central unifying tenets can be identified in these strands.

The fundamental theme of radical feminism is that women as a social group are oppressed by men as a social group, and that this oppression is the primary oppression for women. For example a very early manifesto developed by the New York radical feminisms in 1969, and later published in Koedt, Levine and Rapone (1973, p 379) stated:

Radical feminism recognises the oppression of women as a fundamental political oppression wherein women are categorised
as an inferior class based upon their sex. It is the aim of radical feminism to organise politically to destroy this sex class system.

Unlike other forms of feminism which sought to gain equality within the existing systems, radical feminism emphasises that ‘emancipation’ or ‘equality’ on male terms is not enough. Radical feminism advocated a total revolution of the social structures and the elimination of the processes of patriarchy (Rowland & Klein, 1996, p 12).

A radical feminist analysis claims that through the structure of patriarchy, men control every aspect of women’s lives, both in public and private. Patriarchy is defined as a system of structures and institutions created by men in order to sustain and recreate male power and female subordination, including structures of the law, workplace relations and the family. One of the earliest radical feminist writers, Kate Millet (1969, pp 24 - 26), in what she describes as “notes towards a theory of patriarchy”, talks about a form of “interior colonisation” in the way women think and what is taken for granted, or seen as ‘natural’. She argued that women as a class have been conditioned to an ideology based on the values and needs of men. Radical feminists see patriarchal discourses of, for example, reproduction, marriage, compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood, as ways in which men control women (Rowland & Klein, 1996, pp 11 - 17).

Raising women’s awareness to their oppression by patriarchy was an important function of radical feminism, and was seen as the first step towards action to change society. In New Zealand, some women who had formed consciousness-raising groups went on to political actions such as opening Women’s Refuges (Broadsheet, 1975, pp 20 - 24). In the Refuge context, the discourse of radical feminism produced practices not only aimed at providing women with safety from abusive situations, but also at changing the social conditions that led to abuse of women and children (Broadsheet, 1975, p 21).

A criticism of radical feminism is that it universalises the experiences of mainly white middle class women to all women (Weiler, 1991). Within a discourse that takes the primary form of discrimination to be that based on gender, it is difficult to account for the complexity of the multiple positionings women experience. In the following
chapters I will argue that, at the end of the twentieth century, the Refuge made strategic use of the notion of all women as oppressed in its training. It did this to break down the barriers between the volunteer advocates and the women who used the services of the Refuge. However, the notion of all women as oppressed was resisted by many of the new volunteer advocates who did not feel personally oppressed.

Another criticism of radical feminism is that it is ‘essentialist’ in that it locates the source of women’s subordination in women’s and men’s biology (Richardson, 1996). This perspective is not one that is supported by recent radical feminist writing (Dwoken, 1987; Richardson, 1996; Rowland & Klein, 1996). Rather than emphasising essential differences between men and women as a group, recent writing emphasises the social constructedness of sexuality.

Most radical feminist analyses recognise the social variability of sexuality in different social and historical contexts. They do not see female and male sexuality as pre-given in new and different ways; sexuality need not be coercive or oppressive; it can be challenged and changed. (Richardson, 1996, p 145)

This shift in perspective within radical feminism can be seen in the changing practices at the Refuge. As I mentioned earlier, in the 1980s women were encouraged to leave their violent partners because changes in men’s behaviour were seen as unlikely. Women who stayed at the Refuge received a lot of emotional and practical support to move into the community on their own or with other women. Those who decided to go back to their violent male partners were not supported; for example they had to pay for their own taxi ride home. However, by the late 1990s the Refuge discourses of domestic violence had changed to recognise that violence against women was a social construct and as such could be changed. Several of the paid staff and volunteers also worked as facilitators for the men’s programmes at the local Stopping Violence Centre, and talked about this work as a contribution towards improving the lives of women.
Feminist consciousness-raising

In the final section of this chapter I examine feminist consciousness-raising as a discursive practice of radical feminism. I begin with a brief overview of the development of consciousness-raising in the women’s movement. In the early stages of the second wave of feminism, consciousness-raising groups were one of the main strategies of the Women’s Liberation movement. Consciousness-raising was seen as the most effective means by which all women could be encouraged to acknowledge their “entrenched secondary status, by accepting that no aspects of their lives were free of patriarchal influences” (Whelehan, 1995, p 71). Early consciousness-raising groups, based on friendship and common political commitments, focused on the discussion of shared experiences of sexuality, work, family, and participation in male-dominated left political movements (Weiler, 1991, p 456).

Weiler (1991, p 457) cites an essay by Kathie Sarachild from this period as describing a number of fundamental aspects of consciousness-raising. The first fundamental was that consciousness-raising was grounded in the need for political action. The second was that consciousness-raising was based on a reliance on experience and feeling. “According to Sarachild, the focus on examining women’s own experience came from a profound distrust of accepted authority and truth”. The last aspect of consciousness-raising was a common sharing of experience in a collective, leaderless group. In feminist consciousness-raising groups, women explored their experiences and feelings as a way of discovering their connections with other women, and identifying a shared oppression as women. Consciousness-raising groups started with the experiences of the women present, rather than beginning with theoretical discussions.

Consciousness-raising was not derived from an identifiable, coherent body of theory, but from the experience of oppression. It was a practical answer to this experience that, by its very method, generated the core of an explicit albeit continuously diversifying body of feminist theory. (McKinnon, 1982, cited in Hart, 1990, p 50)

What set feminist consciousness-raising groups apart from other forms of consciousness raising activity, was the feminist emphasis on experience and feeling as the guide to
theoretical understanding. Irene Preshnikis, a member of Redstockings (an early consciousness-raising group), wrote:

When we think of what it is that politicises people it is not so much books or ideas, but *experience*. (cited in Weiler, 1991, p 458 emphasis added)

Although consciousness-raising groups were autonomous, this emphasis on starting with women’s concrete experiences was common to all groups, and this gave rise to the women’s liberation slogan “the personal is political”. This slogan operated on a number of different levels. Firstly, it challenged what could be called political, with the personal accounts of women being recognised as examples of controlling discourses within society, and therefore political. Secondly, it challenged the dichotomy between the personal and political, and sought to dissolve the boundaries between the two. Thirdly, by placing a new value on personal experience it challenged the notions of objective reality. In an impassioned introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Robin Morgan, (1970, pp xv - xvi) a radical feminist, discusses the effects of feminist consciousness-raising.

It makes you very sensitive - raw, even - this consciousness. Everything, from the verbal assault on the street to the ‘well-meant’ sexist joke your husband tells, to the lower pay you get at work (for doing the same job as a man would be paid for), to television commercials to rock-song lyrics, to the pink or blue blanket they put on your infant in the hospital nursery...everything seems to barrage your aching brain, which has fewer and fewer protective defences to screen things out. You begin to see how all-pervasive a thing is sexism – the definition of discrimination against half the human species by the other half. Once started, the realisation is impossible to stop. And it packs a daily wallop. To deny that you are oppressed is to collaborate in your oppression. To collaborate in your oppression is a way of denying that you’re oppressed (emphasis in original).

Morgan provides a good example of the early rhetoric of radical feminisms. She implies that those who do not agree with her perspective on women’s oppression are living in a false consciousness or colluding in their own oppression (Whelehan, 1995, p 71).
Many of the criticisms about critical cultural discourses of learning from experience can also be levelled at the feminist consciousness-raising strategies. Both approaches fail to address the different forms of oppression experienced by different groups, or the complexity of specific contexts. Both perspectives see the learner as an active agent who can reassess experience and reframe it in alternative ways. However within a radical feminist discourse of consciousness-raising, as employed by the Refuge, the learner has freedom within constraint. If, during the consciousness-raising process, an examination of experience does not produce a particular form of subjectivity desired by the group, then as suggested by a member of the Refuge training committee, the woman “needs more training because she doesn’t seem to be aware of the issues yet”.

There are a number of difficulties specific to the practices of feminist consciousness-raising. The first is that consciousness-raising was built on the notion of the universality of women: of shared experience and shared oppression within a patriarchal structure. Feminist theorists have increasingly emphasised the importance of recognising difference as a central category of feminist pedagogy. The unstated assumption of a universal experience of ‘being a woman’ was exploded by the critiques of postmodern feminists and by the growing assertion of lesbians and women of colour that the universal category of ‘woman’ in fact meant “White, heterosexual, middle-class woman” (Weiler, 1991, p 460). I will argue in the next chapter that by universalising women as a group oppressed by patriarchy, this discourse does not account for the complexities of women’s lives. Nor does it account for same sex violence that resulted in lesbians needing to use the services of the Refuge.

Another difficulty in drawing on feminist notions of consciousness-raising to train advocates who will be working within a specific feminist context, is that consciousness-raising demands starting with individual women’s experiences. In the Refuge context, prospective volunteers came from a wide variety of backgrounds with differing experiences, expectations and ways of thinking about their own lives. Exploring personal interpretations of experience in a training situation can be risky if some of those interpretations are very different to those held by the Refuge. In
Chapter Seven I discuss the difficulties of consciousness-raising in a context where the potential advocates are also being assessed for suitability to work in the Refuge.

**Chapter summary**

I began this chapter with an account of how my understanding of learning from experience shifted from a taken-for-granted understanding of 'experience' plus 'reflection' equals 'knowledge'. I described the way that my research at the Refuge led me to a more complex understanding of 'experience', 'learning from experience', and 'experiential learning' that acknowledged the constructedness, not only of experience and learning, but also of what counts as knowledge. In this thesis I use the term 'experiential learning' to indicate a form of learning based on reflexivity that requires the learner to be aware of the 'meta-learning' involved in telling stories about their learning experiences. These ideas, and the notion that subjectivity is multiple, shifting and constituted in discourse, underpin the discussion in the following chapters. I contend that specific 'regimes of truth' existed in the Refuge context that determined what counted as knowledge and as evidence of learning. I argue that the Refuge in the late twentieth century operated from an epistemology based on radical feminism, learning from experience, and consciousness-raising that shaped the discursive practices of the organisation. I will discuss the way that, throughout the Refuge training, the new volunteers were encouraged to adopt particular subjectivities if they wanted to be accepted as volunteer advocates.
CHAPTER SIX

CONSTRUCTING A REFUGE ADVOCATE

There is no way we can teach our volunteers about every possible situation they will have to deal with. That is why the theory part of the training is so important. If they have a good theoretical understanding they will make sound decisions. There is no way that someone who really understands the theory will then go and make a blaming statement to a woman.
(Jess, training committee member).

Introduction

I write this chapter as a scene setter for the ones that follow. I begin by examining the discourse of ‘advocate’ and use this to develop an analysis of the politics of the Refuge training at the time this study was completed in 1998 – 99. I have argued earlier that notions of ‘experience’ and ‘learning’ are not neutral or value free. New volunteer advocates had to learn to engage in certain practices and to frame their talk about those practices in certain ways. In this chapter I explore discursive positionings of new volunteer advocates, as they entered the Refuge training with their own understandings of volunteering as helping and volunteering as caring. The Refuge, on the other hand, promoted a specific understanding of what it meant to be a volunteer advocate, based on notions of empowerment.

As Jess stated in the quotation above, it is not possible to teach new volunteer advocates about every possible situation they might have to deal with when working on the crisis line. For this reason, the Refuge structured its initial training course to cover the theory on which the Refuge based its practices. Throughout this chapter I
refer to this ‘theory’ as discourse because it was not simply ideas, but a set of practices that were shaped by those ideas. I contend that the Refuge drew on radical feminist ideas of oppression and empowerment. In this chapter I explore the Refuge understandings of oppression and empowerment. In the following chapter I describe the strategies used in the induction training to encourage new Refuge advocates to take up the dominant discourse of oppression and empowerment and to discard notions of volunteering as helping and caring.

A Refuge advocate

For the past 10 years the Refuge volunteers have been called ‘advocates’. The common sense meaning of the term advocate is “to support... a person who intercedes on behalf of another... a person who upholds and defends a cause” (Collins, 1992). The Refuge draws on all three meanings listed here. Advocates joined the organisation to support women and children who have been abused. They also see it as their responsibility to ‘intercede’ on behalf of women who have been abused – whether this is at the level of writing submissions for protective legislations, or by assisting individual women to gain their full entitlement through Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) or the courts. As an organisation, the Refuge also upholds a cause – that of changing society so that women and children will no longer be the victims of domestic violence.

I was unable to find any written record of the name change to ‘advocate’ but Jess, a member of the Refuge training committee, was involved in the Refuge at the time the name was introduced. She stated that the term was introduced to give more status to

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36 Throughout this thesis I use the term “volunteer advocate” to identify members of the groups who were volunteers. Usually in the Refuge the volunteers were just called “advocates”. Within the Refuge the paid staff were usually called “office staff”, but when they introduced themselves to people outside the organisation they usually called themselves “the Refuge advocates”. To avoid confusion I use the term “volunteer advocate” for unpaid volunteers, and “paid staff” for the others. When I am discussing activities of the training committee I do not distinguish between paid or voluntary members of this subgroup.

37 WINZ is the Government department responsible for paying out state benefits including the Domestic Purposes Benefit to sole parents.
the unpaid members of the Refuge than the term ‘volunteer’ gave. She said that it better described what the organisation was asking from its non-paid members.

To be an advocate does not mean to do for or speak on behalf of the women using the Refuge. It means to stand alongside the woman at every point of contact and to ensure that her story remains intact and doesn’t get lost, for example in legal jargon.

I think that Jess’s explanation of why the Refuge introduced the term ‘advocate’ signals the Refuge discourse of empowerment; advocates were not there to do for or speak for women using the Refuge. Instead they were there to ‘stand alongside’ the women and make sure that the women had the opportunity to tell their own stories. However, I argue that the ability of an advocate to promote the interests of, or intercede on behalf of another person, positions the advocate in a relatively more powerful position. I take this idea up in a discussion of empowerment later in this chapter.

The Refuge’s construction of the ideal advocate

In December 1998 and January 1999, as a gesture of reciprocity, I agreed to facilitate two planning days for the Refuge training committee. This was near the end of my time as participant observer at the Refuge. The training committee agreed that these two sessions be available as data for my thesis. I taped one session and took fieldnotes at the other. As facilitator of these sessions, I took a more active role in the sessions than I would have if I had been simply a participant observer. and some of my early findings from this research were discussed. For this reason I use italics to identify the source of comments made during these two sessions.

At these annual planning sessions the training committee reviewed the training offered in the previous twelve months and planned the training for the next twelve months. As part of this process they reviewed the purpose of the training, and the way that individual sessions contributed to their desired outcomes. There was considerable discussion about whether one of the purposes of training was to “provide
education and awareness about issues of domestic violence” to women who would benefit from the course, but would not contribute to the running of the Refuge. The members of the training committee agreed that the Refuge did not have the resources to do this. Therefore the training committee agreed that the purpose of running training sessions was to:

*Provide the Refuge with a pool of skilled, aware, knowledgeable volunteer advocates (Training committee).*

To work in the Refuge, women needed to learn not only the appropriate skills such as listening and counselling, and the appropriate knowledge such as the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) and legal protection orders, but also how to operate from within the Refuge framework of empowerment and radical feminist theories about women’s oppression. In order to assess women’s willingness to adopt these Refuge discourses, what the Refuge training committee describes as “personal characteristics and attitudes” of participants are constantly being assessed.

The induction training provided the Refuge with not only the opportunity to teach relevant skills and information to the prospective volunteer advocates, but also the opportunity to assess the suitability of the women for the Refuge work. Although it was not discussed with the trainee participants until late in their course, the training committee was using the sessions to ‘weed out’ unsuitable candidates. As I will discuss in the next chapter, there was a significant resistance to the surveillance imposed by the training committee. Although the surveillance was covert, the prospective advocates were very aware that this selection process was going on, and accordingly they adjusted the way they presented themselves. I take up these ideas when I discuss issues around assessment of participants in a consciousness-raising context in the following chapter.

At the planning days, the training committee members identified a list of qualities that they were looking for in new advocates. The following list is a composite of what the training committee came up with:
"Assertiveness, openness, being able to express their own opinions, willing to take a chance, self awareness, awareness of your effect on others, willingness to contribute, being part of a group, and being open to challenges."

It is interesting that they were not looking so much for knowledge or skills in new advocates, but for personal characteristics and values.

*Jess [training committee member]: If you thought of the ideal Refuge advocate that you wanted, part of that would be a woman who had an excellent sense of herself and was confident. It is like to do with the self ... Awareness of self, self knowledge, desire for challenge, learning, growth, all those bits of self that are really important in a Refuge advocate. There are some who are already confident, self-aware women in themselves, whereas some come in with less awareness or confidence.*

The 'personal characteristics' of the women are what Jess was most concerned about. She was privileging ideas about subjectivities, and looking for women with self-awareness and confidence above other possible criteria, such as personal experience of domestic violence. However, Jess was looking not just for confident aware women, but for ones who were willing to have their ideas challenged. In this way Jess was incorporating into feminist ideas of personal awareness, not only a willingness to learn, but by implication a willingness to unlearn. In the Refuge context, as I will discuss later in this chapter, a willingness to learn, to take up new subject positions, was contingent on 'unlearning' or discarding competing discourses such as volunteering as helping or caring. In the next chapter I will discuss the strategies that the Refuge used to encourage the advocates to construct subjectivities as Refuge advocates within certain discourses of power, empowerment and oppression.

The views of Jess are however, not those of the whole training committee. Whereas Jess was looking for assertive, self aware advocates, Anna on the other hand argued that a willingness to learn was the most important criterion for a Refuge advocate,
because the women would learn the desired personal characteristics as they went through the training.

Anna: Some will learn this self-awareness, assertiveness, and self-confidence through the training and the work of Refuge. I don’t know if I am right, but it seems to me that those are the women who often stay the longest. Some may only suspect that they have got them, and after doing the training they realise that it is there, and they’re absolutely gob smacked by it.

Anna’s belief that personal characteristics such as self awareness, assertiveness and self confidence could be learned,\(^{38}\) meant that she was using different criteria for potential advocates than Jess. Her comments seem to suggest that she thought that the women who perhaps had less ‘unlearning’ to do, and who embraced the Refuge discourses more readily, were the most desired advocates. Although there was only anecdotal evidence, several of the training committee agreed with Anna that they thought that not only did these women gain more personally from the training, but they remained as Refuge advocates for a longer period of time.

Whereas the training committee members may have had different views about some of the personal characteristics of the ideal volunteer advocate, they all agreed that assertiveness was highly desirable. During the annual planning process, the training committee considered it important that the trainee advocates would feel free to question things during their training and be open about their beliefs and attitudes.

Jess: We don’t want an advocate who is going to “Yes” and nod to everything. We want an advocate who will be open and think

\(^{38}\) A number of writers have explored voluntary organisations or social action groups as forums for learning, and have all concluded that the most valuable learning that occurs in these contexts is related to self-development (Abrahams, 1996; Elsdon, 1995; Foley, 1991. Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995) These studies focus on the learning that comes from doing the voluntary work. This is a slightly different focus to that of this thesis which examines the Refuge’s deliberate educational interventions of the induction course, mentoring and group supervision.
about things, she will be lost in the work of the Refuge if she can only nod.

Jill: [interrupts] We don’t give bad marks for assertiveness and confidence. [Laughter]

Lucy: Well developed qualities are what we are looking for, not over-developed. [Laughter]

Anna: We want the women to have the freedom to say what they think.

However, within the Refuge context, assertiveness was not a constant. Some forms of assertiveness were acceptable, but others were not. Training committee members talked about wanting and needing advocates to be assertive, but it was assertiveness within the constraint of the ‘right way of thinking’. ‘Misinformed assertiveness’ was constructed within the organisational discourse as having the wrong values (and therefore being unsuitable), or simply being unaware (false consciousness). I discuss these issues at greater depth in the following chapter.

Discourses of empowerment

The notion of empowerment was key to the work of the Refuge. Prospective volunteer advocates hoping to work within the Refuge had to demonstrate the talk of empowerment if they wanted to be considered suitable to work at the Refuge. At the beginning of the training, empowerment was not a word that many of the potential advocates used. Some were not sure what it meant in terms of working in the Refuge.

Dawn: I find that word bewildering. To me if you can help a woman who is in a situation not of her choosing, where she had no self esteem, no control, nothing. If you can give her back that feeling of control and self-esteem. Is that empowering?
In a review of literature about empowerment, there was considerable diversity in the way that empowerment was constructed. Disciplines as disparate as business management, critical educational theory, and feminist social work/therapy, all employ discourses of empowerment. VanderPlaat (1999, p 374) offers a commonly used definition:

"to empower refers to a process whereby power is given, granted, or delegated by one with power to one without that power."

This is the notion of empowerment that Dawn is using when she talked about "giving her back that feeling of control and self esteem". From a critical or post structural frame, this idea of empowerment as something that is done to, or for, someone else is highly contested. VanderPlaat (1999, p 380) asks:

"Who, in the process of empowerment, has the capacity to empower? More specifically, is the power that is acquired in the process of empowerment something that must be 'given to' someone, or must it be 'taken for' oneself?"

I will come back to these questions in the following discussion of empowerment.

Within the context of volunteering, the discourses the Refuge drew on were those of radical feminism, particularly as expressed in the literature of feminist social work and feminist counselling (for example, Allen, 1998; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1998; Nash & Munford, 1994; Vanderpyl, 1997; Worell & Remer, 1992). The Refuge was not looking so much to empower the volunteer advocates themselves, although it could be argued that this did occur through consciousness-raising, but for the volunteer advocates to understand the discursive practices of empowerment that shaped Refuge work. An ability to talk the language of empowerment was essential for volunteers who wanted to be accepted to work at the Refuge.

**Feminist social work and counselling discourses of empowerment**

I found there was a dearth of literature around empowerment and volunteering, so I looked at what people had written about feminist social work and counselling. I think it is appropriate to draw on feminist discourses of social work and counselling
because some of the Refuge’s written materials, for example the purposes of supervision, have been sourced from the New Zealand Association of Social Workers. Although the women running the Refuge in this study would probably argue that they have developed their practices independent of more formal discourses of social work and counselling, I argue that there are many similarities about ideas of empowerment. The discursive practices of the Refuge and of feminist social work are both founded on an understanding of unequal power relations existing between men and women (Nash & Munford, 1994, p 235).

The feminist discourses of social work and counselling contain a number of overlapping principles and practices as to what it means to ‘do empowerment’ in this context. Here, the dominant understanding of empowerment is based on a modernist conception of power. Within these discourses, power is constructed as something that you have and can give, something that you can facilitate others acquiring through certain actions. Utilising this understanding of power, much of the feminist social work/counselling literature (for example, Allen, 1998; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1998; Vanderpyl, 1997; Worell & Remer, 1992) is concerned with developing ways of ‘doing’ empowerment that not only improve the lives of individual women but also bring about change on a wider societal level.

For the following discussion I reconstitute the discourses of feminist social work/counselling/volunteering by discussing two major areas: feminist discourses of the personal as political, and mutuality – the relationship between the empowerers (social worker/counsellor/volunteer) and the disempowered (client).

**The personal is political**

The slogan cry ‘the personal is political’ was central to the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s. The phrase was first coined by Carol Hanish in 1971 to mean that all our small personal day-to-day activities have political meaning (Kitzinger, 1996, p 96). Aspects of women’s lives that had previously been seen as purely ‘personal’, for example, sexual relationships, were shaped by and influential upon their broader social context, and therefore had political implications. The idea captured by this slogan has remained central to practices in feminist organisations.
such as the Refuge. It also appears in the literature of feminist social work and
counselling (Elsdon, 1995; Morrow & Hawkhurst, 1998; Nash & Munford, 1994;
Trethaway, 1997; Worell & Remer, 1992). For example Worrell and Remer (1992, p
22) describe feminist counselling based on an empowerment model as being
conceptualised in two interdependent ways:

First, the individual is empowered in dealing with her life
situations through achieving flexibility in problem solving, and
developing a full range of other personal and life skills. Second,
empowerment encourages women to identify and challenge the
external conditions of their lives that devalue and subordinate
them as women or as members of minority groups.

Writing in the New Zealand context, Nash and Munford (1994, p 239) identify a key
principle of empowerment in feminist social work as ‘integration’.

Integration links an understanding of power relations is at the
personal level to those at the political level. It demands that the
worker has an understanding of the links between theory and
practice.

Similarly, Morrow (1998, p 6) talks about three dimensions of empowerment, the
personal, the interpersonal, and the socio-political. She argues that to be successful,
feminist counsellors must work on all three levels, and that placing personal and
interpersonal within the wider social/political context is critical:

When the social/political level is unacknowledged, an individual
is likely to blame her/himself for life circumstances. It is often
necessary to understand the nature and privilege and power
relations in regard to, for example gender, race, class, ethnicity or
sexual orientation in order to achieve empowerment at the
personal or interpersonal dimensions.

For the Refuge, making the links between the personal and political became essential
learning for the new advocates. As I will discuss in the next chapter, much of the
training that the volunteer advocates completed was aimed at ensuring that they made
this connection between the individual experiences of women who had been abused,
and the wider social conditions for women living within patriarchy. An example can
be seen in the first goal listed in the Refuge training manual: “providing women with
a basic analysis of family violence and its relationship to power structures in society.” In listing this goal ahead of “providing women with the basic helping skills and knowledge of procedures to support the day to day work of their local Refuge” (Lambourne, 1990, p 2), the Refuge is clearly drawing on a feminist discourse that places women’s individual experiences of domestic violence within the wider context of perceived structures. Underlying the training was the often stated assumption that domestic violence is not the fault of the women and children who are being victimised. As Jess stated, this was a fundamental tenet of the Refuge and essential for the new advocates to take on board:

*Understanding the wider power and control issues in domestic violence is critical, because women will come in thinking as lots of people think, that it is as the man from mensline said, domestic violence happens because ‘It is people not managing in their intimate relationships.’ And that is what a lot of people think.*

For the Refuge, drawing on ideas from radical feminism, (as discussed in Chapter Five, p 122) domestic violence is constructed as an extreme form of women’s oppression resulting from patriarchal control. In this context patriarchal control means men’s control of intimate relations, a control based on economic advantages and an historic association of men and physical violence. This idea is central to the philosophy of the Refuge. Within the discourse of patriarchy as promoted by the Refuge, women don’t cause domestic violence because of the way they behave or interact with their partners, but are victims of an oppressive system controlled by men. Domestic violence is seen as a result of the exercising of patriarchal power and control within the family context.

Linked with notions of patriarchy are those of women’s oppression. The Refuge operated from a radical feminist discourse of women as a group being oppressed. The training committee members thought that it was important for new advocates to have a good theoretical understanding of the philosophy of the Refuge, so that they would know how to act. Thus when the new advocates understood that domestic violence was not just an individual problem within families who were not good at doing
relationships, they would be less likely to blame the woman for provoking a violent response from her partner. As Jess stated at the training group planning day:

Jess: Some women say, “I’m not oppressed as a woman”. And that is really just because they are not aware, they may not be aware of all the systems out there that actually are oppressing them. The whole thing is that it is not just an individual thing; it is women as a group are oppressed. As a lesbian I am oppressed and as a woman I am oppressed every single day by the male system.

Jess’s comments that women who deny oppression lack awareness has resonance with Freire’s notion of false consciousness. Once the individual is made aware of the structures of oppression, in the Refuge’s case patriarchy, then she will work to change them.

Mutuality

Early in this chapter I discussed the Refuge use of the term ‘advocate’ to describe the volunteers who were recruited to work within the organisation. One of the issues that I flagged there was the inherent understandings of power that are implied in the term advocate. The ability of an advocate to promote the interests of, or intercede on behalf of another person, positions the advocate in a relatively more powerful position than the person seeking assistance. The Refuge explained this by framing the ability of volunteer advocates to act, as taking ‘power to’ or ‘power for’ the women clients who at that stage are not empowered.

At the same time, the Refuge promoted an understanding of the work of empowerment as one that breaks down the distinction between the volunteer advocate and the client. This attempt at equalizing the power relationships is often described in feminist therapy literature as mutuality. The Refuge draws on radical feminist notions of women as an oppressed group to establish mutuality with its clients.
Jess: I think for me it is about showing that we are all oppressed. So for women coming into the Refuge it is not a ‘them’ and ‘us’ situation - it is just a matter of degree. It is not ‘us’ - unoppressed, liberated women helping the ‘poor oppressed women’. It is the whole thing about all women are oppressed and so it is us. Trying to break down the ‘them’ and ‘us’.

In essentialising all women as part of an oppressed group, the Refuge sought to break down the barriers between the advocates and the clients. But at a theoretical level this raised difficulties, because if all women are oppressed, how can it be explained that advocates were there to empower other women? Although the Refuge did not explicitly deal with this tension, they did utilise a notion of a continuum to describe women’s oppression. Within this continuum all women were oppressed, but some were less oppressed than others.

Jess: You only have to look at the continuum being used in the women’s realities session. There is a continuum that looks at us in terms of oppression - it has got a whistle at one end and it has got rape and murder at the other end. And that happens in a continuum of us all.

