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A study of climate dimensions in a nonhierarchical alternative women's organization.

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A STUDY OF CLIMATE DIMENSIONS IN A
NONHIERARCHICAL ALTERNATIVE WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

A Thesis Presented
By
SUSAN WOOLLEY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
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Psychology
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I wish to acknowledge the following individuals for their invaluable contributions to the process of the research. Alexandra Kaplan gave me enthusiastic support, her scholarly attention to form and content helped me learn how to write again. She also inspired me with her tireless focus, in her own work, on revealing and documenting the truth about all aspects of women's lives. David Todd's reflective comments encouraged me to continue the difficult struggle with conceptualizations of "work," "community," and "organization" beyond the completion of the thesis. Richard Leifer challenged me to look closely at my untested assumptions about the relationship between human behavior and organizational context. I thank the committee as a whole for their patience and willingness to engage with me in the innovative project.

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Finally, the person who put the draft in final form and typed the manuscript, Gale Storum, has my deepest appreciation for the quality of her work, her personal warmth, and her willingness to support me in meeting a timeline.
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INTRODUCTION

In the last ten years, American women have once again begun to actively question, and work towards overcoming, the negative results of their sex-role socialization. Part of this work has been carried out within the context of consciousness-raising groups, designed to examine individual member's experiences as females in a capitalist patriarchal culture. Through articulation of perceptions and feelings about the shaping of the self, and attempts to see what results this had on the structuring of their adult lives, members discovered common factors which could not be accounted for solely by individual personality development or family environment. These common factors were patterns of socialization which encouraged a sense of inferiority about the value of women's contributions to spheres of human activity beyond childrearing and maintaining a home. Collective re-evaluation of elements of personal history led to the identification of patterns of prejudice which systematically limited women's personal and professional development (deBeauvoir, 1952; Gornick and Moran, 1971; Kaplan and Bean, 1976; Morgan, 1970).

As women began to formulate strategies to alter perceived constraints in the areas of personal life, education, law, and employment, the need arose to organize working units which could maintain coordination among members' tasks, and yet continue to offer an atmosphere of personal support and active commitment to feminist ideology. Attempts to meet this need resulted in forms of organization which tried to
incorporate feminist ideals into effective ways of identifying, structuring, performing and evaluating tasks. These efforts constituted a difficult transition period for members of consciousness-raising groups, as their priorities developed beyond personal insight to include action directed towards changing institutions. The idea of "structureless" groups, stemming from women's experiences of consciousness-raising groups, had "become an intrinsic and unquestioned part of women's liberation ideology."

For the early development of the movement this did not much matter. It early defined its main goal, and its main method, as consciousness-raising, and the "structureless" rap group was an excellent means to this end. The looseness and informality of it encouraged participation in discussion, and its often supportive atmosphere elicited personal insight. If nothing more concrete than personal insight ever resulted from these groups, that did not much matter, because their purpose did not really extend beyond this.

The basic problems didn't appear until individual rap groups exhausted the virtues of consciousness-raising and decided they wanted to do something more specific. At this point they usually floundered, because most groups were unwilling to change their structure when they changed their tasks... out of a blind belief that no other means could possibly be anything but oppressive (Freeman, 1972).

Women's groups that survived this widening of priorities translated the determination to "keep control over their own lives" into an organizational form that was based on direct, face to face decision-making by all members, with all members considered to be equal partners in the decisions, with equal abilities to influence outcomes (Mansbridge, 1977). For the purposes of this study, this will be referred to as a nonhierarchical or collaborative form of organization.

Today, such women's organizations exist throughout the nation.
The significance of these organizations goes beyond the specific services they provide to individual women and their members' involvement in institutional change activities. Along with other "alternative institutions" created in response to perceived crises in traditional ones, nonhierarchical women's organizations constitute ongoing organizational experiments which merit study.