Thinking about oppression in these continuum terms does not allow us to account for the complexity of women’s lives, and during training many volunteer advocates resisted being positioned as ‘oppressed’. I argue that if subjectivity is assumed to be fixed, these ideas about oppression become problematic. If however, a poststructuralist frame is used, then it is possible to be more or less oppressed at different times and in different contexts. I agree with Ryan (2000, p 132) that “Because different positions in different discourses are being taken up from moment to moment, it is no longer adequate to theorise people as always victims or as always oppressors”. For example when a volunteer advocate is talking to a Refuge client on the crisis line, she may be positioned as ‘less oppressed’ and ‘more empowered’ However, at work the following day the volunteer advocate may be positioned as oppressed by an abusive manager or boss. This suggests that there are issues about
how the women are positioned at any one moment, creating a shifting ‘empowering subjectivity’.

The discourse that presented all women as oppressed was strategically used by the Refuge to break down the barriers between the advocates and the clients using the Refuge. At the same time the Refuge also promoted a discourse of professionalism where the volunteer advocates were encouraged to keep clear boundaries between themselves and the clients they were working with. Christine, who had been involved with the Refuge for four years, commented on the changes she had observed during that time.

Christine: When I first came into the Refuge, women seemed very OK about sharing their own personal experiences with what we now call ‘clients’. The whole language has even got impersonal. Now it is not OK and it is not appropriate, and we do stand aside and sometimes it is hard to fit into that same philosophy of getting alongside women and being empathetic when you are holding yourself out there, and saying “I’m this and you are that”. It is not good to be seen being pally pally with the clients.

Christine thought the changes in the way of relating to the clients of the Refuge were driven by discourses of public choice theory, which emphasised a market model. Within this discourse, voluntary organisations were encouraged to think of themselves as professional organisations providing social services programmes “… to maximise responsiveness to individual preference” (Ellis, 1994, p 69). Christine stated:

I think it is out there in our whole language now and language is incredibly powerful, it permeates our own personal experiences. I think it is driven by the political language we are listening to, the economic language everything. It is tied up with resourcing, funding. It is all that accountability process. It is everywhere and it is all tied up with the kind of language we use. Now it is
I still try and say 'women' but often I say 'clients'. I can’t avoid it happening to me, it is too strong. Christine was clearly resisting the use of language from the professional discourse, but found it difficult keeping to her feminist language of inclusion and mutuality. She clearly identified that the way discourses maintain their dominance is through language. Through the discursive practices of the Refuge, tension was created for her in terms of being positioned within two competing discourses. When Christine had joined the Refuge there had been greater personal sharing and no physical separation of the residents, paid staff and volunteer advocates. She commented on the strength of the professional discourse when she talked about the way that space was organised.

There is a definite division of physical space and this is the women’s space and the office is our space. We don’t even enter through that door now. When I first came, it was OK to come through the women’s lounge. We always came through that door and said “Good morning” to the women in the house. You know. I can go a whole day now and not speak to the women in the house.

Another key idea utilised within the Refuge discourse of empowerment was that of empathy. One of the ways that you ‘do’ empowerment is through empathy. Sometimes empathy is constructed as the sharing of common experiences, but in this Refuge, unlike some in New Zealand (Gilson, 2001), the volunteers did not need to have experienced domestic violence personally to become advocates. The Refuge constructed empathy as something that advocates could learn through their training. Empathy, unlike sympathy, was based on knowledge of, or shared understandings. Although ideas of empathy fitted well within the radical feminist discourse of women’s common oppression, it was more problematic from within a professional discourse. From a discursive positioning in a professional discourse, empathy is something that should be managed within boundaries of professional/client relationship. Once again it is Christine who articulates the conflict of mutuality — how to empathise with someone if you are considering yourself to be different, and therefore not necessarily having shared understandings.
But it is moving away from the original philosophy whether we like to think it is or not. I’m sure it is. I’m wondering how you can get into ‘someone’s shoes’ as such to use very simple terms, if you actually don’t. If you see yourself as something quite different.

This example of competing discourses is clearly articulated by Christine who was able to see the tensions because she had been at the Refuge long enough to have experienced her work primarily within a radical feminist discourse, and be in a position to pay attention to the differences in language and practice coming into the Refuge. As Ryan (2000, p 32) describes it

The discourses in circulation determine how we are able to talk about, or respond to, or act on various events and issues. Discourse appeals to ‘truth’ for authority and legitimation and different discursive fields overlap, influence and compete with each other.

Christine articulates the difficulty of working with the Refuge at a stage when it occupied two competing discourses. As she resisted the professional discourse, she recognised that it was increasingly shaping the practices at the Refuge. New volunteer advocates were presented with Radical feminist discourses of power and empowerment as the core of Refuge practices. However, at the same time they had to negotiate discursive practices based on a professional discourse. But the new volunteers starting the training to become Refuge advocates did not come into their training as ‘blank slates’. They brought with them different motivations and expectations of what it means to be a volunteer at the Refuge. In this way the new volunteer advocates were entering a highly complex learning environment with a number of overlapping and competing discourses. In the final section of this chapter I explore the motivations and understandings of volunteering brought by the new volunteer advocates.
What the advocates brought with them

The women who joined this particular training course had many and complex motives for wanting to be volunteer advocates at the Women's Refuge. In their early interviews the women talked about joining to learn new things, for personal development, to meet new people and make new friends, and as a possible employment path. In addition to these motives, which could be construed as selfishness, all the advocates also had altruistic motives. They joined the Refuge as volunteers because they wanted to help other women and children. They talked about volunteering in the language of 'helping'. For example, Vicki, Kate and Dawn clearly framed their involvement in terms of a helping discourse.

Dawn: I want to help women in unfortunate situations

Vicki: I wanted to help people. I've always wanted to help people. Sometimes I feel it is something I should do.

Kate: I am interested in helping women and children at such vulnerable times. I want to be able to provide support and help them to regain their own strength.

The new volunteer advocates came to the Refuge with different understandings of 'helping'. Dawn clearly drew on the charitable model, of someone with advantage helping the women in “unfortunate situations” of suffering from domestic violence. Although Vicki was not so explicit in her comments, ‘helping’ implies that as helper, she is the one with agency in an unequal relationship. Kate too, used the language of ‘helping,’ but in a way that was very close to the Refuge notion of empowerment I have discussed in this chapter.

The desire of the volunteer advocates to ‘put something back’ into their community was also a strong theme of their motivation to do this work. Many women stated that because they had been successful, or had been helped in the past by others, they felt an obligation to do volunteer work as a way of giving back to the community.
Alix: It’s the time of my life when I’ve got some spare time. Just finished the clinical training. I’ve known for ages that I should volunteer you know, that I should do some work, give something back, and yes, this is just the first spare moment really.

Karen also talked about wanting to put things back into the community, about caring and nurturing and also drew on an additional discourse of reciprocity. She used a banking analogy to describe the way that she saw the community working – we all needed to be depositing in order for withdrawals to take place.

Karen: And I want to put something back. I feel as though in different ways we all get something out of whatever is out there. And you know, for people to get something somewhere along the line other people have got to put stuff in.

Kate, who clearly stated that she wanted to “help... women and children at vulnerable times”, also described working as a volunteer at the Refuge as a way of paying back society for the financial support she received through the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB). For her, helping others by volunteering was a way of earning her benefit.

Lena, on the other hand, wanted to work as a Refuge advocate because, when she had tried to escape from a violent relationship thirty years ago, the Refuge movement did not exist and she did not receive any of the help that she needed. Her motivation was to ensure that women wanting assistance from the Refuge would have it available to them. Similarly, Sandra volunteered out of personal experience with abuse, growing up in a family where domestic violence was present.

In addition to the traditional volunteer discourse of helping those less fortunate than themselves, the volunteers drew on a range of ideas about ‘paying back’ to society. Woods (1998, p 30) believes that in broad terms that there are two sorts of volunteers: firstly, those who volunteer because of their belief in a particular cause; and secondly those who volunteer because they have a skill or need that will be met within the organisation. I think that there are strong links between the discourse of helping and Wood’s category of volunteers with needs met by the organisations. The Refuge
training committee had the expectation that volunteers would fall into the first category. Sandra and Lena were the two who most clearly did fit within this criterion, as Sandra explained:

I'd thought about volunteering for a long time, but it was always going to be women's Refuge... I think it goes back a lot to childhood. To father figures and that sort of thing, and I didn't like what I saw my mother go through.

For a surprising number of participants (six of eleven in the March induction course - Bridget, Dawn, Pip, Maria, Vicki, Alix), the Refuge was not their first choice of organisation in which to volunteer. These women had very limited knowledge about the Refuge as an organisation prior to starting the induction course. They wanted to volunteer to help other people, and this was the primary motivation rather than working for the Refuge as an organisation. As Alix explained, she initially wanted to work for meals on wheels.

Well, to be completely honest, I wasn't specifically interested in the Refuge work. I knew I wanted to do some sort of volunteer work, and I was actually thinking of meals on wheels to elderly women. I have a 91 year old grandmother at the other end of the country and I feel guilty for not doing more for her. But this ad came up, and I felt I should apply because I could learn a lot and thought some of my skills could be useful in this work.

Both Vicki and Dawn had been considering offering to work in a hospice for the dying when the advertisement for Refuge volunteers had appeared in the paper. Both decided to pursue Refuge work because they thought it would be less emotionally draining than working with people who were dying. Bridget on the other hand was considering volunteering for Search and Rescue, but their training did not fit with her work schedule, so she volunteered for the Refuge instead.

The new advocates arrived at the Refuge training with a mix of motivations, a range of knowledges about the Refuge, and varied experiences of domestic violence.
Although the organisation expected that volunteer advocates would join because of their commitment to this particular cause, many in the group volunteered from a desire to help others, rather than a specific commitment to the Refuge.

Volunteering as helping

The dominant discourse of volunteering as 'helping' has its roots in the charity model of volunteering. Volunteering exists across countries and cultures, though it is expressed differently in different social contexts. In the Western world volunteering can be traced throughout Christianity. Woods (1998, p 18) argues that “Since their beginning the Christian churches have had a mandate to care for the poor, the sick and the homeless”.

Woods writes that the British colonists who arrived in New Zealand in the 19th century ignored the way that for Maori, working together for a common good was an integral part of marae life. These early settlers tried to produce copies of British charities doing good for the poor. This particular discourse of volunteering as employed in New Zealand is a European construction. Woods (1998, p 19) argues that volunteering, or charitable work “became a way to demarcate the respectable from the unrespectable and to establish status”. Public morality was the main focus in charitable and voluntary organisations in New Zealand at that time, with work directed at “Protecting society from 'moral decay'” (Ellis, 1994, p 59).

Throughout the 20th century, with the decline of the influence of the Christian churches, much of this work has been taken over by people who may not necessarily operate from Christian conviction. However, the word ‘volunteer’ is often associated “...with the charitable do-gooder image” (Woods, 1998, p 19). Within the Refuge organisation, the charitable model of volunteering and the attendant discourse of 'helping' was rejected by the existing members. Existing Refuge advocates did not wish to be associated with the charitable model of the “rich Lady Bountiful” (Baldock, 1990, p 4) giving to the poor, whether this be in terms of money, time, energy, or care.
The members of the training committee constructed ‘helping’ as a discursive practice of the charitable model of volunteering. Jess, one of the members of the training committee who designed, organised, ran the training, and also assessed the suitability of potential advocates was emphatic about rejecting the helping discourse. At an annual training committee planning meeting we were discussing why women volunteered:

Lesley: But people coming in don’t necessarily know a lot about the organisation.

Jess: Well why would they want to work here?

Lesley: People have really different reasons for wanting to work with the Refuge, but a lot of it is in terms of wanting to help women, to do good in the community. Wanting to give back, wanting to help women.

Jess: That is a real problem if we have women like that coming in... helping them and that is not what we are on about. We are on about empowering women.

In the next chapter I will discuss the way that the Refuge training shifted the understanding of the new advocates of what it means to be a volunteer, from ‘helping’ to ‘empowerment’.

**Volunteering as caring**

Karen: I’m a nurturer, and a carer, and will do anything to help people.
As Karen's quotation indicates, a discourse closely related to helping was that of volunteers as carers. Although there has been very little theorizing on volunteerism as caring, Baldock (1998, p 22) identified a small number of feminist writers, primarily in the United States, who have constructed volunteering "as part of the gender tasks that women do by virtue of their position as wives and mothers, and suggests that most women negotiate volunteer tasks around family responsibility". This discourse of volunteering as caring, an extension of household duties, was reflected in the writing of a small number of New Zealand feminists (Craig, 1992; Hindmarsh, Bell, Addison, Gunn, & McGary, 1993; Waring, 1988).

Craig (1992), who brought a feminist analysis to volunteering, extended this notion of women caring by challenging the separation of voluntary community work and caring work within the family. She concluded that what women define as household duties may include Play Centre or Kohanga Reo, and involvement with school or community projects that involve their children or grandchildren.

Although some of the women volunteering to be Refuge advocates, such as Karen, did construct their involvement within a discourses of caring, they made a clear distinction between the work they did within their own families and the work of the Refuge. For all participants on the training course, except for one, they described this involvement as the first time they had volunteered. Several members of the group had been involved in voluntary activities to support their children, but did not construct this as volunteering, because they saw it as having direct benefit for their families. Dawn, for example, talked about starting a Playcentre when her children were young.

I haven't done any volunteer work in the past, none at all...
When the kids were young I did a lot of work starting up a Playcentre out in the area where I lived. But that was 30 years ago. I never ever thought of it as volunteer work. Even though it was unpaid work, it was never volunteer work. I was doing it for my kids. I was doing it for my community, but it never occurred to me that it was volunteer work.
This distinction by the volunteer advocates between volunteer work and caring within their families was similar to that made in Baldock's (1990) study of women volunteering in Australia. Baldock also found that many women who volunteered in organisations saw their work as quite distinct from their obligations of caring for their families.

...Volunteer labour cannot be equated with other types of unpaid caring in that many women see the opportunity to engage in volunteer work with a formal agency as a break from compulsory altruism. They see volunteer activities as 'selfish' behaviour quite incompatible with the traditional role of wife and mother.

Baldock (1990) and Craig (1992) may not agree on the framing of volunteering and caring, but both agree that women who volunteer often use it as a stepping-stone for other activities. Baldock found that the women in her study often used volunteer work as a bridge to paid employment or other activities in the public sphere. Craig (1992, p 116), who challenged the existence of separate private and public spheres, argued that caring and nurturing were considered by the women she interviewed to be an essential dimension of voluntary community work. She noted that although these women became involved in volunteer work as an extension of caring for their families, they began to actively seek ways to bring about change in society.

I'm here because I want to see real social justice - more equality for my mokopuna, and their mokopuna, more sharing of resources, power sharing, decision making, all that sort of thing that goes with it - real justice. (Craig, 1992, p. 116)

This idea of volunteering or unpaid work for members of one's family extending into advocacy and work for social change is also a finding of a study of women caring for children with disabilities by Traustadottir (1991). Although her work focused on the unpaid work of mothers of children with disabilities, her analysis is useful to this thesis when considering the way that the women volunteering as Refuge advocates constructed caring. Traustadottir identified three different meanings of 'caring'. The first was the work of 'caring for', or taking care of the child. The second was 'caring about', referring to the relationships and emotion, that is loving the child.

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40 Maori term for grandchildren
(Traustadottir, 1991, p 216). It is the third category, that of the extended caring role that has greater resonance, not just with the work of Craig (1992), but with the work of the Refuge volunteer advocates. Traustadottir found that many of the mothers of children with disabilities extended their care beyond their own child to broader community or social change activities. While the caring about, and the caring for children with disabilities often limited women’s choices and options, the ‘extended caring’ often provided these mothers with opportunities for community leadership and activities outside the home. In the Refuge context, this extended caring could be constructed as not only caring for women and children who contacted the crisis line or stayed in the Refuge, but for all women, as all women are potentially at risk from domestic violence.

Chapter summary

In this chapter I have examined the discourse of advocate, and the power relations inherent in the notion of advocate as empowerer. I have described the Refuge’s construction of the ideal advocate, and the new advocates’ motivations for wanting to join the Refuge. I have explored the Refuge’s notions of power and empowerment and examined how power and empowerment are constructed within different discourses at the Refuge. These discourses included radical feminism, professionalism, helping and caring. I argue that women attending the Refuge training entered a complex learning situation, which was based on ideas of learning from experience. Throughout their training they had to negotiate a range of often competing discursive practices. I argue that the dominant discourse running through the Refuge training was a radical feminist one of empowerment. By the end of the induction course, all the prospective advocates were talking ‘empowerment’

Bridget: Empowerment is about giving other people strength and supporting them in whatever they chose to do. Allowing them to make their own decisions, without forcing my ideas on them. It is much more important for them to do it themselves and somehow find that strength from inside. Maybe they just need someone to tell them it is there.
Kate: It is just like offering support, so that they can feel secure about doing stuff I suppose. And when they do one little thing, they are getting a wee bit more strength all the time. And the next thing comes a bit easier.

Lena: Empowerment means to me that every woman has the right and the opportunity to make her own choices in life. That’s basically it I think. She had the power to make her own choices, her own decisions.

Maria: Empowerment is about a way of working. I’m definitely not a rescuer – it is their problem and I can’t change that… I think it is more about being a catalyst, being able to give information, or just to listen. You give women information or a chance to know all their choices, because ultimately the decision is theirs. They have to live with their choice.

The participants’ comments above illustrate the Refuge’s success in encouraging prospective advocates to take on the language of empowerment. How did they do this? In the next chapter I will discuss the teaching and learning strategies utilised in the induction course, highlighting some of the contradictions and tensions arising from competing discourses, including using consciousness-raising in an situation where advocates were being assessed for their suitability.
CHAPTER SEVEN

INDUCTION TRAINING: LEARNING TO ‘DO’ EMPOWERMENT

Speaking out

We encourage people to be open, and to speak out about things. It is 'talk about all your stereotypes and your ideas, and let's not be caught up in being politically correct'. So we encourage people to voice these things. But at the same time, at the end of the day, if you are going to voice your prejudices you have to show that you have changed your mind, or have shifted, or else you are not going to be allowed to continue (Jen – training committee, interview).

Playing the game

It was really like playing the game. Doing your rounds, saying you learned a lot, that you were feeling good and really happy, and liked everyone (Julie – trainee advocate, interview).

Introduction

This chapter is about the way that new advocates constructed themselves as Refuge advocates through the Refuge induction training. To do this, the women needed to demonstrate certain abilities such as listening skills and knowledge of the Domestic Violence Act. However, they also had to take on the particular lens that the Refuge

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31 As discussed in Chapter One, (p 18) I will begin Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine with poems created from the words of the participants. I do this to signal the centrality of their voices in these chapters.
used to view the world. I ended the last chapter with illustrations of how at the completion of their induction course, the prospective volunteer advocates were ‘doing the talk of empowerment’. In this chapter I concentrate on the way that the Refuge promoted discourses of power, empowerment and women’s oppression within patriarchy. I explore the way that the prospective volunteer advocates took up or resisted these ideas. I will show how the prospective advocates utilised the talk of ‘empowerment’, while carefully adjusting their behaviour to perceptions of the ‘ideal advocate’.

As I have discussed in Chapter Five (p 125), consciousness-raising was an innovative discourse of learning from experience from the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s. In this chapter I explore the way that consciousness-raising strategies utilised by the Women’s Refuge in the late 1990s become problematic when used as an institutional practice for inducting new volunteer advocates. The early consciousness-raising groups used women’s individual experiences and shared stories for analysis and theory building. In the Refuge, the training also started with individual experience and shared stories as a basis for analysis. However, the fundamental difference is that the Refuge had existing theories and discourses that the volunteer advocates needed to take on board to be acceptable within the organisation. The Refuge used consciousness-raising strategies to set up its dominant discourses as the subject positions for new volunteer advocates. I discuss the tensions that this created when the discourses presented did not accommodate the complexities of the lives of potential advocates.

I also discuss the use of consciousness-raising strategies in an assessable situation. Throughout the training the women were being covertly assessed for their suitability as Refuge advocates. The women on this course, being aware of this, very quickly adopted self-surveillance and self-monitoring of their stories about their experiences. As Julie’s poem at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, they very quickly worked out how to “play the game”.

Throughout this chapter I explore the ways that the prospective Refuge advocates ‘normalised’ their talk and behaviour during the induction course, to fit with what they perceived as desirable to the Refuge trainers. I argue that Refuge training, like
all other contexts, was a power-laden environment. I use ‘power’ in the Foucauldian way to indicate that the ‘Refuge way of doing things’ “engender[s] apparatuses of knowledge and a multiplicity of new domains of understanding... The code they come to define is not that of law, but that of normalisation” (Foucault, 1980a, p 106). This is a different conception of power to the one utilised by the Refuge during the induction training and discussed later in this chapter. The Refuge trainers constructed power in a modernist way as something that individuals and groups of individuals held and exercised over others. Within the Refuge framing, men through the institutions of patriarchy held power. The Refuge discussed power at an individual and group level as ‘power over’, ‘power for’. The Refuge training manual (Lambourne, 1990, p 4.6) emphasises the centrality of this analysis to the work of the Refuge.

The Refuge workers need a clear analysis of how power works in our society if they are to be effective advocates for women in the Refuge. They also need to acknowledge and access their own ‘power for’ to support and assist the Refuge users.

**Induction course: context**

The Refuge training committee was responsible for organising and running training sessions to recruit new volunteers to work as volunteer advocates within the organisation. It was members of the training committee, both paid staff and volunteer advocates, who not only planned but also ran some of the sessions. The induction course was held on two evenings a week and two Saturdays over a month. The course totalled 50 hours. The course that I attended was loosely based on the sessions outlined in the Refuge Manual (Lambourne, 1990), which had been prepared for all Refuges affiliated to the National Collective of Independent Women’s Refuges.

The Refuge usually offered two training induction courses a year, although during my time in the field an additional course was run to try and recruit more volunteers because they did not have enough advocates to fill the roster slots for the crisis line. The training course I attended included sessions on: an introduction to the Refuge; women’s realities; power and control; diverse sexualities; listening skills; sexual
abuse; the Domestic Protection Act and custody issues; working with the police; mental health; drug and alcohol; structures of the Refuge; working with difference; administration & visit to the Refuge; Treaty of Waitangi; parallel development. In this chapter I focus particularly on the first three sessions of the training, because members of the Refuge training committee facilitated these sessions. These three sessions were the 'theoretical' ones, where the Refuge as an organisation presented its philosophy that shaped its practices to the new advocates. People from outside the organisation facilitated most of the subsequent sessions. For example a senior police officer spoke on the police's relationship with the Refuge and a member of the Drug and Alcohol Team spoke on drug and alcohol issues that might affect the clients of the Refuge.

The prospective volunteer advocates had all completed a written application form prior to being accepted on the training course. The stated criteria for entrance to the course were that the women had lived violence-free lives for three years, had access to a telephone, had a clean driver's licence, and were prepared to give six hours a week to the Refuge for twelve months. They were not told of any further process of assessing their suitability to work as Refuge advocates. However, when I interviewed the women at the end of the training course, most talked about knowing that some sort of assessment or 'weeding out' process was occurring during the training course. I discuss this in detail later in this chapter.

By focussing in particular on the 'Women's Realities' and 'Power and Control' sessions, I explore the way the Refuge worked to get the new volunteer advocates to take on the Refuge discourses of oppression, power, and empowerment. They did this by utilising strategies of consciousness-raising, as discussed in Chapter Four (p 125). However, I will argue that because the organisation made available a set of discursive positions that the volunteer advocates needed to position themselves within, the process of using experience as the basis for learning became complicated. Not only did women need to have had certain experiences, but also they needed to interpret them in quite specific ways if they were to be accepted as advocates. They needed to learn to do the talk of empowerment that the Refuge demanded.
Underlying a model of consciousness-raising, there was a need for the new advocates to utilise discourses, to take up particular subject positions within those discourses, and to demonstrate that they had done this in their talk. The Refuge training was based on utilising experiences of the participants, but these needed to be discussed and framed in particular ways. I argue that consciousness-raising was used not so much for the personal development of the women attending the course, but as a way of strategically constructing an ‘empowering subjectivity’. Because the Refuge had specific goals in mind for this training - ultimately to have a pool of volunteer advocates who could do the work of the organisation - assessment became part of the process. I discuss some of the tensions that arose by using assessment within a consciousness-raising model of learning.

**Talking empowerment**

At the end of the previous chapter I illustrated how the new volunteer advocates were clearly speaking from within the Refuge discourse of empowerment. In this chapter I explore the way that the organisation promoted an understanding of empowerment based on a radical feminist analysis of power.

Lena [new advocate]: Empowerment means to me that a woman has the right and is given the opportunity to make her own choices in life. That’s basically it I think. She has the power to make her own choices, her own decisions…. I see that what I will be doing in the Refuge is giving the women a chance to get out of their violent and negative situations and give them the space and information and support to move towards gaining this ability to make their own choices.

Like Lena, most of the participants described empowerment in terms of offering women choices, through support and information. This is similar to the model that Morrow and Hawkhurst (1998) developed for feminist counselling practice. They described empowerment as permission, enablement and information. The trainee volunteer advocates had clearly taken on board the Refuge language of empowerment.
which they interpreted as supporting women to have choices in their lives. In the Refuge situation, choice can mean leaving a violent situation, but it can also mean going back to the partner. Throughout the training it was emphasised that many women will return to their violent partners many times, before they finally make the break and leave permanently. They described a pattern of many women returning to the Refuge and becoming a “little bit more empowered each time, so eventually she will feel empowered enough to leave her partner” (Fieldnotes from Introductory session of training course). This view was obviously taken up by Alix. It was however challenged by Julie.

Alix: I think that when the Refuge talks about empowerment it does something that is very hard but very important. It provides women with the resources to make their own choices, and supports them in those choices when the organisation sees it as beneficial or not beneficial for the woman. So it allows them to develop their own sense of power in their own time. Which must be really hard. It is about providing women with the resources and a lot of autonomy.

For Alix empowerment meant providing the women with resources and autonomy and supporting their decisions even if it was to return to violent partners. However, for Julie, empowerment was a more active process. She recognised that empowerment in the Refuge was about offering the women choices, but she wanted to be in a position as empowerer, to actively influence the women. For Julie, empowerment was not just about supporting women to make choices, but to make what she considered the ‘right choices’.

Julie: Empowerment is about choices, options. I know that all throughout the training it’s just rammed down your throat this whole idea of not putting your own opinions on other women, and not doing anything like that. And that is fine and good. BUT, and it is a big BUT, to me it is more than just offering choice. All this stuff about “We are just there to listen to the women and we are not there to change anything”, that is not how
I feel about it at all. Of course I want to advocate for change -
good change, positive change. There is no need for women to be
in violent situations. It doesn’t mean me ramming information or
pamphlets down their throats, but I do want to influence women.

Later in this chapter I come back to the way that trainee advocates, like Julie, kept
quiet about their differences in order to be accepted as volunteer advocates within the
organisation. I explore the way that the Refuge, through the induction course,
managed to get the volunteer advocates to do the talk of empowerment: how their talk
shifted from ideas about helping to ideas about empowerment.

**Beginning with experience**

The Refuge placed greater emphasis on drawing on the experiences of the women
attending the training course as the basis for knowledge, than they did on other forms
of knowledge, for example a statistical analysis of domestic violence, or written
material about domestic violence. This particular Refuge changed the order of the
sessions so that ‘Women’s Realities’ preceded ‘Power and Control’ because they
believed that it was better to work from the individual woman’s experience to wider
issues of institutional power. In a planning meeting the training committee discussed
the order of the sessions.

*Christine: The power and control has usually come into that
women’s realities session because that is very personalized I
guess. It is introduced in that session and then it is seen in its
wider context as to why that happens locally.*

*Jess: So you move from the personal and how it operates for you
and into the next bit, which is the institutional stuff...*

*Christine: For me, understanding the realities of women’s
oppression it is the whole foundation on which to build those
other skills on. I mean the reason that we exist and the reason*
that the Refuge is needed in the first place is to do with [pause]  
with what happens to women.

Ordering the course in this way was consistent with the Refuge philosophy of  
beginning with the experiences of the women themselves. In this way the  
organisation hoped to enable the women to draw the links between their own  
experiences and the oppressive nature of patriarchy and structures in society.

**Women's Realities: beginning with experience**

The 'Women's Realities' session, the second session of the induction training course,  
was facilitated by Christine, one of the paid staff members from the Refuge. The  
aims of the Women's Realities session (Lambourne, 1990, p 5.1) were: to examine  
stereotypes that exist in society; to examine oppression of women through  
maintenance of these stereotypes, language etc; and to reach accord in women's  
understandings of feminism. This session drew heavily on radical feminist notions of  
women as a group oppressed by patriarchy. After identifying words commonly used  
to describe women, such as “homemaker, ladylike, passive, submissive, responsible,  
dependent, nagger, peacemaker”, the group was split into small groups to discuss the  
messages that they, their mothers and grandmothers received from society.

The group then moved on to discuss the discourses that shaped the experiences of  
their mothers and grandmothers, with the emphasis being placed on patriarchy as  
limiting women’s choices. By instructing the groups to discuss the kinds of  
‘stereotypes that limited women’s choices and where those stereotypes came from’.
Christine was utilising the individual experiences of the women in the group to  
illustrate a theory of women’s oppression. Members of the group were encouraged to  
make the links between their individual experiences and the discourses of patriarchal  
oppression that shaped the experiences of all women. The training manual suggested  
that:

Women may wish to share personal stories and experiences.  
Encourage them to do this... make the links between these  
findings and the oppression of women clear to the group i.e. the
stereotypes become accepted thinking, women themselves often believe them. Challenging them becomes highly threatening to others. (Lambourne, 1990, p. 5.3)

By providing such a singular analysis of women’s realities, i.e. women’s oppression, the organisation was able to encourage some of the women to think about issues that they had not considered previously. For example, during the small group discussions, some women ‘did the talk’ of social construction of women’s oppression.

Sandra: I’ve never thought about it before, but my mother was always expected to put other people first. I don’t know if she was happy with her life, but it seemed like she had no views of her own, and no expectations of her own.

Lena: My mother is like that. She’s widowed now, but she never has a view of her own. Even if she is discussing things with her neighbour, she says Lena thinks that... or Tom says that... She never ever expresses her own opinion on anything.

Sandra: Yes, it is that, but I think it is more than that. It is not only her not having her own views, but that she wouldn’t consider that it is appropriate for her to have any views. My father always told her who to vote for, and I guess that she did vote for them, even if she hated them. I don’t think that she ever realised that she had any choice in anything. I don’t know.

In this conversation Sandra, for the first time, made links between her mother’s life and societal expectations of what it meant to be a woman in that particular time and context. This involved a shift from, that is the ‘way my mother was’, to ‘why my mother was like this.’ What were the social conditions and expectations of women that led her to be so compliant? For the first time, Sandra was critically examining her ‘taken-for-granted knowledge’ of her mother. Later when I interviewed Sandra, she talked about the violence in her home when she grew up, and how this analysis was useful to her because it allowed her to construct her mother’s staying in a violent relationship in a new way. It was not just that her mother was not able to make the
break and leave the situation, but that social expectations of what it was to be a woman had shaped what was possible for her mother. Sandra stated: "In those days it was 'you have made your bed and you must lie on it'".

Some members of the group had more difficulty drawing on their own experiences and then making the links to women as an oppressed group. For example, Kate (aged 23) found it difficult to complete the exercise because her mother died when she was very young, and she did not have this particular experience available to her. She had been brought up by her father in what she described as a "very easy type of bringing up. We did what we wanted to". Kate had to go back to her grandmother's life to be able to contribute to the discussion. Unlike other members in the small group discussion, she constructed her grandmother's life very positively.

We had a lot to do with my Granny. She was a really homey type. She always provided good food and was there for me. She didn't go out to work and she always had things like tins full of home baking for us to eat.

For Kate this discourse of domesticity was a positive one. Her grandmother had been available to care for and nurture her after her mother died. However, this construction did not fit with the experiences of the other member of the group, and in a subsequent brainstorming exercise that followed, domesticity was constructed very negatively by the facilitator and the rest of the group. Kate did not offer her experiences to the large group discussion, and was effectively silenced by the discussion that followed. I think that this is an example of self-surveillance, where Kate remained silent rather than offer an account of her experience that did not fit the discourse promoted by the Refuge.

The purpose of the exercise was to get women thinking about the messages they received about what it is to be a woman, and to examine the oppression of women through maintenance of those stereotypes and language (Lambourne, 1990, p 5.1). One of the tensions that arose from using this approach was that some women did not identify with the discourse being promoted, because the life experiences that they could draw on were different to those of other members of the group. However, there
was no space in the programme to acknowledge those differences. As the training committee members discussed at the end of another training course, any resistance to the dominant Refuge discourse of all women as oppressed was because the women simply did not recognise their own oppression. Not articulating your ‘oppression’ meant that you were even more oppressed because you couldn’t see it.

_Jess_: _Some women say, “I’m not oppressed as a woman.” And that is really just because they are not aware, they may not be aware of all the systems out there that actually are oppressing them._

In an environment where volunteers knew that they were being assessed for their suitability to work as Refuge advocates, the women who found that their experiences did not fit the model being promoted by the Refuge were effectively silenced. They recognised that if they wanted to be advocates they needed to, as Julie put it, “play the game” and present themselves and their ideas in ways that were acceptable to the Refuge.

**Women’s Realities: A powerful discourse**

The Refuge drew on radical feminist ideas about women’s oppression within patriarchal structures. As I discussed in Chapter Five (p 122), ideas of patriarchal control are central to the philosophy of the Refuge. In this particular context ‘patriarchal control’ means men’s control of intimate relations, a control based on economic advantages and an historical association of men and physical violence.

Within this framework all women are oppressed to a greater or lesser extent. While on one hand this discourse of women’s oppression did not seem to allow any space for agency, the Refuge construction of power did accommodate ideas of agency. The manual emphasises that the women running the training should point out that there are two types of power:

- **Power over**: refers to domination, control, and oppression to the benefit of the people in power. A clear example is the apartheid system of government in South Africa. Power for is power in a
positive sense. It's our personal ability, our integrity, such as when we stand up and demand our rights, or fight for our beliefs. An example is our work in the Refuge - using our combined power to make a stand against violence and abuse of women and children. (Lambourne, 1990, p 4.2)

While there is no question of the oppression faced by Blacks and Coloured people in South Africa under apartheid, a Foucauldian analysis would claim that this oppression was maintained by a myriad of practices that upheld the discourse of 'white supremacy'. Similarly, I argue that it is through the discursive practices of patriarchal relations that violence against women occurs. I argue that power is not always hierarchical or visible. I think it is by examining the day-to-day practices of institutions including 'the family' that we can see the power operating. Power in the Foucauldian sense is not always negative, nor a totalising force (Ryan, 2001, p 34). The Refuge notion of 'power for' suggests that, even though women as a group are oppressed, there is room for resistance. By making a stand against violence and abuse of women, the Refuge resists notions of male oppression and takes up an active position. Within the Refuge in this study, the active position is as an 'empowerer'.

The Refuge did not explicitly draw on any particular theorists in their discourses of power, powerlessness and empowerment. However, I see close connections between what they presented to the new advocates and the model that Morrow and Hawkhurst (1998, p 7) present.

Empowerment consists of analysing power and identifying potential action at the personal, interpersonal, and social dimensions. At each dimension are conditions - permission, enablement, and information - that must operate in order for empowerment to occur.

Morrow and Hawkhurst's claim that empowerment comes from analysing power and identifying potential action at the personal, interpersonal, and social dimensions, fits within a critical discourse. In Chapter Five (p 119) I argued that learning from experience from a critical perspective involves learners analysing the mechanisms of cultural power and domination (Flax, 1993; Freire, 1970; Weller, 1988). Working from a discourse of radical feminism, a form of critical theory, I contend that the Refuge training sought to identify and analyse the mechanisms of power at the
personal, interpersonal and social dimensions. Throughout the training the Refuge emphasised the links between personal and political. I will discuss this later in this chapter (p.137), but first I want to look more closely at the idea of empowerment as permission, enablement, and information. I think that these notions provide a useful framework for examining the components of empowerment as taught by the Refuge.

During the women’s realities session, Christine talked about power and powerlessness and empowerment in the following way:

I like to think of power as on a continuum. At the beginning when the women come into the Refuge they are powerless. They are powerless because of the situations they have been in. Although they have taken some power by leaving their violent partners. At that stage we as Refuge advocates, have power over the women. We are the ones with the knowledge and information, so we work to empower the women. Then we have shared power. We might do this by making suggestions, and they say, “Yes that is something I want to try to do”. So we share power with them. When the women try something and find that they can do it, they become empowered. The final thing is where the women become powerful themselves. This is the ideal and sometimes you see it happen. Sometimes it doesn’t, and the women remain powerless. They need a lot of support. Somewhere I read that women often go back into a violent relationship up to five times before they finally leave.

Clearly Christine is constructing power as something that one has and can share or give to another person. In her model the women who come into the Refuge are powerless because of the situations they have been in – living with a violent partners who have ‘power over’ them. In this way Christine is conflating notions of power with notions of force or domination. Throughout the training, what the Refuge describes as ‘power over’ is linked to these ideas of force and domination.

\footnote{See Chapter Four for a theoretical discussion on empowerment.}
What Christine is describing as a process of sharing power with the clients, is what Morrow (1998) calls ‘enablement’. Morrow argues that at the interpersonal dimension, enablement involves mentoring, support, assistance, or facilitation within the context of individual or group relationships through such actions as networking, support or consciousness-raising groups, or individual advocacy for another person. This is closely linked to the need for sharing information with those to be empowered. Christine makes this link very clearly when she talks about the advocates as being the ones with the power, because they are the ones with the knowledge and information, in this case about the processes and procedures to get out of a violent relationship. In Christine’s model power is shared with the women through a process of working alongside them and offering them support to try new alternatives. So not only are the advocates ‘giving power’ to the clients, they are also creating situations for the women to ‘take’ power for themselves. The fact that not all women avail themselves of this opportunity is constructed as part of a process. It takes time and support to become empowered, and it may not happen on a woman’s first visit to the Refuge. The assumption is that if the Refuge continues to support the woman, she will eventually ‘become powerful’ and leave the violent situation.

**Power and control: From the personal to the political**

The session that followed the ‘Women’s Realities’ session was titled ‘Power and Control’. The aims of the session were to provide women with a basic analysis of institutional power and an understanding of personal power; to examine the link between power and oppression and to examine the link between power and family violence.

The training manual (Lambourne, 1990, p 4.2) stated the following:

- Introduce the topic: Explain that power is an important issue in the process of social change - and that is a big part of what the Refuge is about. Power can be used against us, for us, and by us. We can and do use the power we have as individuals and as groups in many ways.
From this statement I interpret the Refuge as promoting the notion of agency. Women were oppressed by the power that patriarchy had over them, but there was ‘wiggle room’ (McWilliams et al., 1997) for women to take, and exercise power as individuals and groups. However, before women could explore their agency, it was necessary for them to understand the nature of their oppression. This is consistent with critical pedagogy as discussed in Chapter Four (p 119).

Jess, the training committee member facilitating the session drew triangles on the board each representing a structure in society where men dominated, for example, the police, WINZ (Work and Income New Zealand), the family. In all diagrams men were represented at the apex of the triangle and women and children were represented at the bottom. The diagrams illustrated that men, who had the power to make decisions that affect women and children, controlled institutions that affect women’s lives. As an example I include the diagram for WINZ.

![Diagram of WINZ structure]

The diagrams clearly showed that men were in positions of influence within structures, and the women and children who were clients of the organisations had very little power to shape their interaction with that institution. Jess described this social arrangement as ‘patriarchy’. When the diagrams were presented, Alix made the following comments:

Alix: I think that who holds power depends on the relationship; it depends on what the relationship is. Like in my work I have a lot
of power to make decisions for my clients, but that is only because of the relationship of consultant/patient. So it depends on the relationship - there are other times when I have very little or no power.

Jess: So you have power because of your position and your knowledge?

Alix: Yes I do, but it is more than just that - it is depending on the relationship.

Lena: That's like parenting too. Parents have power to make decisions for their children because that's what parents have to do. Until the child gets to a certain age to make its own decisions.

Karen: I think that parenting is like working with people with intellectual disabilities. You have to assist them to make their own decisions. Sometimes I think I could have a lot of power with the people I work with. I could make the rules and tell them that they've to do everything my way. But in the long term that is not good because they need to learn that they've power for their own lives and that they can make decisions.

Jess: That brings us nicely to the next section that we are going to look at which is decision making power.

I do not know if this issue was not discussed further because it did not fit the model proposed by the Refuge. The model of women as an oppressed group, did not allow for complexities resulting from relational positionings. Alix identified that in relations with her patients, who included men, she was relatively more powerful because of her positioning as a consultant. Similarly Lena and Karen identified positionings within a caring discourse where they held relative positions of power. The facilitator, who wanted the group to move on, closed down this discussion, and in
this way the women who wanted to introduce this complexity were silenced. It is also possible that this complexity of multiple positioning could also be interpreted as the notion of women having 'power for'; women having the agency to act in the best interests of others. Alternatively, the issue may not have been discussed because of time constraints. The women leading each session had a set programme to get through which meant that the complexities of the topic were often not discussed. These issues were left hanging and not picked up in future sessions, because each session was taken by a different person, which makes experiential learning for the new advocates very difficult.

In the next exercise of the ‘Power and Control’ session, the women were divided into small groups and instructed to draw triangles that represented their experiences of dealing with institutions. They were asked to identify who held the power in these institutions, who made the decisions, and how this affected them personally. In our small group Kate started out drawing a triangle representing her family. However she quickly realised that a simple triangle was inadequate to describe the power dynamics in her family:

Kate: I have a triangle in my immediate family. It has my partner Bob [separated] at the top and our son James in the middle and me at the bottom.

Lena: Why have you drawn it that way?

Kate: Because my partner has a lot of power when it comes to our son – he is always going on about who of my friends or boyfriends can be in contact with me and James [2 year old son]. And he got a court order so that I can’t take him out of town.

Lena: So in your family is it always that pattern?

Kate: No, with some things I’d be at the top and sometimes he [child’s father] is not even in the triangle. It’s difficult, I’ll need
to think about it. Perhaps I need a whole line of different triangles to describe everything.

Kate’s final drawing looked like this:

For Kate, the discourse of simple oppressor/oppressed is not adequate when she thinks of her own life experiences, which are more complex than the model can account for. Like Alix, she drew on ideas of relationality, to describe the power dynamics in her immediate family. When the small groups reported back to the whole group, this complexity was lost. Kate did not bring up her analysis, and all of the examples presented by other members of the group fitted the Refuge model of institutions controlled by men, with women situated at the bottom of the triangle in relatively powerless positions. I interpret Kate’s decision not to share her insights in the wider group as a form of self-surveillance. The models that she had developed to describe the power relations in her family, did not fit within the Refuge model of women as oppressed and powerlessly positioned at the bottom of the ‘triangle’, so she chose not to contribute to the large group discussion.

Power equations

One way of explaining the structures of society used by the Refuge was to develop a number of ‘power equations’. Up to this point in the ‘Power and Control’ session the focus had been on women as an oppressed group. The following exercise, which was the final one for that session started with women’s oppression and then widened the discussion to include other sorts of oppression. A key feature of these equations was that they “must describe two groups – the power group and the victim (oppressed) group’ (Lambourne, 1990, p 4.4). During the Power and Control session the group worked through a number of binaries to identify the ‘ism’ involved. ‘Binaries’ or ‘dualisms’ are ways of thinking that are structured as either/or. Binary oppositions always privilege one position more than its opposite. Poststructuralist theorising
rejects the logic of either/or thinking and adopts instead a logic of both/and (Burr, 1995, p 107).

When discussing ‘power equations’ the training group came up with the following binaries as an explanation for the way that power worked in our society:

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The group also identified other examples: ageism and ableism. Within a model of radical feminism, which privileges the oppression of women above all other types of oppression, Refuge is acknowledging that there are other sorts of oppression operating within society and that these interact with oppression of women as a group. However, during this session there was no time for discussion of the way that these systems are mutually reinforcing, or that we can be multiply positioned as both oppressor and oppressed. I do not know if this would have been raised anyway. There was no link back to what Alix, Karen, and Kate had been saying about the relational nature of power and oppression. Alix and Karen both identified that in some situations, especially where they were able bodied women working with people with mental
disabilities, they wielded considerable power over the men as well as over other women.

Even though the Refuge training drew heavily on the women’s experiences, the women were increasingly aware that they needed to present their ideas in certain ways that were aligned to those of the Refuge. In an interview Alix talked about how she was silenced during a session, and that she recognised that every organisation has a particular way of being and presenting itself.

Alix: Yeah, and I felt, towards the end of the power and control one I said something about “You know is hierarchical set-up always bad? You know I just want to do my time.” And it was like “Yes, but I invite you to think....” [laugh] Yeah, OK. So whenever you work in an organisation or a system where they’ve set ways of doing things, and there are things to facilitate people feeling empowered and you know everything is set up in quite a politically correct way, you are going to have things that might be a bit pompous, and you might go into stuff in too much detail than you feel you need to.

I see Alix’s comments to the facilitator of the session as an example of situative resistance. She questioned the way that the Refuge organised itself by suggesting that she would be happy working in a hierarchical situation as a Refuge Advocate. She got the message very clearly that discussing a Refuge hierarchy was not an appropriate response. Although she did not use the language, Alix is commenting on the discursive practices of the organisation, which she recognises as occurring in all organisations.

**Complexities of power**

By providing a simple linear model of power and women’s oppression, the Refuge worked to give the new advocates an understanding of the discourses that the Refuge worked within. For new advocates who may not have previously been exposed to
feminist ideas, this was intended to provide them with a framework for their work with women and children who had been abused, overwhelmingly by men. So for the advocates working with most of the women using the Refuge, this discourse of men as oppressors and women as victims may have been adequate. But the model of men as abusers and women as victims did not accommodate the possibility of women as abusers.

The training course included a session that was not included in the Refuge Manual: one of “Diverse sexualities”. Although this particular Refuge has a long history of lesbian involvement, including a policy of lesbian visibility, it is only relatively recently that this recognition has been extended to acknowledge that some lesbian relationships are violent, and that some lesbians use the Refuge as clients. The “Diverse Sexualities” session focused on heterosexism, with the expressed aim of getting the participants to examine their own assumptions about sexuality. This was not simply a consciousness-raising exercise, but aimed at making the women aware that when they answered the crisis line, they should not make assumptions about the gender of the abuser. For example, they were encouraged to use neutral language like ‘partner’ rather than ‘husband or boyfriend’ when questioning the women about their situations. Although at a theoretical level the prospective advocates had adopted a discourse of women as oppressed by men, at a practical level they were being asked to accommodate ideas of women also as abusers.

The training sessions were led or facilitated by different people each time, and the session on heterosexism was facilitated by an ‘outside consultant’. The session was self-contained and did not draw on the previous theoretical discourses of men as perpetrators of violence and women as victims. Clearly in this session if some lesbian relationships were violent, the perpetrator must also be a woman. This did not fit within the Refuge discourse of women as victims of male violence. When I interviewed Alix, she talked about the “Diverse Sexualities” session which she found to be really useful, not only because it raised the issue of women’s violence, but also because it gave her permission to talk outside the frame of male violence against women.
What I did find myself thinking though, in the third session, that it was very much orientated towards the power that men wield over women, and I don’t know. You might have heard my comments in the later one on celebrating diverse sexualities. I was wondering what it would be like for women who were the victims of violence within lesbian relationships. And I just felt that in the back of my mind, throughout this whole process, it must be so totally different for them and what must it be like to be in a situation where... It seems to me to be ironic that a situation which is set up by lesbian women for women to protect them from violence is probably not geared to look after their own... and I didn’t really feel safe in that third session, the power and control session to say that. It was in the back of my mind and I very much doubted that I would ever bring it up. I was quite pleased that in the fourth one I was able to do so. In fact we were invited to do so, really given the case studies.

By utilising a monolithic discourse of male violence and women’s oppression, the Refuge set up a context that made it difficult for the new volunteer advocates to account for greater complexity. It also resulted in the volunteer advocates self-monitoring what they could say in the group. Alix felt unable to comment on the issue of women as violent in the previous session, because it was outside the model presented by the Refuge. It was only in a subsequent session where the participants were being challenged to think of ways that they could make lesbians feel comfortable using the service, that she was able to talk about this issue.

Since different women were leading each individual session, it was difficult for the course to achieve any internal coherence. Abby, the tutor for the ‘Diverse Sexualities’ session, did not know about the theoretical framework presented in the previous two sessions. Her session focused on issues of practice within the Refuge, and most of the women attending found it to be the most enjoyable and interesting session of the whole course.
Although most women found the ‘Diverse Sexualities’ session particularly useful, Maria had a different view. It was in this session she learned not to offer comments or views that were different to those being presented. At one stage in that session she had a rather heated discussion with the facilitator as to whether as a heterosexual woman she could adequately support a lesbian needing to use the Refuge. Maria was adamant that she could do this because she had the generic skills needed for a range of situations. However, during an interview she described how this discussion silenced her in future sessions:

Maria: I made a comment, basically saying I didn’t like being told I couldn’t work with this woman because I wasn’t lesbian. That’s like saying I’m less of a person because I don’t have this sexual orientation, and that I can’t be caring and understanding or supportive. What she [session tutor] did was she turned around and said to me under her breath, so that only a few would have heard, “It’s very interesting, maybe you need to look at the issue behind that statement.”...So in the future I probably will not voice that. If I express something that’s against what they believe, I will get the same, flicked back on me. “It’s your problem. It’s your issue, deal with it”. And that’s not what I want if I’m going to go with a personal issue that comes up through the work.

The silencing of Maria during the session made her very aware of what she could and could not do within the confines of the organisation. The organisation was not open to her particular challenges, and she was very clear that she would monitor her discussions in future, and that she would not seek support from people who had different views to her own.

The inclusion of the ‘Diverse Sexualities’ session challenged the Refuge’s assumptions about domestic violence, and acknowledged that lesbian relationships could also be abusive. The issue of lesbian abuse suggests that the theoretical basis for the work in the Refuge, as it was presented in this induction course, did not fit the actual practices of the organisation. The philosophy of the Refuge was built on
radical feminist ideas of women as an oppressed group. Domestic violence was seen as an extreme result of the exercise of patriarchal power. But this theoretical model does not account for the complexities of women’s lives. On a practical level the trainee advocates were encouraged to recognise the implication of lesbian violence for their work as advocates, but the theoretical framing that the Refuge put forward of women’s oppression and men’s violence, did not account for lesbian violence.

*Consciousness-raising and assessment*

The purpose of the training for the Refuge was to have a pool of volunteer advocates to do the work of the Refuge. The training course was a way of assessing the suitability of the potential advocates. In the previous chapter (p 131) I have detailed what the organisation was looking for in its new advocates. The Refuge wanted advocates who were self-confident, self-aware, open to having their existing ways of thinking challenged and willing to learn new things. They needed volunteers who embraced the dominant discourses of the Refuge, and who would have a theoretical understanding of women’s oppression and empowerment to guide them in their work. Because the work of the Refuge is so varied, and it is not possible to predict all the possible scenarios that the new volunteer advocates might have to deal with, the organisation believed that these understandings of oppression and empowerment were the foundation for building skills. If women worked from within the Refuge discourses of power and empowerment, their responses and actions with the women who used the Refuge were more likely to be appropriate, than if, for example, they operated from a charity discourse.

Throughout the induction course the women were being assessed as to their suitability to work as volunteer advocates. This was not an overt process, and the criteria that the Refuge were looking for was never spelt out to the participants. The assessment process for this particular course was very informal; at the end of the course the training committee members met and discussed each participant on the basis of what they observed during the training course. No members of the training committee had been present at all sessions, with most attending only one. All participants for this
particular training course were accepted. They were told at the following session that they had all been accepted into the practical phase of their training.

Any form of consciousness-raising relies on participants being open about their values, attitudes and experiences. Jen, one of the training committee members, described how she saw consciousness-raising working in this context.

We encourage people to be open, and to speak out about things…. it is talk about all your stereotypes, and your ideas, and let’s not be caught up in being politically correct…. So there is a certain amount of naivety we are relying on so that women will actually express things that might be inappropriate sentiments.

What I understand from this statement is that if you express ‘inappropriate sentiments’ or question any of ‘the Refuge’s regimes of truth’, your suitability to do the work becomes an issue. The question for me is, does that mean that consciousness-raising becomes simply surveillance? How do the new advocates know which discourses are open to challenge and which are not? Obviously some of them don’t work it out, but others do. As Julie explained, most participants were very aware of the contradictions between expressing ideas that would not be acceptable in this particular forum, and being assessed as a suitable person to be part of the Refuge:

It was really clear that throughout the course they were still sifting us to see if you are suitable for this kind of work, and depending on what you say you may or may not be accepted. It was really like playing the game: Doing your rounds, saying you learned a lot, that you were feeling good and really happy, and liked everyone. It was really contributing, and being extremely careful, weighing each word you spoke in front of the large group. Being careful about what you said so that none of your prejudices came out…pretending that we are all politically correct and don’t bring prior baggage to anything.
But it just depends on what sort of person you are. That’s the thing. But we’re supposed to be these strong willed, strong-minded women, and we need to feel safe that we can say what we want to. And it is just bull. It still all boils down to fitting in, and meeting certain criteria. And that’s really sad. It’s ironic really isn’t it? What we are doing, and how it conflicts with still being examined and presenting a certain side of yourself to get through. Yeah, it’s just ironic, that’s what we’re not supposed to be, not supposed to promote, and yet that’s what we need to do to get through the training. [laughs]

Here I identify a paradox of Women’s Refuge training. The Refuge wants assertive and aware women to work as volunteers. But this assertiveness and awareness needs to be shaped to a Refuge model of the ‘ideal Refuge advocate’. Women needed not just skills and knowledge, but to adopt particular subjectivities for constituting themselves as advocates. In order to be assessed as suitable to work as volunteer advocates they needed to meet a number of unstated criteria. The potential advocates were all aware that they were being assessed but were unsure of the criteria. Julie clearly identified a number of criteria that she thought she was being assessed against. These included ‘playing the game’ and being co-operative within the training. Self-surveillance was essential, and prospective advocates needed to ‘fit in’ and not allow any of their ‘prejudices to come through’. The way that Julie did this was to remain silent on issues that fell outside the Refuge discourses and present only “a certain side of yourself to get through.”

I identify this as one of the major tensions in the training course offered by the Refuge. On one hand the training is based on women’s experiences and their interpretation of those experiences. However, this relies on women feeling comfortable about sharing information about their lives, their values and ways of seeing the world. But throughout the training, the women were aware that they were being assessed using some implicit undisclosed criteria, and self monitored their contributions to the discussions.
Chapter summary

In this chapter I have primarily focussed on two of the induction training course sessions, Women’s Realities, and Power and Control because it was during these sessions that the organisation introduced the theoretical basis for its work. These two sessions were based on an understanding of learning from experience where the new advocates were asked to tell stories of their lives and experiences in a process similar to 1970s consciousness-raising. The training committee expected the new advocates to be open and discuss their “prejudices and stereotypes”. This created tensions because the new advocates were aware that they were being assessed (against unknown criteria) and presented themselves in ways that they thought acceptable in the Refuge context. This involved a process of self-surveillance where they monitored their stories and shared only those that could be accommodated within the subject positions offered by Refuge.

I began this chapter with a quote from Julie about ‘playing the game’ to get through the Refuge training and be accepted as a volunteer advocate. But if women are ‘playing the game’ to get through the training, what are the implications for their practice once they are no longer under direct surveillance? I end the chapter with Jess’s response to the issue of women presenting particular subjectivities to fit Refugee discourses.

Jess: I do see that, and if people aren’t being up-front about their values, how are they going to be open to change?

Lesley: They may not necessarily be open to change. They want to be part of the group and they are smart enough to work out what is acceptable in the group.

Jess: But that then has real problems when it comes to practice.
CHAPTER EIGHT

MENTORING: DOING IT RIGHT

It is about modelling Refuge values.

Like empowering women who phone in.

On the phone, I'm sympathetic,
I listen and I try not to talk too much.
I try to give back to the woman some sort of control,
some ability to now be in a state to think more clearly.
Giving them some kind of feeling of self worth and self esteem.
Not telling them, but letting them find it for themselves.

It is those sorts of things, that you do learn how to do.
It takes time, but then you realise that you are doing it
(Dawn, participant interview).

Introduction

Fieldnotes 28 May 1998
I arrive late for my lunch date with Jen from the Refuge. She is sitting at an outside
table under the trees, working on a bunch of papers. Her cell phone is on the table
with the papers. When I sit down, I see that she is working on the Refuge rosters for
the following week. She tells me that she is having difficulty filling them. The
Refuge roster for answering the crisis line is divided into 7 slots for each 24-hour
period. So for a week Jen has to fill 49 slots. I look at the timetable, noting that
although some women are filling several rosters, I count ten empty slots. Jen has
phoned the eight active roster women; and several have picked up extra rosters in
addition to their two regular slots each week. But Jen has been unable to cover:

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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>6 pm - 10 pm.</td>
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Jen: It is really difficult when the pool of volunteers gets so low, it means that everyone gets loaded up with extra roster times. It is complicated just now too because I’m trying to get the experienced advocates to take their rosters at the Refuge house so that the new advocates can work with them. But supervising new advocates puts an extra load on those few who are holding the crisis line together. We desperately need to get the new volunteers to the stage where they can pick up rosters on their own. But we don’t have enough experienced advocates to do that quickly.

Lesley: So what happens now?

Jen: I’ll have to cover the overnight and weekend ones myself as best I can. During the work day I’ll ask for any calls that come in at those times to be put through to the Refuge office. The paid staff won’t like it, because it interrupts their work, but what else can I do? It is the same with having an experienced advocate in during the day. If I can’t get people, I have to ask if the paid staff can supervise new advocates on roster during those times.

The material constraints on the Refuge were most visible during the mentoring phase of training for the new volunteer advocates. The Refuge did not have enough existing volunteers to keep the crisis line open for 24 hours, seven days a week. It did not have the money needed to employ staff specifically to work on the crisis line. Putting crisis calls through to the paid staff at the Refuge interrupted the work they were paid to do. Asking ‘experienced’ advocates to do their phone rosters at the Refuge rather than in their own homes placed an added burden on a small pool of already overstretched women. This is the background context into which the new volunteer advocates began phase two, the mentored component of their training.