Alternative institutions are radically different ways of perceiving, enacting, and experiencing work...and other basic relationships and life activities...An institution is an articulating complex of values, norms, roles, statuses, and interactive processes, which result in specific social groups and organizations, as well as practices and procedures, that define appropriate individual behaviors. Alternative institutions challenge the operating assumptions of Western societies. They propose new value complexes. They rearrange and redefine roles and statuses. They implement new interactive processes--for decision-making, for selection, and for intimacy. They shift the boundaries and procedures for groups and organizations. They redistribute power, reshuffle personnel, and redesign spaces. And they do these things in the context of a set of ideals that implicitly criticize things-as-they-are and propose things-as-they-should-be (Kanter and Lurch, 1973, emphasis added).

The present study focuses on this different way of "perceiving, enacting, and experiencing" work. The aim of the study is to describe what it is like to work in a nonhierarchical alternative women's organization--how its members experience its day-to-day problems and rewards as a work environment, rather than as a collective social movement group or consciousness-raising group. In documenting member perceptions of and reactions to organizational structures, procedures, and events, the goal will be to lay groundwork for further research identifying and investigating relationships between specific aspects of the work environment in a nonhierarchical alternative organization, and
members' reactions to it. This documentation will occur through observations of staff meetings and structured interviews with staff members. The study will mean an addition to the existing body of organizational literature, which includes very few descriptions of members' work experiences within nonhierarchical organizations (Payne and Pugh, 1976).

The organization chosen for study is a women's center located on the campus of a large state university. Services are provided within the context of a "feminist perspective" which encourages clients to recognize their unique strengths and talents, and which provides support for female lifestyles which are not necessarily emotionally, financially, and socially dependent on men. The center identifies its client population as female, providing services to any woman who requests them, regardless of whether or not she considers herself to be a feminist.

The center supports the activities of Third World women's groups; a variety of legal efforts aimed at eliminating racial and sex-based discrimination; and national and international political movements. Services include the following: assistance to women on welfare who are completing undergraduate degrees; personal and rape counseling; career counseling; a feminist newsletter; supportive services for female clerical workers at the university who are organizing around employment issues; and employment discrimination counseling for women with sex-related job grievances.

The staff consists of eight women who work from 20-35 hours per week, rotating their ongoing projects and staffing the reception desk. Decisions about assistance to, or liaison with, individuals and agen-
cies on and off campus are made in weekly staff meetings. Staff are recruited through advertised hiring procedures. The salaries are usually $7000 per year.
CHAPTER I
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Currently, no literature exists which identifies significant dimensions of the work experiences of women in nonhierarchical alternative organizations such as the center. Analyses of some analogous situations do exist--Freeman's paper, cited above, describes reactions of members of consciousness-raising groups to the shift from an emphasis on "personal insight" to task-oriented decision-making, and is considered the "classic" paper on organizational processes among feminist women. Kaplan (1976) describes stages in the development of an entirely female psychotherapy training team, and in her summary notes that a "shared feminist ideology is not to be equated with instant trust and intimacy." One paper documenting the history of a feminist counseling collective depicts the complexity of organizational issues confronting women trying to work as a group, centered around their lack of experience in forming strong personal and professional relationships with one another in a feminist context rather than a context characterized by primarily male membership (Amherst Counseling Collective, 1977). Rothschild-Whitt (1976) specifies characteristics of nonhierarchical alternative institutions which are shared by the organization under study--social movement orientation, mutual and self-criticism processes, and economic marginality. She identifies these as central factors influencing members' experiences of the organization.

It is the intent of this author to avoid replicating the "descrip-
tion-rich but structure-poor" type of case study to which Rothschild-Whitt (1976) refers. To systematically investigate the work experiences of the center staff, the strategy of measuring "organizational climate," which has been used in traditional hierarchical organizations, will be adapted to the project. Some background on the development of the climate concept will help clarify its meaning and its use in organizational study.

There are a number of definitions of climate, varying with the academic disciplines and aims of researchers and the nature of the organizations under study (business enterprises, units of state and government bureaucracies, school systems). Studies on climate have appeared in the literature of sociology and education as well as psychology and management (Forehand and Gilmer, 1964).

Researchers in psychology and management have defined and utilized the concept for organizational study according to the distinctive perspectives of each discipline. Management theorists acknowledge the value of analyzing public and private bureaucratic organizations not only as rational machines, but also as social systems (Wieland and Ullrich, 1976). One extension of social systems analysis is to consider the perceptions of individual employees, and their resultant attitudes and behavior, as factors in organizational effectiveness. This appears to be a relatively recent concern, if measured by the content of research in this area. A little over ten years ago, Dunnette and Campbell (1966) stated, "there is almost no existing literature concerning the measurement and exploration of variables which meaningfully
describe the organizational environment. Measures of organizational climate and other situational factors are nearly non-existent and are sorely needed."

Porter and Lawler (1965) state that classical organizational theorists--Fayol, Taylor, etc.--tend to analyze organizational phenomena by placing heavy emphasis on factors related to organizational structure. They observe that modern psychological theorists have paid relatively little attention to structural aspects of organizations, and speculate that methods for improving organizational administration and leadership advocated by psychological theorists may be less efficient in relation to their failure to take into account structural characteristics of organizations. The focus on the personal experiences of individuals, without any attempt to connect that experience with specific organization structures, can be seen in climate studies where workers are asked to identify tasks and the amount of time allocated to each. The attempt is then made to draw conclusions about work satisfaction from attitudes about discrete tasks, rather than worker reaction to structural dynamics.

Another way that psychological researchers approach climate is demonstrated by Forehand (1964), who sees the organization as a particularly appropriate setting for studying the effects of "environmental variation" on human behavior.

The definitions of climate which follow are used to define the concept of "organizational climate" in this study. They are presented beginning with the most general conceptions, then moving to descrip-
tions of more specific elements of climate.

The most general of these definitions is "the set of characteristics that describe an organization and that a) distinguish it from other organizations, b) are relatively enduring over time, and c) influence the behavior of people in the organization" (Forehand and Gilmer, 1964). Litwin and Stringer (1966) identify climate as a set of perceptions of phenomena in their statement that climate must include properties "perceivable by people in the organization...an important aspect of climate is the patterns of expectation and incentive that impinge on and are created by a group of people that...work together."

Schneider and Hall (1972) describe the process by which these perceptions arise. "In forming climate perceptions, the individual acts as an information processor, using inputs from a) the objective events in and characteristics of the organization and b) characteristics (values, needs) of the perceiver. Global perceptions of the organization emerge as a result of numerous activities, interactions, reactions, and other daily experiences the person has with the organization...individuals' discrete job behaviors and experiences, over time, have major influences on their perceptions and the conclusions they reach about the general nature of the psychological climate of their work setting."

Pritchard and Karasick (1973) further refine the notion of "psychological atmosphere" of an organization: "one might define organizational climate as a relatively enduring quality of an organization's internal environment...which results from the behavior and policies of members of the organization...which serves as a basis for
interpreting the situation...and...acts as a source of pressure for
directing activity." Hellriegel and Slocum (1974) raise the important
issue of the possibility of differing perceptions of climate among
members, in stating that "organizational climate refers to a set of
attributes which can be perceived about a particular organization and/
or its subsystems" and asking "is there congruency between individuals
in a given subsystem and, if so, are these perceptions congruent with
the environment?"