All volunteer advocates at the Refuge worked on the crisis line. They completed roster slots where they were responsible for taking all calls from the crisis line, and taking appropriate action to support the women and children who were subject to abuse. Advocates received a very wide range of calls via the crisis line: women in situations of danger needing to be taken into the Refuge for safety; calls from the Police requesting assistance; calls from men looking for their partners who they think might be staying at the Refuge, requests for information about legal protection rights and child custody rights; calls from the public offering donations of food, clothing or furniture. Action resulting from calls may include ‘call-outs’ to pick up women and children needing to come into the Safe house at the Refuge, and accompanying women to lawyers, Family Court, or Accident and Emergency. During the night, or
rosters over the weekends, a call-out might entail going to the Refuge Safe house to assist sorting out various crises that arose. During the induction training the new advocates had undertaken training in listening skills, communication skills, legal issues including the relevant legislation and government polices, working with the Police, and other support systems in the community. The training committee and the new advocates saw the supervised rosters as the time when they put this initial training into practice in an environment that would be safe for them and the clients.

‘Experienced’ advocates, who had worked for the Refuge for at least 12 months, made themselves available to complete their rosters at the Refuge, so that they could work with the new advocates. Training committee members wanted each new advocate to be matched with one experienced advocate who would mentor the new advocate through this stage of their training. However, the scarcity of ‘experienced’ advocates who were available, and the logistics of finding times when new advocates could be at the Refuge, made this unworkable. The ‘experienced’ advocates filled in slots on a monthly roster sheet, and new advocates wrote their names in slots where they could attend. This sometimes resulted in up to three new advocates on duty with one ‘experienced’ advocate. New advocates also worked with a variety of ‘experienced’ advocates, rather than being mentored by one particular advocate.

The first session of supervised roster was an observation session. The new advocates watched the ‘experienced’ advocate take calls on the crisis line. In subsequent sessions, the new advocates were encouraged to take calls with the ‘experienced’ advocate sitting beside them to assist them with information and advice during the call. When a call resulted in a family being admitted to the Safe House, the new advocate accompanied the experienced advocate as an observer. When new advocates started on this phase of their training, they were given a list of tasks that they had to complete before they were able to go solo on roster. The list included: A visit to the Family Court; accompanying a client to Income Support; observing a crisis call-out; picking up a family from the community or police station; and observing an admission to the Refuge.

In this chapter I discuss the way that mentoring works within the Refuge context as a way of inducting the new advocates into their work. On one level, it is successful –
advocates who are supported by experienced advocates through supervised rosters learn the necessary skills and confidence to do rosters on the crisis line. However, as the women’s stories in this chapter show, it is very much a ‘hit or miss’ process. Some of the tensions that arise in the mentoring process at the Refuge directly result from a lack of resources, but at same time, many of the issues faced by the organisation are ones that occur in other contexts where apprenticeships or mentoring form the basis of learning from experience. These issues include a tendency to maintain the status quo, the idiosyncratic nature of mentoring, and mentoring as a technology of surveillance.

Throughout this chapter, I will be returning to some of the issues that arise from this type of practice. How does the organisation balance maintaining the status quo, while at the same time leaving room for advocates to contest established discourses, and introduce new ways of thinking and acting? How can the organisation ensure that new advocates acquire knowledge about not just how to do the work of the Refuge, but why it is done in particular ways? Another tension is the need for new advocates to have a variety of experiences so that they are exposed to a range of learning opportunities, whilst at the same time not compromising the services for clients. How are quality of service and learning strategies balanced by those training new advocates?

Mentoring: literature

In a brief history of the practice of mentoring, Darwin (2000, p197-98) claims that for centuries mentoring has been used as a vehicle for handing down knowledge, maintaining culture, supporting talent, and securing future leadership. Mentoring was prevalent in pre-revolutionary China, the English feudal system, the Guilds of Medieval times and during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Darwin argues that there was a strong reproductive element attached to mentoring, that meant it was well suited to relying on ritualised behaviour to protect the status quo.

Implicit in traditional mentoring practices are unchallenged assumptions about knowledge and power. Learning was a means
of transmitting knowledge to protégés, and the mentor’s primary role was to maintain culture. (Darwin, 2000 p 198)

Definitions of mentoring today are less restrictive and the way that mentoring is defined and used appears to depend on the context. Mentoring is a practice that is employed in a wide range of different situations, for example, in the workplace, in teacher education, in nursing education, and in academia. Within each context, the meaning and practices of mentoring are slightly different. There is a wealth of literature about mentoring, but I was unable to find any that directly related to voluntary organisations such as the Refuge which used mentoring as a strategy to train its volunteers. Although it is not a common practice in New Zealand, in some countries, for example Great Britain and the United States of America, organisations recruit volunteers to work as mentors with young people or sole parent families (for example (Cox, 2000). These volunteers are recruited specifically to work as mentors, which is different to the experienced members of the Refuge mentoring the new volunteer advocates.

In the absence of literature directly relating to contexts like the Refuge, I draw on teacher and nursing education literature on mentoring. I argue that although teacher and nursing education occurs in formal situations compared to the informal context of the Refuge, there are a number of common features. Zanting, Verloop and Vermunt (2001 p, 58) provide a useful compilation of features, and names of theorists who have written about mentoring in the teacher education field. There are a number of interpretations such as being: a model and instructor of students’ teaching (for example, Maynard & Furlong, 1994); an information source for tips and advice (for example, Hawkey, 1998); a co-enquirer who stimulates students' reflections on their own lessons (for example, Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993; Maynard & Furlong, 1994; Tomlinson, 1995); an evaluator (for example, Martin, 1996); a challenger (for example, Martin, 1996); a provider of an introduction to the teaching world (for example, Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993); and a coach or supporter (for example, Hawkey, 1998; Tomlinson, 1995). Many of these features identified by Zanting et al., were also present in the relationships between the more experienced members of the Refuge and the new advocates.
Although mentoring can describe a range of functions and relationships, how the mentors construct their mentoring role depends not only on their own experience of being mentored and what they have been taught about mentoring, but their own values and assumptions about learning (Hawkey, 1997, p 326). Maynard and Furlong (1995, pp 17-21) describe three models of mentoring in the teacher education context: the apprenticeship model, the competency model, and the reflective model. These models are not discrete, and a mentor may operate from more than one at any time, but they do provide a useful starting point for considering discourses of mentoring at the Refuge.

The apprenticeship model assumes that students (trainee teachers or Refuge advocates) learn by observing the ‘teacher’ and gaining experience under the mentor’s guidance. The mentor acts as a role model for the learner (Maynard & Furlong, 1995, p 18). I think that the mentoring at the Refuge exhibited many of the characteristics of this apprenticeship model. The ‘experienced’ advocates I interviewed talked about the process of becoming what they variously described as a “mentor”, a “buddy”, or a “person supervising new advocates”. They all described mentoring of new advocates as part of the process of working in the Refuge. Although they used a variety of terms to describe this process, all agreed that the process involved modelling or demonstrating how to take calls on the crisis line, and assisting the new advocates to feel confident in their ability to take calls on their own. Jess, a member of the training committee, described mentoring in the Refuge in the following way. “It’s not really a supervisory role, that is too strong a word, but it is that whole mentoring thing”.

During the time I was observing at the Refuge, this phase of training was developed to try and limit the number of women who dropped out of the training process after completing the training course, but before they had completed enough supervised rosters to ‘go solo’. Aliesha, who had been a member of the Refuge for two years, was one of the main mentors of the group of new advocates who started their training in March 1998. For that intake Aliesha described herself as “Just someone who was available to come in and do the roster with the new advocates”. The process at that stage was more like an apprenticeship, where the new advocate watched and learned how to take calls on the crisis line. Twelve months later Aliesha described a more complex mentoring relationship that involved not simply being available to supervise
rosters, but to take on personal responsibility to ensure that her buddies received the necessary training.

I see buddying as being a lot more than just making sure that they come in and do their rosters. It is about being a support person for them and making sure that they feel OK about their place in the agency.

Maynard and Furlong’s (1995, pp 19-20) second model of mentoring is a “competency model”. Competency is a controversial and contested discourse in teacher education (Hyland, 1995; Pring, 1995; Whitby, 1995; Whitty & Willmott, 1995). There is no common understanding about what the term ‘competence’ means, but Whitty and Willmott (1995, p 209) identified two major approaches to the definition of ‘competence’.

[Firstly] competence is characterised as an ability to perform a task satisfactorily, the task being clearly defined and the criteria of success being set out alongside this. [Secondly] competence is characterised as wider than this, encompassing intellectual, cognitive and attitudinal dimensions, as well as performance; in this model neither competences nor the criteria of achievement are so readily susceptible to sharp and discrete identification.

At first glance, the practices at the Refuge could fall into either of the approaches described by Whitty and Willmott (1995). New volunteer advocates work alongside ‘experienced’ advocates learning to take calls on the crisis-line. Unlike in the first approach, however, new advocates do not have the criteria for success clearly defined. In assessing a new advocate’s readiness to take calls in her own home, the ‘experienced’ advocate must have drawn on some criteria, but this was implicit rather than made explicit.

Mentoring at the Refuge could also be interpreted as belonging to Whitty and Wilmott’s second approach because learning encompassed not only skills, but cognitive and “attitudinal” dimensions”. There were overlaps with a competence model of mentoring, because although the criteria were implicit and not written or presented directly to the advocates, the new advocates did need to learn how to
present themselves in particular ways. For example in the previous two chapters, I have argued that the new advocates needed to take subject positions as ‘empowerers’.

I think that the mentoring process in the Refuge is complex and multi-layered. At the same time as I am arguing that mentoring at the Refuge can be considered under the apprenticeship or competence models, I am also arguing that much of the time the Refuge operated with a different ontology that privileged experience. Much of the training during the mentored phase assumed that if volunteer advocates had a range of experiences, they would have knowledge to deal with similar situations. They had to complete a list of tasks, such as attending the family court, and attending a crisis call-out with an ‘experienced’ advocate. In completing these tasks there were no set criteria for their performance to be measured against. By experiencing a range of situations that they could be expected to encounter in their work as volunteer advocates, it was assumed that learning had taken place. At that time the Refuge was experiencing a severe shortage of volunteer advocates to run the crisis-line, and wanted the new volunteer advocates to take up rosters as quickly as possible. It was within this context that the new advocates’ training relied more on self-assessment of their readiness to complete rosters on their own, than on meeting external criteria.

The third model of mentoring described by Maynard and Furlong (1995, pp 20-21) is a “reflective model” that assumes a more egalitarian relationship between mentors and learners, which Zanting et al. (2001, p 59) describe as “co-inquirers”, where reflection and critical thinking are emphasised. I did not observe any use of the reflective model during this phase of the advocates’ training, which suggests to me that the Refuge had a specific way of working, which they wanted the new advocates to adopt. In the following chapter, I will discuss the practice of group supervision, which, I think, incorporates the practices of reflection and critical thinking that Maynard and Furlong refer to as the reflective model.

Within the Refuge context, mentoring was a process that relied heavily on learning from experience, with the ‘experienced’ advocate mentoring the new advocates to independence, and then the cycle starting again with the ‘newer’ advocates becoming mentors for other women coming into the organisation. One way that mentors pass on information about the “Refuge way of doing things” is through stories. By telling
ontological narratives, the mentors and the new advocates get to define what a Refuge advocate is, and how a Refuge advocate acts (Somers, 1994, p. 618). The personal stories related by mentors fall into a number of categories: for example ‘my own induction to the Refuge’; ‘my first crisis call’; ‘my first call-out’; and ‘the one that went terribly wrong’. I agree with Somers (1994, p. 618) when she argues that “the intersubjective webs of relationships sustain and transform narratives over time”. Somers calls those narratives attached to institutions larger than the single individual, public narratives. I argue that the stories told by the participants in this chapter and the following chapter are both individual ontological narratives, where people get to define subjectivity, and also public narratives specific to the Refuge. These public narratives, which get to be told and retold within Refuge, provide alternative story lines about what is possible and not possible in the Refuge context.

**Becoming a mentor**

There were no written criteria for women to become mentors, buddies or supervisors of new advocates, other than that women needed to have been a member of the Refuge for more than 12 months. However, at the training committee planning meeting, implicit criteria were discussed. These included that the woman must be an ‘experienced’ advocate, although there was no criterion other than length of time to indicate what this measure of experience might include. During the discussion, members of the training committee elaborated on additional criteria that they might employ for determining readiness for taking on a supervision or mentoring responsibility within the Refuge:

*Christine: In the first instance it is self-judgement. People need to feel that they have the self-confidence to do it... but I think you need more criteria than this. You could have the situation where people feel confident but you would have some concerns about their practice.*
Christine's comments about the need for self-confidence resonate with Aliesha's comments that the decision to be a buddy or supervisor of rosters relied ultimately on her own assessment of her suitability and her confidence to do this. Within the idea of self-judgement is the notion of self-surveillance. Christine wanted all mentors to be aware of their own practice, but she had some concerns that emphasising self-confidence could result in advocates who were not reflective about their own practice, becoming mentors. For this reason, she introduced the idea not only of self-surveillance, but also of surveillance of prospective mentors by members of the training group. Jess took up this idea of surveillance.

Jess: *That is really important. It is not just that they are experienced but also that they are appropriate in the way that they work with other people... So when someone rings in they just don't say "yeah, that's fine." If it wasn't fine, the new advocates need to know that. We do need to be able to ensure some level of accountability for the work and maybe setting up a process with potential mentors is one step.*

I understand Jess to be saying that not only does the organisation need some system of surveillance so that they can ensure the quality control of the work that the mentors are modelling, but that the mentors must also have skills for giving feedback to the new advocates. In this way, Jess seems to be describing a practice that is similar to what Maynard and Furlong (1995) describe as a competency model, where the mentor not only gives feedback but also assesses competence. However, Jess also introduces an added dimension of surveillance, that of the 'experienced' advocate by the training committee. The training committee are considering different levels of competency among mentors in their capacity to provide the necessary feedback to new advocates. At the time I interviewed the participants in this study, there was no formal process or training offered to prospective mentors. I will discuss the way that the potential mentors drew on their own experiences of being mentored when they joined the organisation as the basis of their knowledge of how to 'do it.'

Aliesha: There wasn't really any process for me to start doing supervising of new advocates. No selection or training. I fit the
criteria of having worked for the organisation for a year. That’s how it was. Yeah. I fit the criteria when they would have gone through the list. They would say there are 6 people who can do that – let’s ring them and see if they are available. So it was who is available, who fits the criteria? “Aliesha can you come and do it.” There was no, ‘How you do it’. It was “Can you come and do your roster so that person can observe you doing your roster?”
So in the end it came down to confidence; I felt confident to do my roster in front of new women.

The Refuge was making an assumption that not only were advocates who had been involved with the organisation for more than a year competent, but also that they were able to model this competency for the newer advocates. However, Aliesha expressed concerns about this assumption.

Aliesha: Something I have talked about recently, is that how do we know that we are doing our roster correctly? Well we don’t is the short answer. We don’t.

This is one of the issues arising out of an apprenticeship model for learning from experience; not only are there issues around quality control of the mentors or ‘experienced’ advocates, but there is a danger that less effective ways of working are modelled by the mentor and the new advocates take these as examples of good practice. In the Refuge, once the volunteer advocates had completed the mentored part of their training, they staffed the crisis line from their own homes. This practice presumes that the advocates taking calls in their own homes are competent in doing the work of the Refuge, and sufficiently self-reflexive to be able to identify shortcomings in their work. The advocates needed to be able to talk at group supervision about their practice and what they learned from difficult situations they managed on the crisis line. As Aliesha stated above, if an advocate was not reflexive about her practice, or not prepared to share stories in supervision, the organisation would not know if they “were doing roster correctly”. In theory it would be possible for such an advocate to pass on inadequate practices to new advocates in a mentoring situation, but the reality of completing rosters at the Refuge house ensures that the
actions of both the new volunteer and the ‘experienced’ advocate are scrutinised by anyone present in the office at that time.

**Back to experience: Mentor’s talk about being mentored**

In Chapter Six I discussed in depth the organisational discourses in which the Refuge positioned its volunteer advocates. If volunteer advocates wanted to work for Refuge, they needed to do the talk of oppression and empowerment. At the end of their induction course, all the new volunteer advocates were able to demonstrate ideas of empowerment in their talk. I observed that within the discursive practices of empowerment, there was room for the Refuge advocates to develop their own style of working. Aliesha identified that although they had completed similar induction training, people brought different ways of working with them. That diversity of practice was maintained because new advocates were learning from different ‘experienced’ advocates, who all had their own interpretation of how to ‘do the Refuge work’.

Aliesha: Because we model what we do on what we saw when we were learning, we all do it differently. So there is a group that does it the way Lucy does, a group that does it the Christine way and others the Sarah way. And when it comes time for us to train them [new advocates] we all do it in different ways. I know I think back to Sarah who I modelled myself on. But I have changed my practice over the years. All of them bring their own stuff to it after a while.

I argue that the mentoring process can result in largely serendipitous learning. In the Refuge context, it was a matter of chance who the new advocates were matched up with, although most worked with more than one ‘experienced’ advocate. New advocates noted the differing styles of advocates they worked with, and as I will discuss later in this chapter, adopted the practices that they felt most comfortable with.
All of the ‘experienced’ volunteer advocates that I interviewed relied heavily on their own experiences as new advocates and how the mentoring process had been for them. Lucy, a member of the training committee and a mentor, had a positive experience of being mentored when she had joined the Refuge. She talked about the support and direction that she had received from another volunteer advocates

That process of getting involved happened really fast. Jackie took me under her wing, and she was like my mentor. She was a volunteer then. She was great, she was really good. She would get me in there and got me answering phones straight away. Within two weeks I was doing it at home, but I had my neighbour Cheryl [A former Refuge advocate]. She really supported me as well. She would come over and sit with me when I was on roster. So I had a lot of support. I think I made a list of about six women I would ring, if I had any problems.

Lucy identified different women within the organisation that she approached for different kinds of support.

I made a list of women and checked with them to see if I could call them. I knew I couldn’t rely on one or two women, that wasn’t OK. I used to ring certain women for certain areas, I had worked out. Like Jackie I would ring a lot for the practical things. I would ring Jen for legal stuff, and Christine for the emotional complicated stuff. It worked really well for me.

When Lucy mentored new advocates she encouraged them to get to know other ‘experienced’ advocates so that they would have others to go to for assistance if she was not available.

Aliesha’s induction into the work of the Refuge had not been as smooth. When she completed her initial training, she did two rosters with Sarah who at the time had been at the Refuge for about 9 months. Following those two sessions, Aliesha was on her
own, completing rosters from her home. She described how she felt inadequate and ill-equipped to do the work.

I felt absolutely unequipped to do that. I felt I had no skills whatsoever to be doing what I was doing. We didn’t have any sort of buddy system or anything. I felt really inadequate in what I was doing. I didn’t have a connection at that point with the office and with what I would describe as the more senior members. So it was very isolating…. I can remember half an hour before my roster I would get all my books out, make sure that everything was done and I would sit by the phone, and wait. And when it rang - panic. Oh no, what am I going to do? [Laughter] And be rushing through the book trying to find things, and having to ring someone. If it was a long call I might have to ring someone about 5 different things about what the caller said.

Aliesha took the initiative, went to the paid staff at the Refuge, and asked for assistance. She was linked up with Christine, an ‘experienced’ advocate and a member of the paid staff who also completed voluntary roster time. Aliesha went with Christine to do her first ‘pick-up’ and worked alongside Christine until she felt confident to do rosters on her own. She talked about modelling herself as a Refuge advocate and a mentor on what she observed Christine doing.

I absolutely modelled myself on what I saw her doing. I guess I still do largely in terms of how to be mentor to other women.

Aliesha was surprised when after 12 months within the organisation she was considered an ‘experienced’ advocate and suitable to take on the role of mentoring the new advocates. Her feelings were consistent with being what Middleton (2001) has described as an ‘impostor’.

Aliesha: I was so unconfident and struggled so much when I first started at the Refuge. Where I started, it is just so unthinkable to
think that I would be in a position today, where people ring me
and ask for a decision. That is just unthinkable. It is bizarre to
me. [Laughter] Why did it happen? Why would anyone want an
opinion from me anyway? Why would anyone care what you
have to say? [Laughter] And yet they do, often.

Both Lucy and Aliesha drew on their experience of being mentored when they joined
the organisation, as the model for how they would mentor the new advocates. Both
had found the support of other women in the organisation invaluable to them when
they were starting out, and wanted to provide support and encouragement to new
advocates, based on what they had themselves experienced. They drew on their own
experience of being mentored to know what to do when they were in a similar
situation themselves.

Ailesa and Lucy modelled themselves as mentors on the positive relationships they
had with their mentors. Judith on the other hand, found that her experience with an
‘experienced’ advocate was for her, how not to work with new volunteer advocates.
Judith, [an experienced advocate and mentor] told a poignant story about her early
experience as an advocate at the Refuge, that highlights the tensions of learning in this
type of apprenticeship model.

It was over the Christmas period that Judith received a late night call from the police
saying that the husband of one of the women staying in the Refuge house had
committed suicide. Judith arranged for a more experienced advocate to go with her to
the house. When she arrived at the house, she found that the ‘experienced’ advocate
had already told the woman of her husband’s suicide. Judith went back alone the next
morning when the woman woke her children and told them what had happened. Two
years later, she described the situation to me in the following way:

I went down at five the next morning to be with the woman when
the children woke up, so she wasn’t alone when she told them. I
always remember them screaming. It was really quite difficult,
and it has stayed with me. I remember feeling quite helpless.
Two years down the track and I still remember it quite clearly. Of just standing there and feeling so darned helpless.

Judith said that she had intended bringing up the situation at group supervision, because she needed to bring about some closure for herself. However, at that supervision session she took her lead from the ‘experienced’ advocate who had actually told the women about her husband’s death.

Because I was new, and the experienced advocate was the one who had told her that her husband had hanged himself, I was hoping in my naivety that she would take it to supervision, and she didn’t. That is where it needed to go. I probably needed individual supervision, and I went up to the experienced advocate later, and I said “What was that like for you, that experience?” She said it was “Fine”. So I thought “OK. If it is fine for her then obviously I’m not dealing with it very well.” I was thinking if it was fine for her it should be fine for me too. Yes, at that point because I was so new and she had been there for a while, and I thought, “OK so it is something you just deal with and get on with it”

I didn’t feel confident. I also felt I wasn’t doing OK because she was coping. So I sort of modelled her behaviour. That’s what I would do differently now. I feel confident now to raise issues and feel OK about not coping. I don’t have to model other women and do what they do, but at that point I felt that she is not making an issue of it, so that’s how it is done in the Refuge.

Judith’s story suggests that some of the existing practices of the mentors may not be in the best interests of the new advocates. She needed support and encouragement to work through what for her was an emotionally difficult situation, but because she was modelling her behaviour on that of the ‘experienced’ advocate, she did not feel confident to ask for the help she needed. If a different ‘experienced’ advocate had accompanied her to the Refuge, perhaps the outcome may have been very different for
her. However, for Judith this model of ‘learning by doing’ was framed by the actions of the ‘experienced’ advocate. It is not possible to know if the experienced advocate’s unwillingness to talk about the incident at supervision was part of the organisational culture as Judith interpreted it, or if it was specific to that particular advocate. The issue of learning being constrained or shaped by what advocates are prepared to talk about is discussed in more detail in the next chapter on supervision.

This account of modelling the behaviour of experienced advocates also raises the issue of the need for conformity within the organisation. To what extent is it important to have conformity within the organisation? How does the need for conformity limit which stories can be told and which must be silenced? Judith talked about how she would act differently now, two years after the incident. It is difficult to know if her ability to do something different to that modelled by the ‘experienced’ advocate is because she is now a confident ‘experienced’ advocate herself. She stated that when she works with new volunteer advocates, she emphasises the need for them to be able to talk issues through with her or other ‘experienced’ advocates, and to talk about their experiences and feelings in-group supervision.

**New volunteer advocate’s stories of being mentored**

The new advocates talked about this phase of their training to be Refuge advocates as being ‘supervised’ by more experienced advocates. They constructed the experienced advocates as people who were “doing it right” and generally modelled themselves on what they saw the ‘experienced’ advocates doing. The new advocates constructed learning as a linear journey from inexperience and lack of confidence to experience and confidence. They all emphasised the learning dimension of this training rather than the quality control dimension.

All new advocates talked about feeling nervous before their first supervised roster. They had completed the 50-hour induction course, but few felt prepared for the work that they would be doing.
Julie: And a lot of it I just can’t apply it to what we are doing now. It’s just like going into that house for the first roster; it felt like we’d done nothing. I know we have, but it felt like we were just totally unprepared and knew absolutely nothing. And the heart jumped as the phone rang. That sort of feeling, well for me anyway.

Maria: When we actually got to the house it was like “Eeeeek, I’m not prepared for this. The first few calls that you take you are going to be absolutely terrified. The first time I went in the mature [experienced] advocate answered the phone. I felt like “I have got no clue, absolutely no clue at all”. I felt absolutely unprepared. Listening to the mature woman, listening to the way she spoke on the phone and how she listened was a real eye opener. I’m thinking, “Yes, I can pick it up.”

These new advocates constructed the experienced advocates as being models and instructors (Zanting et al., 2001, p 59). Vicki also brought in the personal support dimension of mentoring. She talked about feeling inadequate because of her lack of formal education, and that she was reassured by her ‘experienced advocate’ who came from a similar background.

Vicki: I did my first supervised roster last week. All the way in there I was a wreck, but once I got in there it felt right. I thought “I’m going to get in there and not know what to do.” That worries me, the paperwork, and what if I forget something? And the other girl [experienced advocate] said that she was like that when she started too, she was exactly the same. So that made me feel really good. She just came from being a machinist to go in there with no idea. That made me feel a lot better.

Vicki was constructing her work at the Refuge as a linear journey from ‘not knowing’ to ‘knowing’. She was reassured when Helen as experienced advocate talked about how she also had come from a background outside the ‘social services area’, and
through the ‘experience’ of doing the work had learned what she needed to become an ‘experienced advocate.’ Vicki talked about her experience of being widowed at an early age and bringing up her children on her own, as being potentially valuable for her work in the Refuge. At the same time, she constructed other members of the group as having the ‘professional’ skills that she did not have, because of their employment in the social services arena. Finding out that others did not have the social service experience before joining the Refuge was helpful to Vicki.

Other new advocates also talked about how their lack of experience in the area of domestic violence contributed to their lack of confidence when they started to do rosters.

Pip: It was just so scary just going in to do those first rosters. Especially like my first one. Lucy was with me, and my very first call was a crisis call and I’m thinking “I’m not ready for this”. It was really scary and I didn’t think I had anything. The training gave us the paperwork stuff, but I didn’t feel I was equipped when I started rosters. I still feel not quite as bad, but sometimes I think “I’m not ready for this” I don’t think anything in my background prepared me. And probably because I’ve had a pretty easy going background, I haven’t had to face a lot of people in stress or trauma and all that sort of stuff. So it was an eye opener.

Pip made these comments in an interview six months after she had started work on the rosters as an advocate. At this stage, she had completed the induction course, but looked back to her previous life experience as not preparing her for the work. The fact that she had no experience of being with people under stress or trauma was what she identified as the key to her lack of initial confidence.

For other women, the experience of completing rosters with an ‘experienced’ advocate worked well. Lena described a process where she quickly felt confident to do rosters on her own.
Lena: First off I went into the Refuge and took calls in there with somebody beside me - Aliesha for instance. I took the calls and if there was anything I couldn’t handle, she was on hand to guide me through it. So I did about 3 of those, and then felt that I could handle them at home, but there was always someone I could ring if I was really in strife - if there was something I didn’t know. I don’t know that I ever did ring anybody.

As Maria commented earlier, it was through listening to experienced advocates doing roster that she realised “I can pick it up”. She talked about the value of working with an ‘experienced’ advocate in terms of practical tips and advice (Zanting et al., 2001, p 59) The advocate that Maria worked with was able to pass on specific ‘tools’ that she had created to assist her with the work.

Maria: I have picked up a couple of tools already from my supervisor. I picked up a tool from one of the girls [experienced advocate]. She had a book and she writes down with enough information on each call to jog her memory, and she does her statistics from the book each week. Anything that she has to do as follow-up after her session, she leaves uncrossed until she has done it. I’m thinking that I’m really lucky to have worked with someone who used an extra tool that helps her. This is the kind of stuff we needed to know before we get there. I’m sure that other advocates have other little tools that would be really good to use, but how are we going to find it out? Unless you get lucky and work with that particular mature advocate.

The issue that Maria raises about the serendipitous nature of mentoring, ‘getting lucky’ through working with a particular mentor is one of the tensions that Darwin (2000, p 214) identified in her study of mentoring within the medical profession. Maria felt ‘lucky’ being supervised by a specific ‘experienced’ advocate, but did not comment on what she learned from other experienced advocates she had worked with.
Whereas Maria focussed on the practical tips and skills of learning to become a Refuge advocate, Dawn talked about learning not just the skills, but learning the Refuge language and the Refuge way of being.