Steers (1977) offers one way to distinguish between climate and
other aspects of the organization. "Structure generally refers either
to the physical arrangement of people in an organization...or to the
extent of work 'structuring' that is imposed on individuals by an or-
ganization...Climate, on the other hand, refers principally to the
prevailing attitudes, values, norms and feelings employees have concern-
ing the organization...These affective responses result largely from
the interaction of an organization's structure and the individual's
(or group's) goals, needs, and abilities...on a conceptual level,
structure, an objective phenomenon, is seen as a major influence on
climate, a subjective phenomenon." Steers also describes the link
between organizational climate and organizational effectiveness. The
interaction of the "characteristics of the perceived environment and
the characteristics of the individual can be seen as leading to two
equally important outcomes: 1) an individual's desire to maintain his
membership in a particular organization and 2) an individual's desire
to perform on the job and contribute to organizational goal attainment."
Thus, the use of the climate construct to investigate the work environment of the women's center will result in identification of significant dimensions of that environment, and also, according to Steers, provide an understanding of how those dimensions affect staff commitment to the organization and quality of task performance. Steer's comment, that climate refers to "prevalent attitudes, values, norms, and feelings employees have concerning the organization," can serve as a summary of the climate concept as it will be used in this study.

The literature has provided orienting frameworks for constructing climate dimensions—ways of delineating organizational structure and process that are particularly appropriate to the study of the center. The model of the "organic" dimensions of organizational functioning proposed by Burns and Stalker (1961) approximates important characteristics of the organization under study well enough to be useful in determining how to construct dimensions. In specifying systemic processes, structures, and member behavior found in organizations with a "network structure of control, authority, and communication," the organic model provides a highly accurate description of the organizational processes already observed at the women's center (see Table 1). Payne and Pugh (1976) comment that the Burns and Stalker framework "emphasized our lack of research information on nonbureaucratic structures, a name which itself has suggested a lack of positive identification...Hopefully future research will generate measuring instruments suitable for such structures." Kanter and Lurch, in their overview of a variety of "participatory" alternative organizational forms (1973)
The organic form is appropriate to changing conditions, which give rise constantly to fresh problems and unforeseen requirements for action which cannot be broken down or distributed automatically arising from the functional roles defined within a hierarchic structure. It is characterized by:

(a) the contributive nature of special knowledge and experience to the common task of the concern;

(b) the "realistic" nature of the individual task, which is seen as set by the total situation of the concern;

(c) the adjustment and continual redefinition of individual tasks through interaction with others;

(d) the shedding of "responsibility" as a limited field of rights, obligations and methods. (Problems may not be posted upwards, downwards or sideways as being someone else's responsibility);

(e) the spread of commitment to the concern beyond any technical definition;

(f) a network structure of control, authority, and communication. The sanctions which apply to the individual's conduct in his working role derive more from presumed community of interest with the rest of the organization in the survival and growth of the firm, and less from a contractual relationship between himself and a non-personal corporation, represented for him by an immediate superior;

(g) omniscience no longer imputed to the head of the concern: knowledge about the technical or commercial nature of the here and now task may be located anywhere in the network; this location becoming the ad hoc center of control, authority, and communication;

(h) a lateral rather than a vertical direction of communication through the organization, communication between
people of different rank, also, resembling consultation rather than command;

(i) a content of communication which consists of information and advice rather than instructions and decisions;

(j) commitment to the concern's tasks and to the "technological ethos" of material progress and expansion is more highly valued than loyalty and obedience;

(k) importance and prestige attach to affiliations and expertise valid in the industrial and technical and commercial milieu external to the firm.
suggest questions that can be used to evaluate such forms on terms other than those of efficiency and long-term stability, which are primary concerns of business enterprises (see Table 2). Their comments also contribute to an identification of the significant processes and structures which climate dimensions should take into account. The organizational model on which their comments are based—"participatory democracy"—embodies the major features of the model of decision-making in the women's center: "decision-making is direct (not representative), face to face (without referenda), consensual (not majoritarian) and... egalitarian" (Mansbridge, 1973).

Specific climate dimensions, which express salient aspects of the experience of work in a nonhierarchical alternative organization, have been formulated. An analysis of data gathered during a four-month period of observation of the center's weekly staff meetings suggested that several aspects of work experience are particularly significant. Burns and Stalker, Kanter and Lurch, Rothschild-Whitt, Mansbridge, Holleb and Abrams, and Torbert note these aspects in their discussions of nonhierarchical organizations. Their comments, along with the observations, have been used to construct the dimensions. A listing of the dimensions follows, along with acknowledgements of how the literature aided the identification and formulation of each one. (Questions which address each dimension have been compiled into an interview protocol that was used in interviewing center staff. As each dimension is discussed, the reader is referred to Table 3, p.17 for the corresponding questions.)
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<th>Alternative Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>Not: How large does a system grow?</td>
<td>But rather: How small, intimate, and connected does a system manage to stay--and still do whatever it has to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not: How much does a system produce?</td>
<td>But rather: Do relationships and tasks offer participation, involvement, excitement and learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not: Does a system or relationships meet standards of reliability, predictability, stability, and control?</td>
<td>But rather: Do relationships and roles change in response to needs of the participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not: How efficiently are decisions made?</td>
<td>But rather: How widely is power shared?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not: How well are conventional boundaries between life activities maintained (standards for what is appropriate where and with whom)?</td>
<td>But rather: How much of a person and his life activities does a system or relationship incorporate in an integrated fashion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not: How well does a person play any particular role?</td>
<td>But rather: How many roles is a person given the opportunity to play in an integrated fashion?</td>
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TABLE 2 (CONTINUED)

Not: How many paradoxes and seeming dilemmas among the values, norms, and roles of a given alternative institution?

But rather: To what extent are those paradoxes and dilemmas understandable, in terms of the involvement of the alternative institution in the change process? To what extent are individuals associated with the alternative institutions able to understand and tolerate stresses associated with the paradoxes and dilemmas?
TABLE 3

Interview Questions About Climate Dimensions, and Their Sources in the Literature

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<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>A. Commitment--Kanter and Lurch. Organizational ideals involve a critique of present social conditions and proposals for change; this affects individual commitment to the organization.</td>
<td>How do you compare working for the center, to which you have a moral and political commitment, with other work situations? How does this affect your attitude towards working at the center, and towards other staff? How does it affect the way you accomplish tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Role Flexibility and Efficiency--Burns and Stalker, Kanter and Lurch. Worker yields time and energy to broader range of commitments, with less defined organizational role. Continual redefinition of tasks occurs. There is contribution of expertise, not task specialization.</td>
<td>How are your tasks defined? By whom? Do you see yourself as having more or less flexibility in the tasks you do as compared with others in the center? How does this affect the way you do tasks? How do you see it affecting others who work with you? Are there tasks for which staff inconsistently take responsibility? How does this affect you in your tasks and relationships with other staff?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Economic Marginality--Rothschild-Whitt. Uncertainty of funding for organization, with salaries paid according to funding available rather than commensurate with traditional scales for compensation according to the nature of the task.</td>
<td>What is your salary? Do you feel it is appropriate for the type and amount of work you do? How does this salary level affect your attitudes towards your job? What type of non-monetary rewards do you receive from your work? How does the current funding situation affect your attitudes about working at the center? Do funding uncertainties affect either the type of work you do or how you do it?</td>
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### TABLE 3 (CONTINUED)