I was listening to other people’s crises, that other roster people had, and how they dealt with it. Listening to language. What language to use, because you have to learn a new language as well. So that was a big help. I had to learn to be non-judgemental, and I had to learn to be like everyone else.

Dawn was aware that to be an advocate in the Refuge she had to learn the language and the norms of the organisation, and that through working with ‘experienced’ advocates this happened. For her learning was not complete until she had actually done it herself.

It’s all about experience. The more you do the more you know. The more you read the more you learn. In this instance, the more you do the more you know. I mean you can read about it, you can talk about it, but it will only mean something if you actually do something with it yourself.

Learning and adopting the discursive practices and language of the organisation was an important learning process for new advocates. However, learning under the apprenticeship model of a new advocate working with a more experienced advocate creates the possibility of silencing the new advocates and maintaining the regimes of truth. Zanting et al. (2001, p 60) argue that the ability of the learners to think critically about different processes and practices is an essential but often overlooked component of mentoring. Alix’s experience of her first call-out suggests that within the Refuge new advocates did have space to question the existing practices of the Refuge.

Alix: The first case where I did a callout with another advocate, we went to the police station to pick up this woman whose husband had burned all her clothes. She was in tears, really in
pieces. And we had taken the longest time, like gone to the wrong police station. Yeah. It would have been at least an hour. And her 13 year old daughter was there, and she was just shell shocked. Just doing her best to stay intact. That was really touching, I just felt so sorry for that child. Yeah, she was just doing her best to stay intact and look after mum. And mum was just in pieces, she was completely devastated.

I didn’t do much, I was just observing. The other advocate did all the admission stuff, all of that. The only unfortunate thing was that we did take so long. I felt really bad about that. And then when we got to the Refuge, fussed around and did the admission and filled out the form, and all that sort of stuff. In reality we should have just put them straight to bed and said we will do this stuff tomorrow. It was early hours of the morning and they just needed to get to bed really. So I guess the admission process could be streamlined quite a bit. Particularly when they are taken straight from a crisis, it is not the best.

In this narrative, Alix was critical not only of the miscommunication that resulted in them going to the wrong police station, but also the Refuge admission process. She brought up the issue of the admission process at a volunteer meeting, and other women shared similar stories where they believed that the existing process did not meet the immediate needs of the women seeking to stay at the Refuge. Other more ‘experienced’ advocates had also talked about the need to streamline the process for some time. The Refuge changed the admission process not long after this incident so that advocates needed only to fill in essential contact details on admission. Full information was collected the following day.

This could be seen as an example of the new advocate learning not from ‘best practice’ within the organisation, but from a situation where the existing processes were not effective. Alix was able to challenge the existing practices of the ‘experienced’ advocate, and this resulted in a change of organisational procedures.
**Surveillance**

A critical component of mentoring is that the mentor observes and provides feedback to those being mentored (Zanting et al., 2001, p 58). There are parallels between this study in a Women’s Refuge and the study undertaken by Wilson and Pirrie (1999) of health professionals learning from experience. They argue that learning within the healthcare sector is dominated by an apprenticeship model, which places the learner under close surveillance by the more experienced members of the profession.

“There are so many things that you don’t know about when you come into practice.” In this situation, the role of the more experienced colleagues is crucial. However, being under close scrutiny could lead to feelings of uncertainty and an increasing awareness of deficiencies in both knowledge and skills. One general practitioner referred to such continuous scrutiny as “just a nightmare having people watching you”. (Wilson & Pirrie, 1999, p 215)

Within the Refuge context, new advocates also talked about their feelings of discomfort with the close scrutiny of their work on the crisis line. The physical set up of the office where supervised rosters took place was such that new advocates could end up taking calls in front of an audience of not just their mentor, but other new advocates and office staff. On one occasion, I was in the office when a new advocate was taking calls in front of six people, including myself.

Kate: Yeah, I just can’t wait to be able to do it independently at home. God, that’s a big goal for me at the moment. I think I was really worried about all the people around me watching me and listening the first time I took a call. Ohhh it was yucky. Having other people watching me I think. I think that’s what it is, because I feel like I’m capable, but maybe not confident. Whereas when there are no other people around you, you know that you are the only one that has to do this, so you just do it.

For Kate, the biggest barrier to taking calls was not that she might not cope or might give the wrong information, but that there would be other people watching her performance. Maria was also aware of the surveillance of her as a new advocate.
It got to the stage that it was really noisy in the office and it was hard to concentrate, ... so I decided that I would do it at home. Actually it worked out the best because you are second guessing yourself when there is someone there to check up on you. So when you are on your own you are actually following your instincts, and what you learned, and using your manual a lot more.

Whereas Kate had worried about others watching and listening to her taking the calls, Maria was more concerned that she was giving the appropriate responses to the woman at the other end of the line. Both stated that they would find it easier to take calls on their own. Both had confidence that if they had to take calls on their own they would be able to do it. By moving to taking calls in their own homes, these new volunteer advocates moved from a system of direct surveillance by their ‘experienced’ advocates to self-surveillance of their own practice.

The new advocates went onto the supervised roster expecting to learn the skills needed to operate the telephone crisis line from their own homes. But for advocates to operate within the Refuge it is important that they employed the dominant discourses of the Refuge. As Zanting et al. (2001) and Wilson (1999) state, an important part of mentoring by experienced members of an organisation or profession is introducing the new member to the discourses of the organisation. In the following narrative, Alix is recounting an incident at her first supervised roster when the ‘experienced’ advocate made explicit some of the understandings of the Refuge. Alix was present with two other new advocates and the experienced advocate.

Alix: When I went in for my first roster something interesting came up. We were going through the POL 400s, another new

45 Under the Christchurch Abuse Intervention Project the Refuge and the Police operate a combined project. When the Police attend any incident of domestic violence they complete an Incident Report, a POL 400. Each month copies of all police POL 400’s are forwarded to Women’s Refuge. The Refuge has the responsibility of contacting all the women named in the POL 400’s to offer them information about, and assistance from the Refuge. At times
advocate was reading it and said “Oh, look at this.” I don’t even know the real scenario, but the implication was that the woman had said countless times she’d been abused and the outcome of it all was that she’d made it up. I think the new advocate reading it was quite shocked and said ‘Oh poor man’, and Aliesha [experienced advocate] said, “There are some people who would get quite upset with you, with hearing that. I personally don’t, but it might pay to remember that those comments aren’t that welcome.” I was just shooting out the door to get some chips, and the new advocate was like “So some people would get annoyed at that?” I was just in time to hear Aliesha say “Well this is supposed to be an organisation for women”.

In this story the ‘experienced’ advocate is reinforcing the organisational discourse of men as perpetrators of violence and women as victims. Rather than question the relevance of the discourse to the situation, Aliesha sought to ensure that the new advocates adopted the dominant discourse of the Refuge and encouraged them to monitor their language accordingly. Stories told at Refuge do not offer sympathy to men. In this way mentoring worked to maintain the Refuge’s regimes of truth.

**Closing the circle**

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that becoming mentors or supervisors of rosters for new advocates was a part of what it meant to be a Refuge advocate. It could be seen as a ‘rite of passage’ that all advocates who were still involved in the Refuge after 12 months were expected to make themselves available to assist the new intake of advocates.

After 12 months working as a volunteer advocate, Dawn was approached to mentor advocates from a new training intake. She expressed surprise that she would be considered ‘experienced’ enough to work with new advocates.

when supervised rosters were very quiet, the experienced advocate completed some POL 400 phone calls to the women.
I don't really feel that I am at that stage. I suppose I am. I suddenly realised at the beginning of this year, when all the new people came in that I was an 'old' one! I'd never thought of myself as having enough experience to be thought of as 'old'. But then I thought about it, and realised that probably I was. The more you do, the better you are at it, but I still don't know everything.

It was not until the new intake of women arrived, and Dawn was able to make the comparison between them and herself, that she realised the extent of what she had learned over the past year. She classified herself as "old" and "experienced" in relation to the new women coming into the organisation, and felt able to take on the role of mentor.

Dawn's experience of becoming a mentor is very similar to that of the women who mentored her intake of new advocates.

Lesley: What was the process for moving into this stage of working with new advocates?

Dawn: [laughs] Process? There wasn't any. There really wasn't. It was just "Would you mind doing roster with so and so and coming in?" And I said "Yes, that's fine, when do you want me?" It wasn't difficult and I was happy to do it.

Repeating the cycle of earlier mentors at the Refuge, Dawn drew on her own experience as the basis for how she worked with the new advocates.

It is really about training through experience, through doing it. It is all very well to go and learn theory, but you have to do it in practice as well to really reinforce what you have been learning. Experience is the only way to learn, or the only way I learned.
The major problem that Dawn experienced was the lack of calls coming through on the crisis line during the times she was supervising rosters. She was concerned that if the women did not have the experience of taking calls they would not have the opportunity to learn. It was during these quiet times that Dawn told some of the Refuge stories to the new advocates. Dawn talked about not just passing on skills to the new advocates, but that she wanted to model Refuge values, which she described as:

It is about modelling Refuge values. Like empowering women who phone in. On the phone, I’m sympathetic, I listen and I try not to talk too much. I try to give back to the woman some sort of control, some ability to now be in a state to think more clearly. Giving them some kind of feeling of self worth and self esteem. Not telling them, but letting them find it for themselves. It is those sorts of things, that you do learn how to do. It takes time, but then you realise that you are doing it.

I was struck by the synchronicity of Dawn’s stories of her experiences as a mentor and those of the ‘experienced’ advocates like Alesha and Lucy who had mentored Dawn’s intake. One reading of these stories is that Lucy, Alesha and the other experienced advocates had been very successful in mentoring Dawn into the organisation. She had learned not just how to do the work of the Refuge, but also the language, and how to ‘fit in’ in the organisation. She had adopted the discourse of empowerment and could model how this was done. She was now willing to pass this on to the new intake of advocates.

Other readings of this narrative, however, would raise questions about the mentoring process. If mentors only learn from what they experienced, how does the organisation avoid maintaining the status quo, and encourage new advocates to bring in new ways of ‘doing the Refuge work’. How can this model ensure that new advocates are not silenced? How does this model encourage new advocates to think critically about what they are doing, and about the rationale behind acting in a certain way and not others? Dawn emphasises the value of experience over theory, but acts in a theoretically informed way. How can the discourses informing the practices of the
Refuge be made explicit? Dawn modelled how to do empowerment, but did not make explicit the discourse of empowerment that shaped her approach to her work.

Chapter summary

I have framed this chapter on mentoring in the Refuge within a discussion on the material constraints of the organisation. From my observations, I think the mentoring of new advocates was compromised by the lack of resources, particularly the limited number of 'experienced' advocates who were available to mentor the new advocates. However, despite these constraints, new advocates did learn how to take calls and offer support to women on the crisis line. They in their turn, as Dawn's story illustrates, went on to mentor other women into the organisation.

But the mentoring process is not unproblematic, particularly when considering issues of power/knowledge. Mentoring as a practice tends to maintain existing power/knowledge relationships, maintaining existing 'regimes of truth' within the organisation. The new volunteer advocates looked to the 'experienced' advocates in the Refuge as sources of knowledge. They constructed the mentoring process as a time of moving from ignorance and lack of self-confidence to being knowledgeable and self-confident, in a direct linear way. Using the apprenticeship and competency models of mentoring, Refuge maintained its discursive practices because, in the main, the mentors modelled themselves on the women who had mentored them. Within the Refuge, mentoring involves a process of moving from direct surveillance to self-surveillance as the advocates gained knowledge and confidence and started doing rosters in their own homes.

Christine, a member of the training committee was reflexive about herself as a mentor in Refuge. She identified many issues about mentoring and herself as a mentor. She had many questions, which the organisation as a whole could have benefited from hearing and discussing. However, Christine saw 'moving on' as the only way of encouraging new women with new ideas into the Refuge. Christine left the Refuge within three months of this interview. I conclude this chapter with her comments.
This model of learning by doing is set very much within a framework of existing practice. I think new advocates probably measure themselves against old advocates. I do think that is probably what occurs and probably to a degree initially needs to occur. However, my hope would be that still fresh ideas are brought in and I guess what I would hope too, is that we do allow for those to be expressed and not suppressed. I even look at myself now and I will have been with the Refuge four years next year and I think “Is it time for me to move out of this now and let new women move through? Have I been here too long? Am I now unable to get alongside women? Am I rigid in my ideas? Do women need something different?” I don’t know. All those are questions for me. I do have concerns about that. Am I actually deluding myself in thinking that I’m getting alongside women or am I actually persuading them? I don’t know.
CHAPTER NINE

SUPERVISION: TELLING IT RIGHT

On Self-surveillance

If I make a mistake or I stuff something up
I can evaluate it and then do it differently.
Then I know I have learned something.
So the more mistakes I make,
the more I get out of it.

I do make a lot of mistakes [laughs]
(Pip – participant interview).

Introduction

A text is woven, creating the self as a character in our own story,
from the ‘raw material’ of our experience, our being in the world.
In effect, learning from experience is a process where we create
and recreate ourselves. (Usher, 1993, p 175)

Supervision within the social services is a formalised practice that is based on a
premise of learning from experience. Learning from experience, as practiced in
supervision, can be a vehicle, not just for learning new skills and knowledge, but also
as Usher claims, a “process where we create and recreate ourselves”. Supervision can
provide new ways of thinking about ourselves, our work and our social worlds. In
this chapter, I argue that supervision as practised in the Refuge has an added
dimension that frames the learning as ‘experiential’. As I have discussed in earlier
chapters, I use the term ‘experiential learning’ to mean ‘meta-cognition’ or ‘thinking
about thinking’. Kemmis (1985, p 145) defines experiential learning as “meta-
thinking (thinking about the relationship between thoughts and actions in a particular
context)”. I argue that the volunteer advocates were engaging in ‘meta-thinking’ as
they reflected on their practice, identified issues or problems, and presented these as
narratives at supervision. In addition to being able to tell stories of their practice, they had to articulate alternatives by framing their narratives as ‘learning stories’.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of supervision as administration, education and support, and explore the way that in the Refuge, these functions of supervision intersected with Foucault’s notions of discipline and self-surveillance. Recognising the importance of paying attention to the meaning given to particular situations by those who occupy different discursive positions, I explore supervision from the perspectives of the new volunteer advocates, the ‘organisational position, and the independent supervisor.

Group supervision is the forum at the Refuge that relies most directly on storytelling. Supervision is where the volunteer advocates’ construction of subjectivities is most visible, as they create and recreate themselves in their stories of their Refuge work (Somers, 1994, p 618; Usher, 1993, p 175). It is through telling stories that they locate themselves and are located in the various discourses, or storylines, of the Refuge. These storylines guide the advocates to act in certain ways and not others, as is observable in Dawn’s story of breaking the Refuge rules (p 228). The advocates also learn the genre of storying at the Refuge, and recognise what can and cannot be talked about in Supervision. I highlight the importance of storying in the Refuge by constructing this chapter around four ‘case studies’ of narratives that were offered at supervision sessions during 1998. I begin with short narratives on ‘seeking support’ and ‘communication difficulties’. These are followed by a more in depth discussion of incidents of ‘breaking the rules’, and ‘not breaking the rules’, that have entered Refuge mythology, and as such have become public narratives within the organisation. These narratives are theorised in terms of experiential learning, discipline, surveillance and self-surveillance, and the relationship between knowledge/power.

**Supervision as surveillance?**

I was unable to locate literature that theorised the purpose of supervision as practiced with volunteers in community organisations. Because of this paucity of literature
relating directly to volunteering, in this chapter I draw on literature relating to social work supervision. It is appropriate to consider this literature because the Refuge bases its supervision practices on a document prepared by the New Zealand Social Workers' Association. I discuss this particular document later in this chapter. There is much discussion in the social work literature about what constitutes supervision. Supervisors have been identified as teachers, enablers, consultants and managers (Brashears, 1995; Christian & Hannah, 1983; Crow & Oldewahn, 1987; Magee & Pierce, 1986). I found the writings of Kadushin, a social work theorist, to be particularly useful even though they were published in 1976 and 1985.

Kadushin (1976; 1985) argues that supervision has three separate but overlapping functions. Administrative supervision refers to the disciplinary component of supervision; the focus is to ensure that the work is performed adequately and in accordance with agency procedures. The second function of supervision is to teach the worker what she needs to know in order to do her job effectively. The third function of supervision is supportive supervision, where the supervisee is helped to adjust to the stresses she encounters in her work. Kadushin's analysis of these three overlapping and sometimes conflicting purposes of supervision provides a framework for reflection on the supervision offered to volunteer advocates at the Refuge. I utilise his framework to discuss supervision at the Refuge and create a synthesis between his ideas and Foucault's ideas of discipline and self-surveillance.

Of particular interest is Kadushin's focus on conflicts between these three functions of supervision. He argues that the separation of the administrative role of supervision from the educative and supportive roles is one way of overcoming the issues of power inherent in the administrative role. I question whether this is possible. Later in this chapter, for example in Dawn's story, I discuss instances where the disciplinary, support and educative functions of supervision were mutually reinforcing.

Kadushin's discussion of power in supervision is usefully considered in the light of Foucault's (1977) analysis of the shift in Western societies away from 'sovereign power', in which the sovereign controlled the populace through the power to punish, coerce or kill them, and towards 'disciplinary power'. As I discussed in earlier in this thesis, with a shift towards 'disciplinary power' people are disciplined and controlled
by subjecting themselves to the scrutiny of others, and to their own self-scrutiny. Foucault (1980b, p 155) describes the way that invisible surveillance leads to self-surveillance. It is through surveillance and self-surveillance that discursive practices are maintained.

By arguing that the administrative (disciplinary) and educational function of supervision are mutually reinforcing, Kadushin (1985, p 96) also describes the notion of surveillance and self-surveillance: "... educational supervision supplements administrative supervision by furthering the internalisation of administrative controls, developing a professional orientation and a sense of loyalty among colleagues". I understand Kadushin to be describing a circular process whereby the learning that occurs in supervision works to maintain the existing knowledge of the organisation. Foucault presented this interdependent relationship between power and knowledge as the power/knowledge couplet. I argue that Kadushin's notion of the "internalisation of administrative controls" describes Foucault's process of disciplinary 'self-surveillance'.

Within the Refuge context, surveillance operates on multiple levels. Funding providers insist that supervision of volunteers is provided within the organisation to ensure the quality of the services provided to the clients. The funding providers do not know what happens at supervisory sessions, but do know that the organisation is providing surveillance of its members by the very nature of supervision. Within the Refuge the emphasis is not so much on accountability to the funders, but on providing the best possible service to the women and children clients. Volunteer advocates needed to know what constitutes 'best service' but this is often not explicit because the work of the Refuge advocates is so diverse. The trainee volunteer advocates observed their 'experienced' advocates during their mentored phase of training. Once they were doing 'solo' rosters from their own homes, they received feedback from the group supervisor and other advocates, and learned from their 'mistakes'. To be able to tell stories at group supervision, volunteer advocates needed to be aware of their own practice and willing to talk about self-perceived shortcomings. To do this they had to learn to turn their 'experience' into a story suitable for telling at supervision. By engaging in story telling of their practice, the volunteer advocates engaged in 'experiential learning'. The volunteer advocates demonstrated an ability to think
about the relationship between thoughts and action in a particular context, and to tell stories that were appropriate in Refuge supervision. Their ability to tell the ‘right’ kind of story equates to self-surveillance.

It is significant that the practice of group supervision for volunteers was introduced to the Refuge at the same time as the structure of the organisation was changed from a collective to a more hierarchical organisation with a governance board. When the Refuge operated as a collective, all paid and volunteer members met on a fortnightly basis to discuss all issues relating to the work and management of the organisation. Within the new structure, the work of the volunteers was less open to the scrutiny of other members and group supervision was instituted. Volunteer meetings and group supervision were the only fora for volunteers to talk about their work, and for the Refuge as an organisation to assess the competence of individual volunteer advocates. As only the volunteer advocates and an independent supervisor attend group supervision, the volunteer advocates assumed a responsibility for surveillance of their peers, as well as using supervision for self-surveillance of their own practices. This links back to Kadushin’s idea of separating the disciplinary function of supervision from the educative and support functions. My observations of group supervision as it operated at the Women’s Refuge are that the three functions are intertwined and mutually reinforcing, as I discuss in greater depth in the narrative ‘breaking the rules’ (p 228).

In any social context it is important to pay attention to the meaning given to particular situations by those who occupy different positions within it. The Refuge as an organisation constructed supervision in a particular way, as did the supervisor and the new volunteer advocates. In the following section I discuss the supervisor’s construction of supervision, before moving on to explore the way that the new volunteer advocates constructed supervision. I utilise Kadushin’s notion of supervision as administrator, education and support, and explore the way that in the Refuge context these functions of supervision intersected with Foucault’s notions of power/knowledge, discipline and self-surveillance.
New volunteer advocates’ constructions of supervision

The most common constructions of supervision by the volunteer advocates were of learning, but also of support. The women constructed supervision as having a therapeutic function, where people could talk about issues that had affected them personally and emotionally and get support from other members of the group. It was a time to tell stories of both successes and ‘stuff-ups’ and to have the opportunity to replay the incident and create other possible ways of acting in a particular situation. I argue that through the telling and retelling of stories, what Somers (1994) described as ontological narratives, became public narratives within ‘the Refuge. Public narratives become part of the culture of the organisation, and continue to guide action sometimes long after the original participants have gone. In order for the volunteer advocates to learn from their own and others’ experiences, participants had to want to tell their stories at supervision. It relied not only on a level of awareness of their practices, but also on the confidence to tell this in the group.

Pip and Lena’s comments were representative of the strong emphasis most women put on supervision as educative and supportive:

Pip: That is how I learned, by doing it and talking at supervision. That was the key thing. I might have done something and felt “Oh I’ve stuffed that up completely” and taken it to supervision and they came up with all these ideas “You could have done this or that, try this.” And I tried it the next time and it actually worked. Or actually just sitting back and thinking, instead of just jumping in to do something. Just sit back and think “How can I do this properly?”

Lena: If you are feeling unsure in any area at all, supervision is a safe place to talk about it. You don’t feel as if you are going to be judged or criticised. Everybody is there to learn from each other and to share their experiences. Working on the roster can be very isolating because you are doing it from your home and you are not mixing with the other people. This is a chance to get
together and exchange ideas. Someone shares something and you think "Oh wow, that is a good way to handle that situation". It is something that you might not have thought of yourself. Then you find that something that you share, someone else gets something out of that too. So it is very much a two-way thing.

Lena, Pip and most of the other women interviewed had a construction of supervision as providing a positive, supportive learning environment for them as volunteer advocates learning from experience. Dawn had a slightly different understanding of the purposes of supervision. For her the support function was most important:

I try very hard not to miss supervision. I like the inter-relationships with the women, talking about my experiences, and I like hearing what other women have done. It is the same as bringing up kids, you go to Plunket and talk about their problems and they are the same as yours [laughter]. And it is the same here. You come and talk about your problems and "Oh yes, that happened to me." "Oh yes, it is exactly the same situation" and talking about it is the best solution.

The new volunteer advocates at the Refuge talked about supervision as a positive experience. They saw it as somewhere to go each month and talk about their practice, get support and new ideas to try out. Hearing other women's stories gave them rehearsal opportunities, and possible repertoires for future 'tellings'. They all stated that they felt comfortable sharing stories in supervision. Lena's comment, "you don't feel as if you are going to be judged or criticised", indicated a high level of trust in the supervision process. In fact, on two different occasions I observed situations in supervision where volunteer advocates actions were judged and criticised. I discuss one of these incidents later in this chapter in the narrative about 'breaking the rules' where a volunteer advocate, expecting support from other members of the supervision group, got instead discipline and close scrutiny of her practice.

46 Plunket is a New Zealand institution that offers early child health care for children from 0 to 5 years. Plunket was established in 1907 and its motto since its inception has been "To help the mothers and save the babies" (Olssen & Mein Smith, 1981, p 11).
Organisational construction of supervision

The definition and purposes of supervision listed in the Refuge Advocates Manual (1998) are sourced from the New Zealand Association of Social Workers Aotearoa Draft Policy Statement (no date). Supervision is defined as:

...a process in which one worker enables, guides and facilitates another worker(s) in meeting certain organisational, professional and personal objectives. These objectives are competency, accountable practice, continuing professional development and education, and personal support.\(^{47}\)

The purposes of supervision are listed as ensuring that the worker is clear about her roles and responsibilities, meets the agency’s objectives, and provides a quality service to clients. Supervision is also to provide a safe environment within which social work (refuge work) practice can be discussed and reviewed, develop a suitable climate for practice, assist professional development, and assist in reducing stress.

I believe that the definition and purposes of supervision as listed above fall into the three categories identified by Kadushin (1985), supervision as discipline, supervision as education, supervision as support. I use these categories of supervision to frame the way that the Refuge as an organisation constructs supervision, and identify some of the tensions of using supervision as a learning tool within this context.

The first four purposes of supervision listed in the Advocates’ Manual are: ensuring that the worker is clear about roles and responsibilities; ensuring the worker meets the agency’s objectives; ensuring quality of service to clients; and developing a suitable climate for practice. These all fall into the disciplinary purpose of supervision. One of the contradictions of using supervision for a disciplinary purpose was that it relied largely on the volunteer advocates being willing to bring to supervision accounts of incidents where their practice may fall short of what the Refuge demands. Therefore

-\(^{47}\) The Refuge advocates manual is a loose-leaf file with a collection of articles and documents. There were no page numbers in this document
it relied not only on self-surveillance by the volunteer advocates, but their willingness to discuss their shortcomings within the group.

Because the Refuge had a ‘flat management structure’ and other members of the group did not observe much of the work done by volunteers, the opportunities for surveillance by their peers were limited. Surveillance usually took the form of telling stories about their work in the company of other advocates. In this way, surveillance of other members was not so much of their work, but the stories that they told of their work. How did this surveillance by their co-advocates influence the learning environment of supervision? Later in this chapter I discuss in detail an incident where one of the volunteer advocates ‘broke the rules’ of the Refuge. The incident, which involved a breach of confidentiality, was first raised and later resolved at supervision sessions. The incident made other advocates more aware of the consequences of telling the ‘wrong’ type of story at supervision.

Within Refuge, the training for volunteers advocates was aimed at increasing their skill levels, and therefore their effectiveness as advocates. Because much of the work done by the volunteer advocates was difficult to predict and covered a very wide range of situations, supervision was promoted as a major way of learning within the organisation. Supervision, in this context, was premised on an understanding that people learned from sharing their stories of their experiences. In supervision, volunteer advocates had the opportunity to rework new endings for their own and their colleagues’ stories. This was a strategy that was often used by advocates, who after telling their stories would often say, “If I had the chance to do this over again I would do it differently. I would...” Other advocates would also offer alternative endings based on their experiences. Volunteer advocates described this process as a way of learning new ways of acting in situations that they may face in the future. While the advocates may have been learning ways of acting as Refuge advocates, they were also learning how to represent their stories as more acceptable in the supervision context.
Supervisor's construction of supervision

The supervisor who facilitated the supervisory sessions was not a member of the Refuge. She was contracted by the organisation to provide supervision on a monthly basis. She was an experienced counsellor who had a private practice specialising in the areas of family violence and sexual abuse. She described herself as “feminist with a strong commitment to bringing about social change in the community”. She had previously, and concurrently, been involved in supporting similar organisations by supervising their paid staff and volunteers. In an interview, the supervisor talked about the balance between meeting the needs of the organisation and the needs of individual women at supervision. Her explanation of how she constructed supervision reflects Kadushin’s (1976) notion that the administrative (disciplinary) and educational functions of supervision are mutually reinforcing, but with a particular emphasis on its educative function.

I see the overall purpose of supervision as enabling everyone to do the work in the most effective way, but because it is a community organisation, it also then means working with each other, and with the community. So what I would hope to provide is an environment in which the community of the volunteers can be built, so that it is safe to bring anything up. So they keep on developing themselves professionally, and so that their awareness is heightened about their own functioning. But again I think it is a really delicate balance because everyone is at a different stage of role development.

The supervisor wanted people to be able to do the work “in the most effective way”, and to “develop themselves professionally”. This was to be achieved in an environment where people felt safe to bring things up for discussion. The supervisor constructed one of the educative functions of supervision as moving volunteer advocates to a place where they carry out self-surveillance of their practices. Her goal

48 I interviewed the supervisor at her professional rooms in September 1998.
for supervision was to develop the volunteers to the stage where their “awareness is heightened about their own functioning”.

In her introduction to supervision for new members of the group, the supervisor clearly emphasised the educative function of supervision:

For the new members of the group I'll just explain a little about supervision. The purpose of supervision is for you to explore issues that will result in you being more effective advocates in your Refuge work. Before coming to supervision you might want to spend a little time thinking about things that have happened in your Refuge work over the last month that raise issues for you - things that you had difficulties with, and also things that went really well. So other members of the group can learn from these too. If we go around the circle as usual, it will give the new people who haven't started doing rosters yet an idea of the sorts of things to bring to supervision.