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<tr>
<td><strong>D. Mutual and Self Criticism</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Evaluation, Feedback) Rothschild-Whitt.**</td>
<td>How do you receive feedback on your work? Formally? Informally? What do you like/dislike about the quality of the feedback? What do you see as the purpose of formal evaluation? Does evaluation as it is now structured meet your needs for feedback?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E. Differences in Expertise Between Old and New Members--Burns and Stalker, Torbert.</strong></td>
<td>What is it like to be a new staff member at the center? Describe what the adjustment process has been like to you in terms of personal and working relationships. (For old members.) How does integrating new members into the staff affect your work and personal relationships at the center? (For both old and new members.) Do you see differences in the way new and old staff members participate in decision-making?</td>
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<td><strong>F. Inequalities in Skills, Experience, Information--Mansbridge. Inequalities arise from varying backgrounds and skills of members, and varying levels of experience with the tasks at hand.</strong></td>
<td>How does working with other staff affect tasks given the differences between you in a) experience at the center, b) amount of information about center, university, community events and processes, c) skills to accomplish the tasks of daily work responsibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimension</td>
<td>Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>F. Inequalities in Skills, Experience, Information (continued)</td>
<td>How do you see these differences in experience, skills, and information affecting decision-making? (Affecting who participates in decisions and how they participate.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. Communication--Burns and Stalker.</td>
<td>How are you informed about what activities other staff are involved in? How does it affect your job knowing more or less about the activities of others? How does information, or a lack of it, affect your relationships with other staff members?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Information and advice rather than instructions, as appropriate to a nonhierarchical mode of accomplishing tasks, informally structured according to the task.)</td>
<td>What types of &quot;communication breakdowns&quot; have you experienced in your work--situations where vital information affecting your work was not available or was incorrect? What do you see as the cause of these breakdowns?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Shared Beliefs--Burns and Stalker.</td>
<td>(Staff will be given a list of center goals as stated in center policy and asked to check off ones they believe to be current center goals, and prioritize them according to their importance.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The extent to which shared beliefs about values and goals of the organization counterbalance the absence of a hierarchical system of authority, and promote organizational functioning.)</td>
<td>To what extent do you see center staff working on a basis of shared goals? Where do you see major differences between staff members about goals? Are these differences consistent over time? What effect do shared goals or their absence have on decision-making? What effect does this have on your attitude towards your work at the center?</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Kanter and Lurch note the set of organizational "ideals that implicitly criticize things-as-they-are and propose things-as-they-should-be." Commitment to a position in the center, based on moral rather than economic or traditional professional concerns, may color individual experience much differently than "commitment" to a more traditionally defined job would. Inquiry into the effects of this type of commitment seem appropriate (see Table 3, Dimension A). Rothschild-Whitt mentions "economic marginality" and "mutual and self criticism" as two important dimensions distinguishing alternative institutions. Since wages paid at the center are of a subsistence nature, the significance of this will be explored through questioning about perceived rewards (see Table 3, Dimension C). Questions about evaluation will address the process by which members receive critical feedback; in the past, some staff members implemented "mutual and self criticism" in a way that was extremely anxiety-provoking to other staff (see Table 3, Dimension D).

Mansbridge speaks of the "ingrained inequalities" of the nonhierarchical organizational membership, based on the dimensions of varying expertise, verbal skill, self-confidence, information, and interest in tasks under discussion (see Table 3, Dimension F). Burns and Stalker and Holleb and Abrams note this in terms of the differential of expertise between new members and old ones. Torbert identifies "membership change" as an event which results in stress for those working within hierarchical structures. He describes the paradox of new members being invited to share equally in collaborative tasks by old members who
possess more knowledge about the content and process of those tasks, and with whom truly "equal" collaboration is difficult. Questions will be included which address the experience of integrating new members. The different perspectives of new and old members will be elicited (see Table 3, Dimension E).

Burns and Stalker observe that within an "organic" organizational structure, the individual yields himself/herself to a broader range of commitments, since his/her work role is not rigidly defined, as it would be in a classical hierarchical bureaucratic structure (Burns and Stalker, 1961). The dilemma of role flexibility vs. efficiency will be addressed through questions asking members to reflect on the degree of task definition, the way in which tasks are defined, and the ways that specialized knowledge of members is utilized (see Table 3, Dimension B). Burns and Stalker speak of the continual redefinition of tasks inherent in this type of organization, and the effects of this will be explored, as well as the effects of an organizational environment that requires the contribution of expertise rather than channeling work through a rigid structure of task specialization.

Burns and Stalker describe the content of communication as consisting of information and advice rather than instructions, given the more collaborative nature of tasks. Center staff have expressed dissatisfaction with the way this informally structured communication system functions within the center, so several questions investigate the nature and consequences of this communication as experienced by staff (see Table 3, Dimension G).
These authors also state that in an organization with a "network" structure of "control, authority, and communication," the absence of a hierarchical system of authority is counterbalanced by the development of shared beliefs about values and goals. Questions about goals will be included (see Table 3, Dimension H).

The basic dimensions of organizational experience to be investigated have been stated. The questions are relatively general, since that data that one would need to construct specific climate dimensions for nonhierarchical alternative organizations does not yet exist.

One of the main contributions of this study is such data, and a rudimentary framework for evaluating climate in these types of organization. Another is detailed and well organized descriptive data that can expand the currently limited literature on nonhierarchical alternative organizations. A third contribution is information about the process and content of work in a feminist organization. This information could be directly useful to feminists who wish to work more effectively in this form of organization.
CHAPTER II

METHODS

Definition and Process

The choice of participant-observation methodology for this study is a result of a) the basic level at which the research is conducted, without the benefit of a literature on nonhierarchical feminist organizations, and b) the nature of the phenomena being observed—an organization, seen as a social system.

The outcome of the research is mainly useful for "suggesting hypotheses rather than establishing quantitative relationships" between the nature of nonhierarchical organizational structure and the members' perceptions of and reactions to that structure (Dean, Eichman, and Dean, 1967). As an "analytic description of a complex social organization," the study is "primarily an empirical application and modification of scientific theory" rather than a test of it (McCall and Simmons, 1969). Guidelines for adapting the construct of organizational climate to the study of this type of organization are provided by literature describing the structural and social systems aspects of alternative institutions, the dynamics of task groups composed of women who identify themselves as feminists, and the social systems perspective or organizational psychology, in which climate is viewed as related to organizational effectiveness. These guidelines are used with the expectation that emerging data will alter the dimensions of organizational climate.
as initially defined by interview questions, and that these data are significant, even though they will not constitute a formal test of specific comprehensive theories.

McCall and Simmons' definition of "analytic description" summarizes the content, methods and aims of participant observation:

An analytic description (1) employs the concepts, propositions, and empirical generalizations of a body of scientific theory as the basic guides in analysis and reporting, (2) employs thorough and systematic collection, classification, and reporting of facts, and (3) generates new empirical generalizations (and perhaps concepts and generalizations as well) based on these data.

These authors regard participant observation as a "type of research enterprise" rather than a single method: "participant observation is most sensibly regarded, operationally, as the blend of methods and techniques that is characteristically employed in studies of social situations or complex social organizations of all sorts. These are studies that involve repeated, genuine social interaction on the scene with the participants themselves as part of the data-gathering process."

"Repeated, genuine social interaction" can be seen to describe a broad range of specific behaviors within the setting of the organization. However, these behaviors are organized around the primary concern of collecting data. "The amount and nature of participation should be such that the researcher fits comfortably into the setting and is able to establish the kind of rapport he wishes without disrupting the setting or having his participation interfere with his function as an observer" (Bogdan, 1969).

The researcher's behaviors are also guided by the shape of the
data as the work proceeds. Conceptual developments influence what is chosen for observation or what is deemed important in a particular interaction. This is another characteristic of participant-observation methods; it is a "process of data-gathering that involves continual analytic activity, and leads the field worker to control his operations increasingly as he goes along, in terms of an emerging propositional set" (Anselm Strauss, et al., 1969).

One can identify three "cycles of work" in utilizing this methodology. Pre-field work involves the evaluation of theoretical interests and conceptual developments which eventually result in the choice of a particular setting and the study of particular aspects of that setting. It also involves negotiations with representative members of the setting of interest in order to gain entry to the setting, and choosing appropriate techniques to be utilized once entry is gained. In this study, the pre-field work also involved a pilot observational period of four months, in which weekly staff meetings were observed and notes taken on the function and process of the meetings. Specific issues raised by members which seemed to indicate potentially significant areas of investigation were noted.