By suggesting that there were “certain sorts of things to bring to supervision”, the supervisor was indicating to the new advocates that they had to acquire an understanding of the story genres that were told in this group. Becoming an advocate was not just an ability to reflect practice, but required learning how to turn the detail of ‘experience’, challenge, confusion, failure, or stress into a story that would be appropriate for telling in supervision. This is something that is learned through listening to others’ stories and attempting to recast memory and feelings into particular forms of narrative.

In group supervision the supervisor and the more ‘experienced’ volunteer advocates were in a more powerful position than the new advocates. They had the knowledge to determine what was ‘good practice’ and had already established a pattern for the type of stories that could be told in supervision. Although within the organisational structure the volunteer advocates did not have any formal power to discipline their peers, they had power/knowledge to determine what was and was not acceptable
practice. Later in this chapter I discuss a narrative told by a new volunteer advocate that portrays the power/knowledge relationship to surveillance in supervision.

**Summary: Constructions of supervision**

In the complex web of interaction within a supervision session, individuals were constantly shifting between the discourses of supervision as disciplining, supervision as education and supervision as support. The new volunteer advocates constructed supervision at the Refuge as a place where they would receive support and the opportunity to learn. They engaged in experiential learning as they sought to be reflexive about their practice and to tell 'appropriate' stories in supervision. By trying out alternative endings to stories, the advocates learned to act in particular situations. They also learned, by listening to the stories of the more 'experienced' advocates, which stories were appropriate to tell in supervision. The supervisor and the more 'experienced' advocates had the power to determine what counted as appropriate knowledge in the supervision context.

In its written material the Refuge constructed supervision as multi-functional: as administration; as education; and as support. I argued earlier in the chapter that Kadushin's (1985) functions of administration and education are similar to Foucault's (1997) ideas of the relationship between power/knowledge. The Refuge as an organisation sought to utilise supervision as a way of assuring its funders that it was providing a quality service to its clients. This constructs supervision as surveillance.

The supervisor put a strong emphasis on the learning function of supervision. Through supervision she wanted to develop the new advocates' ability to be reflexive of their practice. She described an important educative function of supervision as teaching the new advocates to carry out self-surveillance of their practice. Supervision was a place where volunteer advocates had opportunities to learn new ways of being advocates, but also to learn what can and cannot be talked about in the Refuge context.
I take up the ideas of supervision as a site of discipline, education, surveillance, self-surveillance and idea of power/knowledge as I present four ‘case studies’ of narratives of supervision. I present four ‘supervision narratives’, which I theorise in terms of discipline, surveillance, self-surveillance, and power/knowledge relationships.

**Supervision: Setting the scene**

Supervision was held once a month in the Refuge office. For the supervision sessions, the office was re-arranged to allow the participants and the supervisor to sit in a circle. The numbers attending supervision ranged from six to 15 women. It was rare for the same group to attend from month to month. Supervision usually started off with the supervisor welcoming people and having a round of introductions to get acquainted and re-acquainted. Each woman then had a turn to talk about her experiences of the previous month, to tell stories about her successes or failures. Usually the group went around in a circle, but sometimes the facilitator suggested that people speak when they wanted to, especially if there was a big group. There was considerable discussion and exchanges among members of the group. When any one advocate talked about her situation, others usually shared their experiences, solutions and suggestions. There was a considerable amount of group problem solving.

**Narrative: Managing stress**

One of the stated purposes of group supervision at the Refuge is to assist volunteer advocates to manage the stress of volunteering at the Refuge. The Refuge recognises that volunteer advocates taking calls on the crisis line, and going out to pick up families and take them into the Refuge Safe house, will at times face difficult and challenging situations. The volunteer advocates utilised supervision to assist them with the stress of dealing with specific incidents in their work, as three of the following narratives illustrate. Although they did often discuss incidents they found difficult and stressful, the most commonly related ‘stress story’ was about the volume of the work and the impact it had on their lives and the lives of their families. Pip’s story is a good example of this type of ‘stress story’ told at the Refuge.
Pip: I’m getting really stressed with my roster. I am on between 11 am and 2 pm, and I need to be ready for work at 3 pm. I’m working in an after-school project at the school my kids go to. I’ve found it really difficult when I get a call at five to two that requires a pick-up or something that takes a long time. Last week I didn’t get to the school until after four, and my kids wore it. The other kids were saying “Where is your mum?” “Why isn’t she here?” and “We are supposed to be having a soccer practice”. I tried to get someone else to do the pick up, but the advocate who started at two was also on a crisis call, and couldn’t take over. I couldn’t get anyone at the office, so I just had to do it myself. I’m really worried because the school holidays start next week and I don’t know how I am going to cope with the children home while I take the roster.

Supervisor: Sounds like you are really stressed, what do you need?

Pip: I really need not to be doing rosters during the school holidays. But if I don’t do my share, that puts a heavier load on the rest of the women, because they have to cover my times too. I don’t think that is fair.

Bridget: I have the school holidays off, and I can pick up your rosters. It is not a problem.

Pip: That is really great, but I still feel guilty about it.

The main solution to too much stress at the Refuge was for the voluntary advocates to take ‘time out’. It could be an informal swap of rosters as happened with Pip and Bridget, or it could be that advocates advised the Refuge that they would not be doing any Refuge work for a specified period. The difficulty with taking ‘time out’ was, as Pip said, that the remaining advocates would have heavier workloads.
Following the interchange between Pip and Bridget, Ruby (the longest serving volunteer advocate at the Refuge) offered the following advice:

One of the things that I would say to new people who are starting out is to really have a look at your limits. I know when I got involved with the Refuge I wanted to do heaps and keep doing more and more and it got to the stage that I actually had to stop and say “This is what I am doing, but I can’t do that”. So it was setting really clear limits round what I could, and what I couldn’t do.

In July 2002, only two of the March 1998 cohort were still active in the Refuge. Both of these women, Pip and Dawn, talked about the importance of being able to set limits on their contribution to the Refuge (see Appendix 1). Like Ruby, they considered that their ability to be assertive and say “no” to the Refuge was the key to their continued involvement. The Refuge wanted to recruit strong assertive women as volunteer advocates, and the women, who remained the longest, were those who were able to be assertive and set limits for their refuge work. Both Pip and Dawn talked about learning to be assertive through their experiences as Refuge advocates. I was surprised when they talked about developing their assertiveness, not as I had expected (that is, by acting with/for the women and children using the Refuge), but in saying ‘no’ to taking on additional work for the Refuge.

The Refuge advocates were expected to take responsibility for monitoring their own stress levels and to set limits and take ‘time-out’ when necessary. Discussions about stress during supervision usually framed as ‘support’ and sometimes ‘educational’ in that the new advocates could learn about managing stress from the more ‘experienced’ women. But the supervisor warned volunteer advocates:

You need to be aware of how you are feeling, and how that affects you when you are making decisions. If you are stressed, or vulnerable, you are more likely to do things that you wouldn’t otherwise do.
The supervisor’s comment that the volunteer advocates needed to monitor their feelings and stress levels brings a different perspective to asking for support when stressed. The supervisor stated that if advocates were not aware of their own stress levels they might make bad decisions. To keep working at the Refuge, advocates needed to be providing work to a standard that was acceptable to the Refuge. They had to learn ways of framing accounts of their experiences of stress in such a way that they were still seen as competent. More specifically they had to be able to tell stories about their stress, in order to get some help to manage it. At the same time they had to ensure that their stress stories did not cross the boundary where they might be perceived to have been inadequate in providing a service to the clients. In this way they had to engage in self-surveillance of the stories of stress they recounted at supervision.

The self-monitoring of stress levels among Refuge advocates reflects, in theoretical terms, a Foucauldian notion of self-surveillance. But it remains unclear from the comments cited, whose interests this self-surveillance serves. The supervisor’s comment implies a professional discourse of serving the clients’ needs, that is, that advocates cannot care for the women and children who need the Refuge advocates’ support, if the volunteers are emotionally exhausted or unable to give the necessary time and attention to the needs of the clients. Alternatively, Ruby’s advice suggests that advocates need to monitor their involvement in the Refuge for the volunteers’ self-preservation.

The advice offered by the more experienced Refuge advocates also indicates an interesting connection with Foucault’s power/knowledge couplet. Assertiveness is an important quality sought in potential volunteers so they can advocate in power/ful ways for the women and children who seek shelter at the Refuge. Yet the comments from Ruby and her colleagues suggest that the sense of personal power gained from their work within the Refuge context, and their increased knowledge of the operational system and the personal cost of being an advocate, have empowered them to maintain a moderated role within the Refuge. This represents an example of the blurring/layering/overlapping of power and knowledge that has arguably undesirable effects for the Refuge, where experienced and knowledgeable advocates are “less committed” in a practical or hands-on sense than those who are inexperienced.
Narrative: Communication problems

In Chapter Eight, I discussed an historical incident where Judith had felt unable to talk about her stress at supervision because she got the message from an ‘experienced advocate’ that the Refuge advocates were expected to handle stress and not talk about it. In 1998, volunteer advocates were encouraged to talk about stressful experiences in supervision. It was not just new advocates who told stories of the stress of ‘stuff-ups’. Ailiesha, who mentored many of the new advocates from the March 1998 intake, talked at group supervision about an incident that she felt she had handled badly. It was a complicated situation where she had been called to the Police Station at night to take a woman and her young children into the Refuge. The woman was profoundly deaf, and had faxed through to the Police that she needed help to escape a violent situation. The Police had gone out and collected the woman and her three children under the age of five, and taken them to the police station. Ailiesha found that her ability to communicate with the woman was very limited:

She had some signing, but we couldn’t sign. She could write so that was how we communicated. I would write things down and she would answer by writing stuff on paper, but it was really really difficult. I had taken Vicki with me because Vicki hadn’t been on a police pick-up and I thought it was going to be a simple straightforward one for us.

But it was not a straightforward case. Ailiesha and Vicki’s inability to communicate, except in writing, made the admission process to the Refuge difficult. Ailiesha tried to find out what had happened to the woman prior to being taken to the police station, so that she could assess if the woman and children were in danger.

We couldn’t establish why she needed to come into the Refuge because whenever we asked about the problem or the violence, she would write ‘no violence’. Eventually I phoned the Police and they explained the situation and that her life was in danger.
Once I'd sorted that out I thought, OK she needs to be in the Refuge. We were trying to go through the admission form, to find out if she had food or money or clothes, or if we needed to supply these. It got to the stage that she lost it - she screamed and just wrote, "I'm going home - too many questions". And she got up and rushed out the door. I just felt totally inadequate. If she could have heard, I felt sure I could have explained why we needed to know these things. But as it was, she just left. She had her own car, so she went back home. I think that if I did it again there would be lots of things I would do differently.

Both Aliesha and Vicki talked about what they would do differently next time. Both agreed that they needed to get more complete information from the Police prior to picking up the family, and that they would admit the woman and her family without completing the administrative admission forms. In the Refuge office there was a list of interpreters available for the newer ethnic communities that did not speak English. Following the discussion in supervision of the incident, one member of the supervision group agreed to contact the Deaf Association and find out about the availability of sign language interpreters. This was done, and names and contact details of sign language interpreters were added to the list of interpreters.

When considered from a poststructuralist viewpoint, this story reminds me of the relation of language to power and to knowledge. As Weedon (1997, p 31) writes "It is language in the form of conflicting discourses which constitutes us as conscious thinking subjects and enables us to give meaning to the world and to act to transform it". The inability of the woman and Aliesha to communicate effectively is at the core of this incident. Ultimately, the woman's decision to reject the Refuge demonstrates dramatically her sense of powerlessness at not being accepted into the Refuge without an accompanying account of herself and her experience of domestic violence. The positive changes made to the Refuge systems (by making interpreters available, and placing less importance on the admission paperwork) represents a change in the power/knowledge discourse at the Refuge. I suggest that this involved a shift in emphasis away from (administrative/bureaucratic) knowledge as a gatekeeper to the Refuge, to a greater empowerment of the clients.
Narrative: Breaking the rules

In one supervision sessions, Dawn told a story about a series of events and phone calls that led to her going to the Refuge house at midnight. Earlier that evening there had been a prowler at the house and the police had been called. Later in the evening, one of the residents (clients) had arrived back at the house and was drunk. The other women in the house were unwilling to let her into the house. Dawn arrived with the police and managed to sort it all out satisfactorily.

Dawn told this story as a ‘success story’, and the other advocates commented on how well she had handled a difficult situation. At that point, Dawn added:

One of the other things I’m doing that I haven’t checked out with anybody, is when I’m doing these night rosters I take my son [aged 23] with me. He doesn’t come into the Refuge, but he just sits in the car and I don’t know how people feel about that because I know that it is against the Refuge rules, but if you want me to do night rosters, I’m just not confident to come in to deal with situations by my own. I feel much safer with him, and if he’s not there I would get my husband to come in with me. I totally trust both of them. I have been married to my husband for 35 years and if I can’t trust him, who can I trust?

One of the rules of the Refuge is that the address of the Refuge house is kept secret. This is a practice that has been carried forward from the time that the Refuge was first set up, and the only protection that could be offered to the women and children staying in the house was that the violent partner would not be able to find them. Only active members of the Refuge can visit the house and its address must not be given to ‘outsiders’. Advocates are instructed not to tell anyone, their children, their mothers, their sisters, their neighbours, and particularly not their husbands, the location of the Refuge house.
Dawn’s disclosure that she brought her adult son to the Refuge was followed by a lengthy discussion on Refuge rules around confidentiality, and Dawn reiterated:

Weil, I totally trust him, and if I trust him, why can’t you? What can I do? I don’t feel safe on my own in those situations. If I can’t bring him, I can’t do the rosters.

Members of the group explained that the issue was not a personal one about whether they could trust Dawn’s son or husband. They argued that secrecy of the house’s address was the main security they could offer to the women needing the refuge of a Safe house. As Aliesha explained:

We don’t know what may happen in six months or one year, he could have a friend and something may just slip out about the place, or your involvement. It is not as though it is going to be someone betraying trust that way, but the more people who know about it the more chance there is that there will be some sort of accidental leakage.

Dawn finally agreed that if she was to do night rosters and she had any concerns about her safety, she would phone another advocate and ask them to accompany her rather than taking her family members to the Refuge. Several members gave their phone numbers and said they were willing to be contacted any time of the day or night. The situation seemed to be resolved.

Dawn was not present at supervision the following month when Aliesha sought clarification that one of the purposes of supervision was “The ability people have to bring things up about other advocates if they feel that the service is being compromised.” She stated that she still had concerns about Dawn’s breach of confidentiality. Two members of the group who had been in the same training cohort as Dawn stated:

Vicki: I don’t think she will. It seemed very clear at the last meeting. I had said that I would take my sister in if I needed
company, and after that meeting there is no way I would even think of it. I just wouldn’t do it, and I don’t think Dawn will either.

Pip: I don’t think it is appropriate to bring it up again at supervision and rehash it. She was in the hot seat once already over it, and I’m sure she got the message clearly.

However Aliesha was not convinced by these arguments. She was concerned that Dawn might not alter her practice, but simply not talk about what she was doing:

Aliesha: I don’t think she will talk about doing it, but that doesn’t mean that she won’t do it, and just not talk about it. I think it needs following up but I don’t know how.

The group finally decided that the supervisor would contact Dawn and ask her to make a time to talk to the manager about the incident and to ensure that she had an alternative support system in place for night rosters. At the following month’s supervision Dawn asked to speak first:

I want to apologise to everyone in the group for my actions in breaking confidentiality in bringing my son to the Refuge. I have talked with my son and stressed the importance of confidentiality to him. And I have worked out a strategy so that I will feel safe coming into the house and not have to bring him. So I’ve asked Fay to be my backup and she has agreed. I had a talk with Jess [manager] and I was afraid that because I had broken confidentiality that I might be asked to leave. If residents who stay here break confidentiality by bringing a man to the house they will be asked to leave, so why should it be any different for me? But Jess said that I was aware now of the issue and the implications of what I had done, and she thought that if I apologised to the group, that would probably be OK. I just want to check out that is OK with everybody.
Aliesha thanked Dawn for clarifying the issue for her and said that she felt OK with the strategy that Dawn had worked out. Other members of the group congratulated Dawn on the way she had handled the situation since making the initial mistake.

**The aftermath**

This is a story of discourses of supervision shifting between discipline, education and support. Dawn told her initial success story of coping with a difficult incident at night, and received support from the other volunteer advocates. However, when she mentioned that she had taken her adult son to the Refuge with her, she got no support but discipline, for breaking one of the rules of the Refuge. Dawn’s action of bringing her adult son to the Refuge was challenged and her involvement in the Refuge work was threatened. She encountered the ‘discipline’ of a meeting with the Refuge manager to convince her that she should never again rely on family members to accompany her on a Refuge ‘call-out’. By talking about breaking the Refuge confidentiality rule, Dawn became subject to the surveillance of her colleagues. Aliesha no longer trusted her to keep the rules of the Refuge.

By apologising to the group, Dawn once again received support from other members of the group. Fay congratulated her for demonstrating that she had learned from her mistake. The group seemed to have been reassured by Dawn’s apology and by her awareness of the importance of the breach of confidentiality. They were satisfied with the way she was able to describe her new strategy for late-night call-outs. She had gone through a process of surveillance by other members of the group and by the management of the organisation, and could now be trusted with self-surveillance.

When I interviewed her, the supervisor stated that talking about incidents such as Dawn breaking the rules might be difficult, but that they were very valuable learning opportunities. She saw her role as creating an environment in the group where people felt confident to speak out, but was aware that the reaction of group members to some stories might be to silence others. She wanted supervision to be a place that:

maximises experience so that maximum learning happens. What

I would hope for is the advocates in some way internalise a
system for dealing with difficulties, so that they have their own internalised supervisor.

In other words, the supervisor was hoping that through supervision the new volunteer advocates would move from direct surveillance of their peers to self-surveillance of their practice; to have their own “internalised supervisor”. But the volunteer advocates were not just learning to monitor their own practice; they were also learning what could safely be talked about in supervision. As Alix commented in an interview soon after this incident:

I think it was incredibly naive of Dawn to talk about taking her son to the Refuge. I don’t know why she mentioned it, it wasn’t even really part of her story, it was just an add-on at the end. I know that others in the group, like Vicki had been taking her sister in with her, but she didn’t talk about it until Dawn had brought it up.

Alix’s comment indicates that other members of the group may have learned to be more careful about the stories they told in supervision. Dawn’s practice had been challenged and she had been reincorporated into the group, but many advocates would prefer to avoid these disciplinary practices. Supervision therefore offered Dawn’s colleagues a valuable insight into how they could function most effectively within the Refuge, and more particularly, the supervision system. Advocates learnt to acquire knowledge about ‘the rules’ of the Refuge, but also learnt to empower themselves by taking up the story genres that would construct them as capable and trustworthy volunteers.

Theoretically, the principle of confidentiality represents power/knowledge in the Refuge discourse. A core component of confidentiality is the non-disclosure of the whereabouts of the Refuge house. Dawn’s sharing of this knowledge with her son, not simply by telling him, but actively requesting that he *accompany her to the site* thus represented a critical threat to a core foundation of Refuge discourse, and unsurprisingly was strongly admonished/rejected/criticised by her colleagues.
Narrative: Keeping the rules

In the previous narrative I discussed the consequences for Dawn of ‘breaking the Refuge rules’. In contrast, this narrative is of a situation where Vicki ‘kept the rules’, with disastrous consequences. Vicki was deeply distressed by this incident, but her willingness to tell the story in group supervision resulted in a change to the Refuge policy.

It was my first call-out. I was on a morning roster and a woman needed to come into refuge. She had been physically abused and her partner was sexually abusing her daughters. She needed the Refuge, but when I phoned the house, Jan [paid staff member] said that she would have to go somewhere else because the house was full49. I rang around all over the place and everything was full except the Y. The woman felt OK about going there, so I arranged to meet her at a shopping centre, and took her to the Y.

The woman was a mess and had bruises around her neck where he had had a go at her. A couple of weeks ago he set fire to the lounge so she was desperate to get out. But when we got to the Y the woman there said no they wouldn’t take her because she had three children. They would only take up to two children because of fire regulations. It was terrible, the woman was crying and begging to be allowed to stay. She said that she would stay on a mattress in the laundry if that was all they could provide. But the woman at the Y wouldn’t let her stay.

There wasn’t anywhere else to take her so I ended up taking her back and dropping her off where I picked her up. I didn’t know what to do. I thought about taking her home with me, but I knew

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49 This policy of limiting the number of residents at the Refuge house at any one time was introduced in the mid 1990s following a tragic fire in another organisation in Christchurch. In 1993 this organisation was housing a large number of ‘street kids’ in contravention of fire safety regulations when a fire broke out that took the lives of seven of the young people.
I couldn’t do that; it is against the Refuge rules. I felt so terrible.
I felt so helpless. That was my first call-out and it devastated me.
I thought that I would chuck it in after that. I was there to help
women, and if I wasn’t able to offer any help what was the point?
If it happened to me again I would just take the women and her
children in, I don’t care if the house is full, and it is against fire
regulations. But it was my first call and I was trying to do the
right thing.

Following this incident Vicki had tried to find the woman to check if she was safe, but
without her address or last name she was unsuccessful. This incident, which was
often discussed at the Refuge as the “Full House” story, is an example of the way that
a personal narrative can become a public narrative Somers (1994, p 619). It was told
as a ‘first call-out’ story, as a means of illustrating the complexity of Refuge work,
and also of the organisation’s responsiveness to its volunteer advocates. Although
this is a gut wrenchingly negative narrative, it did have some positive outcomes. As a
result of Vicki’s experience, the Refuge rules were changed so that no woman or child
would be turned away in future. The Refuge governance made a decision that even if
the house was full they would risk defying the fire regulations if no other safe
accommodation could be found.

I interpret Vicki’s narrative as demonstrating the power/knowledge relationship in
action. As a new advocate, on her first ‘solo’ call-out, she did not feel that she had
the power to break the rules. She had just completed her induction and mentored
training, and shaped her actions according to what she had learned. If the Refuge
house was full, advocates were expected to find alternative accommodation for
women and children with other agencies. It was not acceptable for advocates to
accommodate women and children in their own homes. The ‘rules’ did not anticipate
a situation where all emergency accommodation in the city would be full. Because
she was new, Vicki did not have the knowledge based on experience to know when
she could step outside the rules.

In the Refuge, the ‘rules’, policies and practices are based on an accumulation of
twenty-five years experience. As I have described several times in this thesis, the
‘rules’ often get changed as a result of incidents.\textsuperscript{50} But Vicki as a new advocate thought that she did not have the power to ‘break the rules’. Throughout her training Vicki had expected that, as a Refuge advocate she would be in a position to ‘help’ or ‘empower’ other women. But this incident resulted in Vicki (the empowerer) feeling powerless.

**Chapter summary**

I began this chapter with a discussion of my interpretation of Kadushin’s ideas about supervision as administration, education and support. I looked at the relationship between these ideas and Foucault’s notions of discipline, power/knowledge, surveillance and self-surveillance. I then discussed how the new advocates, the Refuge organisation, and the independent supervisor constructed supervision. Supervision was explicitly constructed as a legitimate tool for learning and support by the Refuge organisation, the supervisor and the trainee advocates. The organisation also constructed supervision as a tool for maintaining quality control of the services offered to women and children users of the Refuge crisis line and Safe house. The supervisor also identified supervision as an opportunity/site for developing the advocates’ sense of professional self-awareness and professional identity. This involved teaching the new volunteer advocates to critically reflect on their own practices. In other words, the supervisor sought to encourage the new advocates to engage in the discipline of self-surveillance.

I have argued that the volunteer advocates engaged in ‘experiential learning’ as they reflected on their practice and identified instances where they fell short of the Refuge ideal. They then had to turn their ‘experiences’ into stories suitable for telling at supervision. Through attending supervision and telling and listening to stories the volunteer advocates learned different ways of acting in the future. They also learned the genre of ‘supervision’ stories, and learned to monitor their stories to fit what was acceptable in the Refuge context.

\textsuperscript{50} For example, changes in the admission form discussed in Chapter Seven, and the availability of a sign language interpreter discussed in this chapter.
In the four ‘narratives of supervision’, I explored issues of power/knowledge, surveillance, self-surveillance, and discipline as they were played out in Refuge supervision. I argue that these narratives demonstrate the complexity of ‘learning from experience’ and ‘experiential learning’ in the Refuge supervision context. I also argue that these stories illustrate the fluid shifting nature of power/knowledge as Refuge advocates negotiated their work with the Refuge clients, and other members of the organisation.
CHAPTER TEN

ENDNOTE 1

The closure here, is a way of letting the work go rather than of sealing it off. Thus every work materialised can be said to be a work-in-progress. The notion of a finished work, versus that of an uncompleted work requiring finishing, loses its pertinence.

I refer to the final sections of my thesis as ‘endnotes’ because I want to resist the academic tradition of providing a conclusion that neatly ties up the theoretical and substantive work of the thesis and offers tidy assertions as to how this work makes an original contribution to knowledge and understanding. Like Wilson (2001, p 297) I am reassured by the feminist poststructuralist notion that I am not expected to offer a central thesis encompassing all I have written about that represents a final conclusion to my research. I use ‘endnotes’ as a way of “letting the work go”, rather than concluding the discussion. In this, the first of two ‘endnotes’, I provide a theoretical discussion of the main ‘findings’ of this research. In the second endnote, I offer some texts that articulate future possibilities for the Refuge. They provide three very different visions for how the Refuge might be in the year 2005. These imaginings have developed out of the material discussed in the thesis.

Endnote is also the name of the bibliographic software that I have used to manage the referencing of this thesis. During the final stages of this project, I had problems with my computer, which required the hard disk to be rebuilt by a computer expert. Rebuilding involves taking all programmes and data off the computer, reformatting the hard drive, and reinstalling the programmes and data files. Since my computer has been ‘rebuilt’, Endnote seems to have taken on a life of its own. Instead of
passively waiting for me to insert my citation and then returning me to the point of insertion, Endnote takes me to seemingly random points in the document. These endnotes to the thesis may appear to be similarly random, but they have been purposefully juxtaposed. I present reflections in Endnote 1 and Endnote 2, as a way of progressing the discussion of volunteering, learning from experience/experiential learning, and feminist epistemologies beyond the pages of this thesis. I begin with a discussion of my motivations for undertaking this research project and the key questions that it addressed. I then briefly restate the major ‘findings’ of this thesis, before analysing some of the personal benefits of volunteering for the Refuge advocates in this study.

**Learning through volunteering**

I worked for many years in my local communities as a community development worker, in middle management in a Government Department, and more recently as a self-employed community development consultant. During those years I had many discussions with women about how they ended up in particular employment situations. Many women over forty had no tertiary qualifications, or had acquired them as mature students. The common thread for many women working in positions of responsibility in central and local government and in the voluntary sector, was their involvement in community organisations. Many women talked of taking on voluntary leadership roles in organisations like Plunket, Playcentre, Rape Crisis, Women’s Refuge, and Women’s Health Collectives. These responsibilities had been a springboard into a variety of different forms of paid work.

I embarked on this research in order to address this issue more systematically. I wanted to research the way that women learn through involvement in voluntary organisations. I was aware that some universities and polytechnics were starting to recognise the value of prior learning. However, my interest was not in the recognition by formal institutions of ‘non-formal learning’. I thought that the learning undertaken by women in the community was valuable in itself, not just as a source of possible credit towards formal educational qualifications. While voluntary experience may be recognised in recruitment, it is rarely taken into account when setting pay rates. Why
do people who gained their skills/knowledge through formal education receive higher rates of pay than those who gained similar skills/knowledge from their volunteering work? The irony of working on a PhD, the ultimate academic qualification, as a strategy for highlighting the value of learning in community organisations is not lost on me.

When I accessed the literature on volunteering and learning in voluntary organisations, I was struck by how little was known about what actually happens in voluntary organisations, particularly in New Zealand. As I moved into the research process, I shifted my focus from the wider question of how to make this learning visible to what was happening in terms of teaching and learning. For this reason, I decided on an in-depth investigation of one organisation. I chose the Women’s Refuge because it is one of a handful of organisations in Christchurch that is totally run by women, and identifies as feminist. There has been very little debate on the practices of women’s organisations at the end of the twentieth century, and little documented about the learning that occurs in these organisations (Baldock, 1998). I wanted to make visible the teaching and learning that occurred in the Refuge, but at the same time I wanted to look critically at this learning. Poststructuralist theorising calls for a self-critique of feminist practices and discourses, as Gore (1993, p 54) writes, “...To look for their dangers, their normalising tendencies, for how they might serve as instruments of domination despite the intentions of their creators”.

I had anticipated that I would observe women learning skills such as listening and open communication, knowledge about the Domestic Protection Act and the various Acts relating to child custody. From other research findings, (for example, Elsdon, 1995; Elsey, 1993; Everingham, 1996; Percy et al., 1988; Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995) and my own experience, I suspected that many of the women would learn things like how to get along with other people and self-confidence. They did learn these things, as I discuss later in this endnote, but what I had not anticipated was the impact of organisational discourses on the participants. I found that the women were not just learning how to do the work of the Refuge, but also how to manage their subjectivities as Refuge workers.
I found that the Refuge legitimised certain experiences as evidence of learning, but not others. Within the Refuge, the notions of ‘experience’ and ‘learning’ were not neutral or value free. What counted as learning within the Refuge context was not generalised knowledge, but an ability to engage in certain practices and talk about these practices in particular ways. The new volunteer advocates were learning not just how to support women and children escaping violence in their homes, but also how to manage their identities as learners and workers within the institutional regimes of the Refuge. The volunteers had to learn to demonstrate reflexivity, and be ‘honest’, but they also had to learn to manage that honesty. They were learning about the Refuge work, about what ‘experience’ was valuable, but also how to demonstrate that they were learning in this particular environment.

I have drawn on Foucauldian understandings of the relationship of power/knowledge. I explored Foucault’s (1980, p 52) notion that “power perpetually creates knowledge and conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power”, by examining the discursive practices used in training a particular set of Refuge advocates in 1998. It is in everyday practices that power can be observed, including the training ‘experiences’ of the Refuge advocates. I argue that the epistemologies utilised in the Refuge did not ‘fit’ the practices of the organisation at that time. I posit that practices of the training and induction of new members maintained ‘regimes of truth’ within the organisation.

In the following section, I review the most important theoretical issues to emerge from my analysis of the Refuge as a site of learning. I begin with a review of the forms of learning from experience/experiential learning presented in this thesis. I then examine the possibilities and constraints offered to volunteers in the subject positions made available to them as advocates at the Refuge. I finish this section of Endnote 1 with a discussion of the need for a new epistemology in the Refuge. In the final section of Endnote 1, I discuss how the volunteer advocates were using the Refuge training to extend their own capacities and to ‘empower’ themselves.
Learning from experience/experiential learning

The trainee volunteer advocates who participated in this study entered a complex learning situation based on ideas about learning from experience. The women needed to constitute ‘experience’ in a number of different ways throughout their training. During the induction course they had to draw on their past life ‘experiences’ and talk about these in ways that ‘fitted’ the Refuge discourses of oppression and empowerment. They had to have certain ‘experiences’, such as visiting the Family Court, and attending a ‘call-out’ before they could do rosters alone in their own homes. They worked with ‘experienced’ advocates on the crisis line where they learned to take calls. They started by observing the ‘experienced’ advocate taking calls, and then ‘experienced’ taking calls themselves and received feedback on their performance. Once the new advocates were taking calls unsupervised in their own homes, they recounted stories of their ‘experiences’ of doing the work of the Refuge at monthly supervision.

I have argued that using radical feminist strategies of consciousness-raising in a context where participants were being assessed for suitability as volunteer advocates was problematic (See Chapter Six, p 177). During the training, the women were encouraged to be honest about their lives and the way they saw the world, but that honesty needed to be managed within the confines of the dominant discourses of the Refuge. What counted as learning was based on an ability to frame stories of experience in a particular way that counted as learning within the Refuge context. For example, in Chapter Six (p 167) I discussed the way that some of the trainee advocates positioned themselves as powerful in relation to some men, but that these ideas did not fit with Refuge discourse of women oppressed by men. This led me to question what happens when trainee advocates talk about their ‘experiences’ in ways that do not fit the Refuge discourses. In the Refuge training, the volunteer advocates quickly learned to monitor their language and actions, and did not offer to discuss insights about their past ‘experiences’ that differed from the Refuge’s perspectives. How can the training course accommodate difference, while at the same time preparing volunteer advocates to work within the specific context of the Refuge?

Using strategies of consciousness-raising in a situation where the potential volunteer
advocates were being assessed for their suitability to work at the Refuge, prompted me to reflect on how consciousness-raising can become surveillance.

A number of educational theorists (for example, D. Boud, R. Keogh, & D. Walker, 1985; Johnston & Usher, 1997) argue that ‘reflection’ on experience is a critical component of ‘experiential learning’ (See Chapter Five, p 114). I have argued for a more specific use of the term ‘experiential learning’ that involves not just ‘reflection’ but reflexivity (See Chapter Five, p 114). I use the term ‘reflexivity’ to draw attention to the way all narratives or stories have been constructed within discourses that make some narratives possible but not others. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that, the volunteer advocate’s ability to tell certain stories and not others during the training process was evidence of ‘experiential learning’. Kemmis’ (1985, p 47) term ‘experiential learning’ has been used to refer to “thinking about the relationship between thoughts and actions in a particular context”. The women training to be volunteer advocates had to think about the relationships between their thoughts and their actions in the Refuge context. The interviews I conducted with them outside the training context provided them with the opportunity to construct themselves as ‘strategic’ experiential learners (See Chapter Six, p 177). They had learned ‘to play the game’ and talk about their learning in ways that fitted with the dominant discourses of the Refuge. By the end of the induction course, all trainee advocates were ‘talking empowerment’ (See Chapter Five, p 152).

Despite resource constraints, mentoring was another strategy of learning from experience incorporated by the Refuge to prepare the new volunteer advocates for work on the crisis line. The mentoring process involves the new advocates learning from ‘experienced’ advocates, and within two months, all were taking calls on their own in their own homes. At this level, mentoring and learning from experience was a successful strategy for the Refuge (See Chapter Seven, p 181).

One of the problems with mentoring is that it reproduces existing practices in an organisation (Darwin, 2000, p 198). In Refuge, the new volunteer advocates modeled themselves on what they observed ‘experienced’ advocates doing. They were not expected to reflect on why the Refuge employed certain practices and not others. I have argued that mentoring was a circular process within the Refuge (See
Chapter Seven, p 205). All volunteer advocates were expected to assist with mentoring new advocates once they had been part of the organisation for 12 months. In a context where mentors did not receive any training on how to mentor, they tended to mentor in the way that they were themselves mentored. In this way the Refuge maintained existing discursive practices.

Mentoring constructed learning as a linear process of moving from 'not knowing' to 'knowing' and 'mentoring', and provided little space for new ideas and new practices to be introduced. Mentors passed on what they learned from their mentors, and ensured that the practices they valued were taken up by the new advocates. Mentors began by providing feedback to the new advocates, who moved from this system of 'direct surveillance' to self-surveillance once they started 'solo' rosters. I argue that such a circular process of knowledge production maintains existing 'regimes of truth' within an organisation. This prompts the question: how can new ideas or ways of working be introduced into the organisation?

Group supervision is the final site of learning that I explored in this thesis. In the Refuge context, group supervision provided the forum for ongoing learning for the advocates (See Chapter Eight, p 210). I have argued that supervision fulfilled a number of overlapping functions of support, education, discipline, surveillance and self-surveillance. For supervision to be successful, it requires a high level of reflexivity on the part of the participants (Munson, 2002). In the Refuge context, the women demonstrated this reflexivity about their practice in the stories they told at group supervision. They needed to be aware of how their practice met or fell short of an 'ideal' Refuge practice of empowerment. Throughout supervision, the women identified what they would do differently if they were faced with that particular situation.

I have argued that, as the volunteer advocates progressed from supervised rosters to completing rosters in their own homes, they moved from a process of direct surveillance to self-surveillance. The supervisor employed what I would term a Foucauldian notion of self-surveillance when she talked about teaching the volunteer advocates to be their own "internal supervisor" (See Chapter Eight, p 219). By participating in supervision, I argue that the volunteer advocates learned to tell the
'right' stories at supervision. They learned to tell stories of stress and 'stuff-ups' in ways that did not cross the boundary where they might be perceived as providing an inadequate service, or breaking the Refuge rules. I discussed an incident where, as a consequence of being seen to have 'broken the rules', Dawn was subjected to direct surveillance of her peers, until they were satisfied that she could be trusted with self-surveillance (See Chapter Nine, p 228). By attending supervision, the volunteer advocates learned to acquire knowledge about the 'rules', but also learned to empower themselves by taking up story genres that would construct them as capable and trustworthy. They were participating in a context in which they were demonstrating knowledge about their experience, and recognising the possibility of falling short of the ideal, but also participating in a process of reaffirming rules and a shared moral and political purpose.

Creating subjectivities

Throughout the thesis, I use the term 'discourse' as ideas, practices, ways of producing knowledge, and ways of shaping the world according to that knowledge (Crowley & Himmelweit, 1992, p 237). In Chapter Five (p 135) I discussed the dominant discourses operating in the Refuge that shaped the language, practices and subjectivities of the volunteer advocates undergoing induction training. For example, the Refuge drew on discourses of radical feminism in shaping the way the training course was presented and the content included in it.

Discourses represent political interests and consequently are constantly implicated in practices of status and power. Competing discourses of volunteering as 'helping', 'caring', 'empowering', and 'professionalism' were evident in the Refuge context. According to Weedon (1997, p 40) the site of the battle for power among discourses is the subjectivity of the individual. In this thesis I have demonstrated how the discourses at the Refuge promoted certain subject positions and not others. For example, throughout their training volunteer advocates were encouraged to define themselves as 'empowerers' rather than 'charity workers'. 
The volunteer advocates working on the Refuge crisis line faced a wide range of possible situations when responding to calls, as the stories in the thesis have illustrated. Because the work is so disparate, it is difficult for the Refuge to provide training to account for all possibilities. The Refuge recognises this and emphasises that, if advocates have a good understanding of the theories underlying the work of an advocate, they are more likely to respond appropriately (See Chapter Six, pp 130 - 140). For this reason the creation of ‘empowering subjectivities’ is central to the training offered to new advocates. The Refuge constructed ‘power’ in modernist terms as something that could be held by an individual or a group and distributed to someone else. The trainee advocates discussed the way power could be used in different ways. ‘Power over’ referred to the force, domination and violence perpetrated by the partners of women in the Refuge. But the Refuge had another understanding of ‘power’, which they described as ‘power for’. The Refuge notion of ‘power for’ suggested that even though women as a group were oppressed, there was the possibility of resistance. By making a stand against violence and abuse of women, the Refuge resisted notions of male oppression and ‘power over’ and assumed an active position. Within the Refuge the active position was as an ‘empowerer’, one who uses ‘power for’ the victims of abuse (See Chapter Six, pp 158 - 171).

The Refuge trainers had an expectation that because volunteers wanted to join the Refuge, they were committed to working towards stopping domestic violence against women and children. The Refuge assumed that women joining the training would be open to examining their own ways of seeing the world, and would if necessary replace existing understandings of ‘volunteering’ with new subjectivities as ‘empowerers’. However, for many of the women in the March 1998 intake, the Refuge was a serendipitous choice. Many women were more interested in ‘volunteering’ than in the specific agenda of Women’s Refuge (See Chapter Three, p 76).

The Refuge was looking for women who fitted the ‘ideal advocate’ criteria. These criteria were covert and were not discussed with the new volunteers. One of the paradoxes of the Refuge training was that the Refuge wanted strong assertive women as volunteers, but this assertiveness needed to be expressed using the discourses dominant in the Refuge. The Refuge wanted women to be open and to share their philosophies of life, but the women trainees were aware that they needed to ‘play the
game' to get accepted as a Refuge advocate. 'Playing the game' involved managing their subjectivities to fit what they thought the Refuge was looking for in an 'ideal advocate'. The prospective advocates demonstrated their learning of Refuge discourses in their talk so that they would be accepted as volunteer advocates at the Refuge and reflected on this explicitly in interviews after their initial training (See Chapter Six, p 177). This raises critical questions for organisations like the Refuge, that train volunteers to carry out the work of the organisation. If trainees work out what the organisation wants and 'play the game' to get accepted as qualified workers, do they adhere to the organisational practices when they are no longer under direct surveillance?

**Need for a new epistemology?**

The Refuge training programme I studied made strategic use of a form of 1970s and 1980s radical feminism to inform the training offered to new advocates. However, the discourses of radical feminism did not account for the complexity of life in the late twentieth century. This resulted in a mismatch of theory and practice within the organisation. For example, the discourse of women's oppression by men, and male violence, does not account for violence in relationships between women. During training the advocates were encouraged to use gender neutral terms when answering the crisis line. The possibility that the perpetrator of violence in a relationship might be a woman, did not fit within the theory presented earlier about men. Another example of a discrepancy between theory and practice was the way that the discourses of professionalism demanded by the funders created boundaries between the advocates and clients, whereas the discourse of radical feminism challenged the boundaries between those receiving and providing services (See Chapter Five, p 140).

It is very difficult for the Refuge to create a new epistemology that challenges existing 'regimes of truth'. The capacity of the members of the Refuge to reflect on epistemology is limited by the pragmatics of the context. The Refuge is always under-resourced in terms of money, personnel and expertise. My observations during the eighteen months of 1998–99 was that the Refuge never really 'caught up with itself'. There was always a desperate need for more volunteers. The training and
support of new volunteers put extra strain on the few remaining volunteers, who often left the organisation when the new volunteers started taking on rosters. There was a high dropout rate for new volunteers, many of who found that they were being asked to do much more than the eight hours of roster that they initially signed up for. Of the twelve volunteers who completed training in March 1998, six were still active after six months, and only three after one year (See Appendix 1). It was a continual problem for the Refuge to attract, train and keep an adequate pool of volunteer advocates to run the crisis-line. At the time of writing this endnote, (July 2002), the Refuge was operating with only seven volunteers. For an organisation struggling to respond to women and children experiencing domestic violence, there was little time to reflect on the match between theory and practice.

**Value of volunteering for the volunteers**

While the Refuge trained volunteer advocates to respond to the needs of women and children, trainees were using the Refuge training to extend their own capacities and to ‘empower’ themselves (See Appendix 1). In the final section of this endnote I come back to Foucault’s argument that “power perpetually creates knowledge and conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power”(Foucault, 1980b, p 52). I argue that by going through the training, and engaging in the work as Refuge advocates, the women themselves were ‘empowered’ by the new knowledge and skills they accessed. By assuming the subjectivities of Refuge advocates, and accessing the stories that could be told from these positions, the women accessed new opportunities and choices that benefited them as individuals. In the following section I review the most important benefits of volunteering that I identified in my analysis of training of the Women’s Refuge advocates. This involves attention to credentialising, taking empowerment to the workplace, trying on alternative forms of subjectivity, and self-confidence. I finish this endnote with a discussion on strategies for change.

**Credentialising**

The Refuge training was not tied to any academic credentials, but for some of the Refuge advocates in this study it did create employment opportunities. At the
beginning of her training, Lena had indicated that she was interested in working as a paid staff member at the Refuge or a similar organisation in the community. The Refuge was the first organisation in which she worked as a volunteer, and it provided her with the first step in a career path. After several months as a volunteer advocate, Lena was appointed to a part-time position in the Refuge organising the rosters. When she left the Refuge after eighteen months, Lena was successful in her application to a community social service agency for a full time position (See Appendix 1). She indicated that she thought it was her Refuge experience that got her the job.

Aliesha, who mentored many of the women from the March 1998 cohort talked of how her work at the Refuge opened professional doors for her. When Aliesha joined Refuge, she was completing an arts degree at university and planning a career in social work. Through her work with the women and children at the Refuge, Aliesha developed a particular interest in working with child victims of abuse. Aliesha claimed that working as a volunteer advocate at the Refuge gave her the experience that led to her acceptance into a postgraduate counselling course. Maria also found her experience working at the Refuge as a volunteer advocate helpful when she applied, and was accepted, into a fulltime counselling course (See Appendix 1).

These women’s stories illustrate that the training and experience of working as a Refuge advocate was valued outside the Refuge itself. Training and working as Refuge advocates gave Lena, Aliesha, and Maria useful knowledge that could be capitalised on to further their careers. The knowledge that they gained through the Refuge involvement empowered them to move into other forms of employment or formal learning, and therefore to alternative forms of new knowledge (Baldock, 1990; Canterbury Volunteer Centre, 1997; Elsdon, 1995).

**Taking ‘empowerment’ into the workplace**

The learning practices of Refuge, particularly group supervision, encouraged the women to be reflexive about their practices. For some advocates, this reflexivity about their practice transferred into their workplaces (Elsdon, 1995). Both Alix and Pip talked about the way that being part of the Refuge gave them new understandings
they took into their paid work. Alix was a professional working with adults with mental disabilities. She found the discussion of ‘empowerment’ helpful and described the insights she had gained:

It has crystallised my own thinking about situations of safety issues in which one partner is being abusive to another in my own work. When there aren’t any issues of competence, it is not my role to try and stop a woman from seeing an abusive partner. I can highlight the issues, I can educate them about those sorts of things, I can discuss their options with them, but I cannot do anything else. And that has been quite good for me. It has resolved for me - OK this is my role, this is what I do, and I don’t need to feel bad if they still decide to stay with that person.

Alix’s understanding of ‘empowerment’ is to provide information and support, but to allow the woman to make her own decisions. The discourse was dominant at the Refuge, but not in Alix’s workplace. Alix’s comments illustrate the value of a resistant discourse of empowerment in her workplace, where, as a medical professional she might be expected to make the decisions for her clients. The discourse of empowerment enables Alix to changes the power/knowledge relationship with her client. She accepts that the client ultimately must make the decisions about her own life.

Pip also found that working as a volunteer advocate at the Refuge added a new dimension to her work as a teacher (See Appendix 1). She talked about how in the past she had children in her classroom who lived in families where violence and abuse were present. She had not really understood the ways that these children had been affected by the abuse and the impact this had on their ability to learn. She stated that, through her work at the Refuge, she had a deeper understanding of what these children were experiencing. Through working in the Refuge’s child advocacy programme, she had some new skills she could employ in her classroom. In this way, the new knowledge about the effects of abuse on children gave Pip power to try out new strategies in her classroom, which resulted in new knowledge about ways to work with her students. In this way, the operation of power/knowledge can be observed.
Trying on alternative forms of subjectivity

Volunteering as Refuge advocates provided the women with opportunities to try on alternative forms of subjectivity (Abrahams, 1996). When Kate had joined the Refuge as a volunteer advocate, she was planning a career as a social worker. She thought that experience in a Women’s Refuge would enhance her chances of admission to social work school. However, after nine months she left the Refuge very clear that she no longer wanted a career in social work. She said “I’ve had enough of pain and sadness, and I want to stop doing that for a while”. She decided that she would enrol in an interior design course and pursue her creativity. Being a volunteer advocate at the Refuge provided Kate with the opportunity to find out that this was not what she wanted to pursue as a career. Although this seems like a negative example, I argue that it is also another example of the way that the power/knowledge couplet works. Through her involvement at the Refuge, Kate was able to ‘try out’ the position of advocate for women and children who were distressed. When she tried it out, she decided that this was work she did not want to pursue. The knowledge she gained gave her choices; she now knew that this was not a career path she wanted to follow.

Acquiring self confidence

Pip: I think I have learned to deal with my own anxieties. I’ve changed so much since doing roster. I just deal with things as they come now. I’ve changed as a person and I’ve learned to deal with my own lack of confidence. So it has been a huge learning curve. I’ve learned not to panic. Until you put yourself in a situation, you know how you should handle it, and you hope that you handle it when you actually have to. I now know that I can do it.

Throughout this thesis, I have implied and even explicitly acknowledged that one of the critical benefits of being involved in the Refuge training and working as a volunteer advocate, is an increase in self confidence for the participants. Many of the
women talked about gaining self-confidence as they went through the mentoring process, attended group supervision and answered calls on the crisis line. As Pip stated in the quote above, the women never knew what calls they would have to manage on the crisis line, but they built up their self-confidence to believe that they could handle any situation that arose (See Chapter Seven, p 205; Appendix 1)

I argue that the self-confidence expressed by the volunteer advocates at the Refuge was based on their own increased knowledge. As they became more experienced with taking calls on the roster, they accumulated knowledge about how to manage a range of possible crises. They learned to trust their judgement as to the danger inherent in different situations, and they recognised the power of being a ‘Refuge advocate’ when calling on other emergency services such as the police. They were able to construct stories of their practice and tell these at supervision, and they were able to relate their experiences to the stories other advocates told.

**Strategies for change**

The point of engaging in political struggles – and Foucault thinks we are engaged in them all the time...is to alter power relations (Rabinow, 1984, p 6).

The political struggle in which Refuge is involved is to “alter power relations” so that women and children are not subject to violence and abuse. Throughout this thesis I have argued for an understanding that power is produced through knowledge and practice. Power creates knowledge, and knowledge induces the effects of power (Foucault, 2000, p 87). It is in the everyday practices that power can be observed, and I argue it is in those everyday practices that power relations are altered.

By providing a Safe house for women and child victims of domestic violence, the Refuge altered the power relations for many women and children. For some women, who had suffered domestic abuse in their families, being part of the Refuge gave them a sense of being part of a movement for social change. For Alix’s grandmother, Sandra’s mother, and Lena herself, there had been no Refuge movement, and they stayed in abusive relationships because they believed that they had no other choices.
Working as volunteer Refuge advocates provided opportunities and choices for victims of domestic violence at the end of the twentieth century that had not historically been available. Many of the volunteer advocates talked about their work as bringing about change by creating choices for their clients.

While the Refuge advocates attempted to undermine the power of violent men, power relations were also altered in other less obvious and more subtle ways. Earlier in this section, I have discussed ways in which the power/knowledge couplet operated to open up new possibilities and new ways of knowing for the volunteer advocates. Throughout their training and work as Refuge advocates, this group of women were encouraged to be reflexive about their understanding of gender relations. As I discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, this was the first time some women had been introduced to feminist ideas. Some women discussed with me the way that the exposure to these new discourses had influenced them. For example, Alix found that the Refuge training challenged some of her assumptions about sexuality. Dawn who did not think of herself as being ‘oppressed’ as a woman, for the first time challenged her husband for telling sexist jokes. If feminism is about change, about developing new ways of thinking and acting in our social worlds, then the Refuge training had a significant impact on the trainee volunteer advocates.

The Refuge provided training for women who worked as volunteer advocates. The training focussed on preparing the volunteer advocates to run the Refuge crisis line. However, the training involved much more than just the skills needed to take calls. Jess, a member of the training committee, explained:

We have to decide how much effort we want to put into doing personal change and growth and understanding and awareness. What they get out of the training is not just a bunch of skills, but also the opportunity to explore some of their own beliefs and values.

I have argued that throughout the induction and ongoing training in the Refuge, members of this group of volunteer advocates were encouraged to take up subjectivities informed by radical feminist ideas of power and empowerment. The
practices of the Refuge as presented to the trainee volunteer advocates represented differing and sometimes contradictory discourses. In making available certain subject positions and not others, the Refuge sought to promote its dominant discourses of oppression and empowerment. I argue that the site of the battle to change power relations is the subjectivities of individuals; subjectivities that are made available through discourse (Weedon, 1987, p 40). In the group of women I studied, some women took up these positions, but others resisted and ‘played the game’ to be accepted as qualified advocates. As subjectivity is multiple, dynamic and constantly changing, it is not possible to know the extent to which the women who resigned as Refuge advocates in the first year actively positioned themselves in other contexts. The stories of Dawn, Alix and Pip give hope that the subjectivities taken up in Refuge can become a way of changing power relations in other contexts beyond the Refuge.
ENDNOTE 2: VISIONING THE FUTURE

I do not make recommendations in this thesis as to how the Refuge or other voluntary organisations might want to alter their practices. I completed the fieldwork for this thesis in 1998 – 99, and acknowledge that both internal and external contexts of the Refuge will be different in 2002. I did not begin the research at the Refuge with the objective of evaluating the Refuge training practices. My concerns were more fundamental and connected to the process of knowledge production and learning from experience. However, as part of my desire for reciprocal relationships I did feed back information to the Refuge at the end of my time in the field. This information was general, for example I highlighted the need for the Refuge to have one person attend all training sessions to provide continuity, and they subsequently employed a training co-ordinator to do this.

At the time I carried out this study, the Refuge like many community and voluntary organisations was on the cusp of change. The Refuge in this study had recently changed its structure from a collective to a more formal structure with a Governance Board. The volunteers, who in the past had been directly involved in policy and decision making, are now entitled to two representatives on the Governance Board. The Refuge still struggles to find funding, with only 30% of its running costs being met by government funding. At the same time, the practices of the organisation are increasingly being scrutinised by the funders. The pool of volunteers that the Refuge has traditionally drawn on is decreasing as more women are forced by necessity to seek out paid employment.

These problems faced by the Refuge are not unique. This case study of the Refuge reveals through attention to detail, the complexities of what might appear to be a simple process of knowledge creation and delivery of services. I highlight issues about learning from experience and experiential learning that are appropriate to consider in a variety of different contexts. Attention to the complex process of power/surveillance and management of selves is pertinent to any organisation attempting change and empowerment.
A case study cannot stand outside its social context. Throughout this thesis I have sought to make visible the ways that lack of resources impacted on practice at the Refuge. For example, I related the harrowing narrative of Vicki’s first call-out where she was unable to find accommodation for an abused woman and her children. Lack of resources within the organisation itself, and in the wider community, impacts on people’s willingness to work voluntarily in crisis situations. Organisations such as the Refuge have problems recruiting, training and sustaining volunteers because the stress of the work can quickly lead to ‘burnout’. The inability of organisations to retain volunteers once they are trained compounds the resourcing issues, as the remaining volunteers and paid staff carry a heavier workload, and must also recruit and train more volunteers.

In this final endnote to the thesis I offer some texts of possibilities for the future that are not constrained by the realities of resourcing. These possibilities are my imaginings, and offer three very different visions of how the Refuge might be in the year 2005. Two of these texts are written in the first person, but I consider that all three offer possibilities for the future. I begin with a text ‘Valuing diversity in volunteers’, in which I imagine the existing framework of the Refuge volunteer training to include greater diversity. I follow this with a text titled ‘The professional choice’, where I envisage the Refuge as a fully professional organisation relying totally on trained, qualified paid staff. In the third text, ‘Sisterhood in the twenty-first century’, I imagine a Refuge movement in Christchurch collaboratively restructured to recognise a variety of forms of diversity. In this final version of a possible future for the Refuge, I retain within the structure of the organisation a feminist commitment to ending violence against women and children. In doing this, I acknowledge the contribution of feminists to the Refuge movement in Christchurch over the past quarter century. I hope that a Refuge of the future will continue to be based on feminist notions of justice for women and children.
Vision 1: Valuing diversity in volunteers

March 2005

I was sitting in our final session of induction training for the Refuge volunteer advocates, marvelling at the diversity of our group. The twelve of us had been meeting twice a week for the past eight weeks, and had grown quite close. Initially I had wondered how such a disparate group would get along together, but we have been able to have open and honest discussions and have worked through our differences in constructive ways. As I looked around the group sprawled out in comfortable arm chairs, I thought back to the first night we met. Most of us talked about having to wait at least three months to get into the training because the Refuge was a sought after place by volunteers. The two Maori women, Mere and Kuini, had a high profile during the training, as they had both worked in the Refuge in other parts of New Zealand. Mere was the Kuia\(^\text{51}\) on our course. I had wondered how Armene and Tohad, two Muslim women from Somalia, would find the training, as their English was not very good. They came on the training as representatives of their community, which recognised that ‘outside’ help was needed to break the cycle of abuse in many families. Their English has improved as my vocabulary of Somali words has increased. Jane and Brenda and Pam, three older Pakeha women, had also talked about volunteering at the Refuge as a way of making choices possible for women and children. Pam had talked about how violence had affected her during her 25-year marriage which she left when she turned 50. Rosa and Katrina, two Samoan women, had experienced domestic violence in their wider family. Tamara and Vanessa, two young Pakeha\(^\text{52}\) women, were both in their early twenties, both students at university. Maggie, a Pakeha in her mid thirties, arrived at the initial training session in a business suit and high heel shoes. I wondered if she would stay. She told us all that she was a lawyer who acted as an ‘advocate for the child’\(^\text{53}\), and that she had heard that the Refuge training was useful for gaining insight into issues around domestic violence. I had wondered if I was the only lesbian in the group, and how I would ‘fit

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\(^{51}\) Maori woman elder, held in high esteem in Maoridom.

\(^{52}\) Maori term for non-Maori usually of European descent, widely used in New Zealand.

\(^{53}\) In cases of custody disputes the Family Court appoints an independent ‘Counsel for the child’, to represent the interests of any children of the relationship.
in' with the other women. What I found most amazing about this training was the way that diversity was encouraged. We came with our different life experiences, and different ways of seeing the world. I was surprised and delighted at the way that our different ways of seeing things were respected by the course facilitators and all members of the group. What we had in common was a desire to end violence against women and children. I feel confident now that our training has ended, that we will work together harmoniously, operating the crisis line and supporting women and children in the Refuge house. I see our differences as a major strength that will enable us to work effectively with women and children from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
Vision 2: The professional choice

I saw the advertisement in Saturday's paper, 18 March 2005. It stated "Qualified social worker wanted by Women's Refuge. The Women's Refuge is a fully professionalised organisation. The position is one in a team of social workers who support women and children escaping from domestic abuse. The position is based on a forty hour week, with some shift work and rotational weekend work."

I was interested enough to send away for the job description and ideal person specification for the position. They provided me with the following information.

**Name of organisation**       Women's Refuge

**Title of Position**           Social Worker

**Tasks and responsibilities**

Rotational time answering the Crisis Line:
- Assessing the needs of women phoning the crisis line
- Arranging to collect and admit women and children if assessed as appropriate for the Refuge
- Assisting with referrals to other agencies if necessary
- Providing information on the Domestic Violence Act and child custody legislation.
- Being on call to cover the crisis line one evening per week and one weekend in six.

Working with the women and children staying in the Refuge Emergency house:
- Meeting the immediate needs for safety, food and accommodation
- Assessing the immediate needs of the women and children
- Arranging medical care if necessary
- Arranging legal advice, and benefit support if necessary
- Enrolling children in the local school or preschool
- Accompanying women to Family Court
Qualifications. Social work qualification essential. Accreditation from the New Zealand Association of Social Workers is an advantage.

Salary paid will be commensurate with experience and qualifications but will be within the range of $50,000 - $65,000.

Functional relationships:
The social workers are directly responsible to the Manager of the Refuge, and will report to the manager on a weekly basis. The social worker will liase with other members of the Refugee team, including five other social workers, the community liaison worker, and the children's advocate.

Ideal Person specification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social work qualification</td>
<td>Accreditation with NZASW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience working in crisis situations</td>
<td>Ability to speak Maori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience working with families</td>
<td>Knowledge of Tikanga Maori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work across cultures</td>
<td>Knowledge of family law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work in a team</td>
<td>Computer skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to be 'on call' evenings and weekends</td>
<td>Counselling skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Refuge is an equal opportunities employer and welcomes applications from both men and women with the appropriate experience and qualifications.
Vision 3: Sisterhood in the twenty-first century

04.07.2005

Dear Debra
I really appreciate your offer to edit this for me before I email it off to the publishers. I have been asked by Women’s Web, the monthly feminist e-magazine to write an article about the way that the Refuge movement here in Christchurch has developed during the first five years of this millennium. They are wanting to get articles from a number of the feminist groups that started up last century, and are still operating today. I guess that is why we were asked, we must be one of the few feminist organisations still operating.

Any suggestions for changes etc can be made using ‘track changes’ and sent back to me. It’s a bit long, so feel free to do some cuts. Perhaps when I have your edited draft we can have a discussion by e-conference.

Cheers
Lesley

File attached: Sisterhood in the Twenty-first Century

The First Women’s Refuge was set up in Christchurch in 1974 by a group of radical feminists. They had been meeting as a consciousness-raising group and set up the Refuge for women wanting to escape domestic violence, as a way of enacting their feminist principles. There has, as the saying goes, “been a lot of water under the bridge” since then. When those feminists first set up the Refuge house, they thought that it would be a short term solution and that by working to eliminate violence against women, Refuges would not be needed past the end of the twentieth century.

Unfortunately, five years into the new millennium, domestic violence still occurs, and the Refuge is still needed to provide support for women and children. In this article I want to talk about some of the changes that the Refuge movement has gone through in the past five years. At the turn of the century there were four separately constituted Refuges operating in the Christchurch city area. All were struggling for resources. They were competing against each other for grant money and public donations. The government funding, which was contestable each year, never met more than 30% of any of the Refuge’s expenditure. Although the groups worked differently, they all ran their own 24 hour crisis or help-lines. They all provided accommodation for women and children, and all offered support to women who were able to stay in the community.

At the end of the twentieth century a major problem facing all four Refuges was attracting and keeping volunteers. All four organisations relied on volunteers to run
their crisis lines, and to support women and children in the safe-houses. Each group ran their own training. There were fewer volunteers starting the training courses, and this resulted in proportionately greater workloads for the few who did volunteer. All groups found that their volunteers were ‘burning out’ and leaving. My understanding is that the changes that have come about in the past five year resulted from a recognition that the four Refuges could not continue to keep operating as they had in the past.

An added incentive for changing the ways that the Refuges operated, was the decision of funders to rationalise the community sector. Whereas in the past they had funded four separately constituted Refuges, they now offered funding for only one in the Christchurch area. Rather than close down three Refuges, all the groups decided to amalgamate.

I don’t want to dwell on the difficult transition time for the Refuges as they struggled to merge their services. Many of the volunteers left, and several of the paid staff either took early retirement or were made redundant. Although the period of the merger was traumatic, the new Refuge organisation has emerged as strong and vibrant.

The four Refuge houses are now run by one Governance committee which meets monthly to make policy decisions. Each Refuge House (or project as they are now called) nominates one member of the Governance committee. Four other women with a knowledge of the Refuge work, and other specific skills, for example accountancy, make up the Governance committee. What we now have is a strong Governance committee that puts at the centre of our work feminist ideas of changing society so that violence against women and children does not happen, while at the same time offering a safe Refuge for women and children. I think that it is important that the feminist idea of bringing about social change in the community has been retained.

We do still have volunteers working in our organisation, but we are not responsible for their initial training. The local Polytechnic now runs a one year full time, or two year part time, certificate of volunteering. At the end of their Polytechnic training, the volunteers make a decision as to which particular project they wish to work in. It really depends on their interests and skill level as to where they end up.

Sheppard House and Pounamu Maori Women’s Refuge provide emergency accommodation for women and children, and also outreach programmes to support women who are safe to stay in the community. Westwood House has been converted into an early education centre that places great emphasis on breaking the cycle of violence. Children who are in the Refuge, have been in the Refuge, or are in families in the community that are supported by the Refuge, are eligible to attend the Westwood House centre. Sunshine House which was the original Refuge in Christchurch, is now the Refuge Support Centre. Women do not stay at Sunshine house, but visit it to take part in the courses that are run there. The staff at Sunshine house also run courses in the community such as assertiveness for women, women’s self defence and ‘gentle parenting’. Sunshine House staff are also responsible for running the crisis line, initial assessments, and arranging admissions of women and children into the two residential Refuge houses.
The volunteer co-ordinator is also based at Sunshine House. Hers is a full time position created to make sure that the volunteers get the support and training they need. She has a close liaison with the course co-ordinator at Polytechnic and arranges ‘placements’ at the Refuge during the course, so volunteers can have practical experience in the Refuge environment. The volunteer co-ordinator organises ongoing training, and supervision for volunteers, as well as co-ordinating social occasions for the volunteers.

Each Refuge House has its own core group of women (paid and unpaid) who run their projects, and report to Governance. We have big meetings once a month when we get together to catch up with each other and celebrate our successes. Although technically we are now one Refuge organisation, there has been space for the Refuge projects to maintain individuality. For example, although no men are permitted in decision making roles within the Refuge, Pounamu Maori Refuge through its involvement of the whanau,\(^5^4\) includes working with men as a part of a holistic healing process. Sheppard House, Westwood House, and Sunshine House decided to remain as women only services, because they think it is important for women going through trauma to have their own space.

I see the way we are working now with other women (and sometimes men) as much more inclusive than the four separate Refuge groups of the late twentieth century. I think of ‘sisterhood’ as women working together for a common goal. Our goal is the elimination of violence against women and children. I’m not sure where the Refuge will end up in the future, but like those early feminists who started the whole thing off, I hope that at some time we will be made redundant.

\(^{5^4}\) Whanau is the extended family. In Maori society the whanau is the smallest social unit.
REFERENCES


Policy and Leadership Studies, Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology.


Qualitative Solutions & Research. (1997). QSR Nud*ist. Scolari


APPENDIX 1

In chapter three of this thesis you met the course participants from the March 1998 course. Although I did not formally interview most of participants after they left Refuge, I met some socially, and others sent in formal letters of resignation. The final words in this thesis record the women’s involvement with Refuge.

Alix
Alix left Refuge after six months because she had completed her post-graduate education and moved to a new career position in another part of New Zealand. She intended to offer to work as a volunteer for the Refuge in her new home town.

Amy
Amy completed the induction training course but did not complete the mentoring phase of her training. She said that she felt that she “Didn’t really fit in with the other women. On the course there were two groups, the older ones and then those in their early 20’s. I didn’t really fit in with either group”. During the mentoring phase of their training, the new volunteer advocates needed to make contact, and put their names down for supervised roster. Amy didn’t do this and was never followed up by Refuge.

Bridget
Bridget left Refuge after four months of rosters. She moved house and did not advise Refuge of her new phone number. None of the other Refuge volunteer advocates knew why she had left.

Julie
Julie was the first volunteer advocate from the March 98 cohort who completed the mentored phase of training to leave. She was studying full time and found it difficult to make a commitment to take slots on the crisis line. The work was not what she had anticipated when she joined Refuge:
I didn’t realise that you can do it from home and that you just sit there with a pager for three hours. That didn’t occur to me. I didn’t realise it was so isolated. I though when I do a roster it would be with other people, and that we would be there to offer support, you know mostly to the women that were in the house.

**Kate**

Kate worked on the telephone rosters for nine months, and during that time went to the Refuge on a weekly basis to work with the preschool children as part of the children’s advocacy programme. She left the Refuge because she found that the stress of doing volunteer work was too much as she was suffering from depression and having custody difficulties with her ex-partner. She thought her time at Refuge had been valuable because it clarified career options for her.

I know that when I started at Refuge I was thinking about the social work course. But NO! Not any more. But now I’m thinking of interior design, something creative like that. I have had enough of pain and sadness, and I want to stop doing that for a while.

**Karen**

Karen completed the mentoring part of her training and started taking rosters from her own home. She left after seven months because she was setting up a business and said that she did not have the time to commit to Refuge work.

**Lena**

Lena was involved with Refuge as a volunteer advocate for 18 months. After approximately six months as a volunteer advocate she picked up a small contract with Refuge as roster co-ordinator. When the number of volunteer advocates was down, Lena ended up taking the rosters herself. It was not unusual for her to be responsible for answering the crisis line for 20 – 30 hours a week. When Lena left Refuge she had a short time looking after her grandchildren, and then worked for a year as paid staff in a residential social service organisation.
I’m sure that I got this job because of my work at Refuge. I learned so much, not only about Refuge, but about what other organisations were around. I also learned about setting personal limits in a job, which will help me in this new job.

**Maria**

Maria left Refuge after completing her 12 month voluntary contract. At the time she left her job as a nurse and was a full time student on a counselling course. She found it difficult to make the time to fill the rosters or attend meetings or supervision. When she left she stated:

> I signed a contract to work as a voluntary advocate for a year. I’ve completed that contract, so I’m leaving. I need to make my study my priority right now.

**Sandra**

Sandra completed the mentoring phase of training and worked on the rosters for approximately two months. She left when her family decided to emigrate to Australia.

**Vicki**

Vicki filled rosters and worked on a committee for ten months until her health failed. She took ‘time-out’ but was not able to resume Refuge work as she underwent therapy/treatment for cancer.

**Dawn**

Dawn completed three years as a volunteer advocate. She undertook regular rosters on the crisis line, and become involved in sub committees at Refuge. She then took ‘time-out’ to travel overseas and spend more of her spare time with her grandchildren. At the time she had also become involved as a volunteer at the local art gallery. Dawn returned to work as a Refuge advocate for another year because she said that she missed the contact with the other volunteers and paid staff working at Refuge. She stated that she had learned so much through her Refuge work:
When I first joined Refuge I was very naive. I’ve become much more tolerant, and aware of other women’s problems. For me it has really been about finding out how the other half live. I had no idea about the abuse that happens for some women and children, it has been a real eye opener for me.

Pip

Pip was the longest serving volunteer advocate from the March 98 cohort. She was still active in Refuge four years later. In July 2002 I re-interviewed Pip and asked her what kept her involved as a Refugee advocate. In 2002 Pip was teaching full time and raising her family. She completed two roster slots (8 hours) most weeks. She said that she didn’t really know what kept her involved in Refuge.

It is just part and parcel of my life. I keep on doing it because the work doesn’t daunt me any more. I have it under control, and I don’t feel any pressure to take on more than I want to. There are only seven volunteers at the moment, but I don’t let that pressure me. I haven’t let Refuge take over my life; I go to the monthly volunteer meeting and group supervision and do my two rosters. That’s it. Perhaps is has just become a habit.
22 August 1997

The Governance
Christchurch Women’s Refuge
PO Box
Christchurch

Dear Women

An alternative proposal

contacted me a week ago to ask me to submit a proposal for evaluating the performance of the paid staff working at the Women’s Refuge. I understand that your organisation will be going through staff changes in the near future that your needs may have changed to include assessing the best use of your resources in terms of paid staff. I would be happy to work with you to identify your needs and to develop new positions if this is what is required. As part of this process it is a good idea to establish a method of assessing staff performance that is appropriate to the specific nature of the work involved. The most effective way of doing this is through consultation with the Personnel Committee (or Staff Liaison Committee - I’m not sure what you call your group) and the staff involved. In this way a process can be established that is both easy to implement and appropriate for you to use in future.

I am a self employed consultant, and attach my CV for your information. My usual charges are $60 + GST per hour, although in the past I have offered a discount for work with Refuge.

However, I wish to make an alternative proposal for your consideration. I am planning to begin my PhD at Canterbury University in 1998. My area of interest is in adult education - specifically what people learn outside the formal education system. My interest in this area stems from my own experiences. I have been involved in feminist organisations and social change organisations throughout most of my adult life. It is through this involvement that I have learned the skills that I have needed to succeed in many areas: in management in the public service; in private enterprise; and more recently in academia. Although my involvement in Feminist groups was not from a desire to learn, looking back it was a major result. Through my involvement with Refuge for example, I learned about presenting an argument, I developed political awareness, public speaking skills, analytical skills, budgeting and financial management skills, writing skills, and of course conflict management skills. But when you look at my CV, (maybe you would look with different eyes to the rest of the world) it is not this area of learning that is recognised or valued.

I want the focus of my PhD to be on gaining some recognition that voluntary organisations provide a valuable site of learning for their members (volunteers), and...
that this form of learning is no less valid than learning undertaken in formal
institutions for formal qualifications. Within my study I am hoping to undertake at
least one case study of a feminist organisation. Exactly how that is done will of
course be negotiated between the organisation, the women involved and myself, but
I would envisage some form of interviews with women over a period of time. My
work will be collaborative, so that control over the direction of the project will be
shared, and I expect that in this way that it will be a useful and empowering process
for all involved.

One of the basic principles of feminist research is reciprocity. I am proposing that in
return for an agreement in principle that Women’s Refuge will be part
of a case study in 1998, that I work with your group without charge to assist you
determine your staffing needs, write job descriptions, and establish a performance
monitoring process that is appropriate for your group. My existing work
commitments are heavy until October, but I would be happy to work with you after
that date.

I am happy to come and meet with you to discuss this proposal further, and to provide
examples of some of my previous feminist research projects. I look forward to
hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Lesley MacGibbon
APPLICATION FOR REVIEW AND APPROVAL

1. PROJECT NAME: Feminist voluntary organisations as sites of pedagogy.
   Key words: up to five words for database purposes:
   adult learning, feminist pedagogy

2. NAME OF APPLICANT: Lesley MacGibbon   Contact Phone No:3321479
   DEPARTMENT: Education Dept   Date 30.01.98
   SUPERVISOR   M W Morton
   OTHER INVESTIGATORS   N/A

   SIGNED BY:
   Applicant:   Date: 30.01.98
   HQD/Supervisor   Date: 30.01.98

for Human Ethics Committee use only

Approved:

Date:

3. WILL THE PROJECT REQUIRE ETHICAL APPROVAL FROM
   OTHER BODIES? Eg Regional health Authority Ethics Committee   NO

4. IS THE PROJECT BEING EXTERNALLY FUNDED   NO
A. PROJECT Describe in language which is, as far as possible, comprehensible to lay people.

5 AIM Describe the type of information sought, and give specific hypothesis, if any to be tested.

Adult learning takes place in a variety of settings within and outside the formal education sector. There has been considerable overseas research on non-formal and informal learning by individuals, but very little about the learning that is undertaken as part of a group for which the learning activity is not the primary focus. A large number of New Zealanders (predominantly women) are involved in voluntary organisations providing social services to the community. What are these women learning through their involvement with voluntary organisations?

This research project is a preliminary study to assess the feasibility for a Ph.D proposal. Access to a community voluntary organisation has been negotiated for the feasibility study. This involves the researcher attending as a participant observer a 30 hour induction course with new and prospective volunteer workers. One to one interviews will be conducted with the volunteers at the completion of their induction course.

The data from this feasibility study will be used to develop a Ph.D proposal which will involve ongoing involvement with this and possibly other community organisations. The case study methodology will be developed and further access negotiated at the completion of the feasibility study.

6. PROCEDURE Describe in practical terms how the subjects will be treated, what tasks they will be asked to perform, etc.

The volunteers attending the induction training will not be required by the researcher to complete any tasks. In my role as participant observer, I will be attending the training and will be involved in all the same activities/discussions as the volunteers. I will not be taking notes at the training session, but will complete field notes from memory at the completion of each session.

Participants who are willing to complete an interview at the completion of their induction will have these interviews tape recorded.

7. DOES THE PROJECT INVOLVE A QUESTIONNAIRE? NO

8. DOES THE PROJECT INVOLVE AN INTERVIEW YES

If yes please indicate interview questions or topics to be covered.

What has led you to become involved in this induction training?

What other voluntary organisations have you been involved with in the past?

Why have you volunteered to work for this particular organisation?

What does it mean to you to work for a feminist organisation?

What do you think you will gain personally from this involvement?
B. SUBJECTS

9. WHO ARE THE SUBJECTS AND HOW ARE THEY TO BE RECRUITED?
If recruitment is by advertisement, please attach a copy
The subjects of this study are new and prospective members of a voluntary
social service agency who are attending induction training. The voluntary
agency has recruited them in a number of different ways, and expects them
to be members of the organisation for a year after completing the induction
training.

10. WHAT INFORMATION IS BEING GIVEN TO PROSPECTIVE SUBJECTS?
Information sheet attached - Appendix 1

11. ARE THE SUBJECTS COMPETENT TO GIVE INFORMED CONSENT ON THEIR OWN BEHALF
YES

12. WILL CONSENT BE OBTAINED IN WRITING
YES
Prior to the first induction session, all prospective volunteers will be
provided with the research information sheet and will be personally
contacted for their agreement to have the researcher present as a
participant observer at the training.

At the first session of the induction training, the research project will be
discussed with the group and written consent obtained. Consent form
attached as Appendix 2.

Volunteers who agree to complete a one to one interview will sign an
interview consent form. Consent form attached as Appendix 3.

13. HOW WILL ANONYMITY OF THE SUBJECTS BE ASSURED?
a) If any identifying information about subjects is obtained at any stage of the
project, how and where will such information be securely stored?
All information about participants will be stored in a locked filing cabinet
at my home office, or a locked filing cabinet at my University office.

b) Who will have authorised access to such information?
The only people authorised to have access to such information will be
myself as researcher, and my academic supervisors.

c) What will be done to ensure that the identities of the subjects cannot be
known by unauthorised persons?
Pseudonyms will be used in all field notes and interview transcripts. All
tapes will be wiped at the completion of the project.
C OTHER PROJECT DETAILS

14. WHERE WILL THE PROJECT BE CONDUCTED?
The participant observations will be conducted as part of the organisation induction course, which is held in the training room of the agency.

Interviews will be conducted at a mutually agreeable place - the researchers home, the participants home, or the offices of the voluntary organisation.

15. DESCRIBE ANY FORESEEABLE RISKS TO THE SUBJECTS
a) Risks to physical well-being, including stress and emotional distress
There is no foreseeable risk in this research project to the physical well-being of the participants.

b) Possibility of cultural offence
There is no foreseeable risk of cultural offence.

16 IS DECEPTION INVOLVED AT ANY STAGE OF THE PROJECT NO

17 WILL INFORMATION ABOUT THE SUBJECTS BE OBTAINED FROM THIRD PARTIES NO

D DATA

18. HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE DATA BE ASSURED?
a) Who will have authorised access to the data?
   The only people with authorised access to the data will be myself as researcher and my academic supervisors.

b) What will be done to ensure that unauthorised persons so not have access to the data?
   The data will be kept securely locked in a filing cabinet at my home, or a locked filing cabinet at my University office. My personal computer will be used for processing data, and has a personal access password.

19. ARE THERE PLANS FOR FUTURE USE OF THE DATA BEYOND THOSE ALREADY DESCRIBED? YES

The data collected in this exploratory study is being collected in the context of a feasibility study for a Ph.D. research project. Although the primary purpose of collecting the data is to assess the feasibility of the project and to develop a clear methodology for the major project, it is not unusual for qualitative research projects to incorporate data from feasibility studies into the wider study.
Appendix 1

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

INFORMATION

You are invited to participate as a subject in the research project:
Learning in voluntary organisations

1. The research project

Adult learning takes place in a variety of settings within and outside the formal education sector. There has been considerable overseas research on non-formal and informal learning by individuals, but very little about the learning that is undertaken as part of a group for which the learning activity is not the primary focus. A large number of New Zealanders (predominantly women) are involved in voluntary organisations providing social services to the community. What are these women learning through their involvement with voluntary organisations?

This research is a preliminary study to assess the feasibility for a Ph.D research project to be completed at Canterbury University focussing on the learning that happens within feminist voluntary organisations. Data from this preliminary study many also be used in the larger Ph.D. project.

2. The research method:

a) Researcher as participant observer at the training course.

By being a participant observer at the training course I will complete the training in the same way as all other participants. I will not take notes during the sessions, but at the completion of the session I will write down what I can remember of the session. The only people who will have access to these ‘fieldnotes’ are myself and my academic supervisors, and all names used in the notes will be pseudonyms.

b) Interviews

At the completion of the training, people who are willing will be interviewed on tape. The tapes will be transcribed and pseudonyms used to ensure anonymity. Participants will be given a copy of their own transcribed interviews and a copy of their own tapes if they wish. All tapes will be wiped at the completion of the project. The only people who will have access to the interview data are myself as researcher and my academic supervisors.

Interviews will focus on the following areas:

Previous involvement with other voluntary organisations
Motivation for joining this particular organisation
Experiences of the training
What participants hope to gain personally through their work with this organisation.
3. Informed consent

You have the right to decline to participate in this research project, and to withdraw from it at any time (including withdrawal of any information you have provided). If you agree to take part in this research project, you will be asked to complete a written consent form.

4. Information about the researcher

Researcher: Lesley MacGibbon

I have been involved with a number of feminist groups in Christchurch including Women Against Pornography, START, Women with Eating Disorders Support Group and the Angel Fund. I was also involved in the Refuge movement from 1979 - 1985, both at the local level through the Christchurch Women’s Refuge and the establishment of the West Christchurch Women’s Refuge. I was a member of the National Core Group for two years. I started my academic career later in life, and found that many of the skills I needed were ones that I had acquired through my voluntary involvement. It is my personal experiences that have sparked my interest in this research project.

If you wish to discuss the research further, please feel free to contact me at Phone 332 1479. If you have further queries or concerns you may contact my academic supervisors.

Supervisors:
The academic supervisors for this project are:

Missy Morton Education Dept, University of Canterbury.
Phone 364 6271

Eldoy Rathgen Education Dept, University of Canterbury.
Phone 364 6258

Rosemary Du Plessis Sociology Dept, University of Canterbury.
Phone 364 6878

The project has been reviewed by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.
Appendix 2

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM: LEARNING IN VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS RESEARCH

PARTICIPANT OBSERVER

I have read and understood the description of the Learning in Voluntary Organisations Research Project. On this basis I agree to participate as a subject in the project, and I give consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed ___________________________ Date ____________________
Appendix 3

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM: LEARNING IN VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS RESEARCH

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

I have read and understood the description of the Learning in Voluntary Organisations Research Project. On this basis I agree to participate as a subject in the project, and I give consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed ___________________________ Date ___________________________
27 February 1998

Ms Lesley MacGibbon
C/o M W Morton
Department of Education
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Ms MacGibbon

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal “Feminist voluntary organisations as sites of pedagogy” has been considered and approved.

Yours sincerely

J A Cockle (Miss)
Secretary
Refuge structure in 1998

Governance committee
- Lawyer
- Accountant
- Business manager
- Paid staff rep
- 2 Volunteer reps
- Children’s advocacy rep
- Training committee rep
Responsible for policy decisions; acts as employing body

Subcommittees
- Training
- Employment
- Children’s advocacy
- Funding
- Lesbian caucus (inactive)
Subcommittees comprise paid staff and volunteers with 12 months experience

Volunteers
- 24 hr emergency phone
- Picking up families for safe house
- Attend monthly volunteer meetings
- Attend monthly group supervision

Group supervisor
Independent of Refuge
Contracted for service

Pais staff – all part time
Manager
Women’s worker
Community worker
Administrator
Volunteer & roster co-ordinator*

* Disestablished August 1998

NCIWR $$
CFA $$
APPENDIX 5

Tell me about your past experiences of volunteering

What in your life has led you to volunteer for Refuge?

Why Refuge?

Having gone through the initial training, how do you see the work of Refuge?

What does being a Refuge advocate mean to you?

What does feminism mean to you? What links, if any, do you see between feminism and the Refuge?

Empowerment is a word that was used a lot in the training, what does empowerment mean to you?

What, if anything has changed for you as a result of doing this training?

What kind of work do you see yourself doing at Refuge?

How do you feel about moving onto doing the work of Refuge?
Summary of feedback session to Refuge women 11 November 1998

Lesley MacGibbon: PhD thesis

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
Qualitative research Aims to find out how the people in the study make sense of their worlds - their activities, their interactions, their social relationships.

CASE STUDY
A case study is a detailed study of a particular setting.

RESEARCH METHODS
- interviews (semi-structured/unstructured)
- participant observations

Participant observations can fall anywhere on a continuum:

Observer ________________________________ Participant

By placing myself at this end of the continuum (and in some cases being placed here by Refuge) I become like an ‘insider’ - a participant in my own research. Eg. On funding committee I am not just looking at myself as researcher, but as a participant.

KEY IDEAS
- research is always political
- researcher cannot be ‘neutral’
- in qualitative research the researcher is the ‘instrument’
- reciprocity is essential
- reflexivity - researcher must be ‘upfront’ about what/why doing things in a certain way
- no hypothesis to prove or disprove - want to understand, find to what, how come?
RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What do members of a feminist social service agency learn through their involvement in providing social services to the community?
- How is what they are learning shaped by the context in which they are learning?
- How do members construct themselves as advocates?
- What teaching/learning strategies are utilised? (Pedagogy)
- What is the relationship between feminist discourses and the pedagogical practices?
- How is the organisation itself shaped/changed by the interaction of its members?

FINDINGS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOLUNTEERS</th>
<th>Refuge as the intersection of the two</th>
<th>ORGANISATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Histories</td>
<td>Refuge as a learning organisation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivations</td>
<td>Doing the work of Refuge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Formalised learning:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Initial training</td>
<td>Existing members</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Buddied system</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Ongoing training</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Supervision</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Subcommittees</td>
<td>Norms (ways of doing things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical incidents</td>
<td>- unwritten &amp; unspeoken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- written and formalised into procedures, practices, policies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&lt; external context &gt;</td>
<td>Nature of the work</td>
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</table>
REFUGE AS A LEARNING ORGANISATION

1. Contextual
   • goal directed
   • responsive to need
   • learning is secondary to the purpose of the organisation
   • BUT learning is recognised - it may be structured or incidental

2. Tension between individual / organisational benefit

3. Refuge as an organisation is learning
   • responsiveness to experiences of members

4. Political/ feminist learning
   • language
   • empowerment

5. What it means to be an advocate
   • finding out by doing
   • formal and informal norms/rules

6. Skills development and personal development of members
   • confidence
   • assertiveness
   • attitudes challenged

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial training</th>
<th>Ongoing training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• tension of training/assessment</td>
<td>• reward for service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• pedagogy - how sessions taught</td>
<td>• private/organisational benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• congruence of training &amp; work (teaching more than content)</td>
<td>• pedagogy - dispersal of knowledge within Refuge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• acceptance and resistance to both content and process</td>
<td>• advocates as public face of refuge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buddied system</th>
<th>Supervision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• learning by doing</td>
<td>• individual reflect/learn from own experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• modelling</td>
<td>• individual reflect/learn from others experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• learning the norms</td>
<td>• group learning/developing ways of doing things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• apprenticeship model</td>
<td>• trust</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• transgressions</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcommittees</th>
<th>Critical incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• identified as learning sites</td>
<td>• Family turned away when refuge house full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• task orientated</td>
<td>• Advocate breach of confidentiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teaching each other</td>
<td>• Alternative volunteer proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>• criteria for membership</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Example of coding tree: Group Supervision (17)

| 17.1 Process | 17.1.1 Resistance to supervision | 17.1.1.1 Supervisor  
17.1.1.2 Other members of group |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.1.2 New members</td>
<td>17.1.2.1 Ways of doing things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.1.3 Peer problem solving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 17.2 Narratives | 17.2.1 Stuff-ups  
17.2.2 Successes  
17.2.3 Stress     |                     | 17.2.3.1 Support from other members  
17.2.3.2 Workloads  
17.2.3.3 Boundaries |
|               | 17.2.4 Genre  
17.2.5 Silencing              |                     |
| 17.3 Learning | 17.3.1 From own experience  
17.3.2 From other’s experiences  
17.3.3 Interpersonal  
17.3.4 Work skills  
17.3.5 Organisational  
17.3.6 Story telling |                     |
| 17.4 Supervisor | 17.4.1 Contract  
17.4.2 Background  
17.4.3 Perspectives  
17.4.4 Purposes  
17.4.5 Doing it  
17.4.6 Follow-up |                     |
| 17.5 Surveillance | 17.5.1 Of other members  
17.5.2 Self surveillance  
17.5.3 Resistance |                     |