The field work stage involves ongoing interactions with members of the organization and the beginning of the process of analyzing the data as it is collected. Theoretical guidelines are applied and modified as appropriate to emergent data. For this study this has meant the continued observation of staff meetings, structured interviews with staff members based on theoretical guidelines and information from the
observations, and informal interaction with members as it occurs in the context of staff meetings, my presence in the center, or contact with members occurring in other social contexts.

Finally, the data analysis has involved organizing the data collected from all sources (observations, interviews, and relevant written materials such as policy statements) according to significant themes, and comparing the data to the original dimensions of climate gathered by the pre-field work and the literature.

Runkel and McGrath (1972) outline the weaknesses of this type of field study. The observations and interviews constitute an intrusion into an existing behavior system; the phenomena under study are changed by the act of observing them. My presence at staff meetings has affected interactions between members in unknown ways. Although the interviews occurred within the space of a month, the content of the interviews may have been affected if members who had been interviewed discussed the process with those who hadn't.

Much control of variables has been given up. Actors have not been randomly assigned to positions within the organization, which makes it difficult to distinguish the influence of a member's personal characteristics on her perceptions of climate dimensions from the influence of her role on those perceptions.

The consequences of the method are that, based on the data, one cannot know the extent to which the results can be generalized to other organizations of this type. However, the method has provided an excellent way to identify variables involved in organizational climate,
and their ranges and combinations, and by doing so forms the basis of more generalizable specific experimental research.

These issues are explored in depth, with reference to specific aspects of the data, in the discussion section.

**Issues and Specific Procedures**

Richardson (1969) identifies some major "problems" in field relations. While this is a simplification or partial statement of a complex situation, these are convenient in outlining more specifically the form and process and issues involved in data-collection activities.

**Type of knowledge obtained before entering field.** This included direct personal experience with a center workgroup, as a "practicum student" in short-term counseling within the Counseling Workgroup in the spring of 1976. From this experience my interest in the relationship between organizational structure and member perceptions of a collaborative non-hierarchical women's organization was generated. I was present at discussions of perceived center problems by members, and this impressionistic data helped me focus on the questions now being asked in this study. I also had the opportunity of hearing perceptions of the center from both clients and staff of other agencies with which the center came into contact. The pilot observational period of spring 1977 provided a general listing of types of member perceptions and responses to center process, besides providing information on the types of tasks the staff were engaged with and expected to take on in the future. I also obtained a copy of the center history, authored by several members with
approval of the full staff, which describes the history of the center from its inception and sets forth goals, policies, and organizational structure.

Sources from which information may be obtained. Besides those listed above (personal experience as marginal member, observation of meetings, written history) the following have served as sources: current individual members and documents describing alterations in policy or structure.

Preparation for and entry into the field. The pilot observation could be viewed as a "preliminary entry," since a certain amount of staff turnover occurred in the intervening four months before research formally began, and this contact eventually laid the groundwork for an acceptance of the researcher into the organizational context. Informal discussion had occurred with two members during winter of 1976-77, both of whom had been on staff for six months, as to the feasibility of performing the research. Their perceptions were that the center staff were dissatisfied with the process of decision-making as it was occurring in staff meetings and the "quality of life" as a member. Through them, I learned which workgroup I could formally approach with my request, and I made contact with a member of that workgroup. I explained what I wished to do and she suggested I come to the staff meeting at which the request would be considered. After a two-week delay she contacted me to inform me of the date of the meeting.

At that meeting, at which not all staff were present, (although
apparently a quorum) I explained my current student status, the background of my interest in studying the center, and my tentative ideas about what I hoped to gain from a pilot observation. I was tense, anticipating challenges as to the usefulness of the research based on some members' perceptions of social science as exploitative of women and other disadvantaged groups within the society. In retrospect, I see my presentation was somewhat disorganized, tentative, and relatively emotional, unconsciously geared towards "fitting in" and appearing as non-threatening as possible. Through this mode of presentation, I attempted to minimize my status as a graduate student in a selective program, and stressed my common concerns as a woman facing issues around which center activities and philosophy were focused. A few members raised questions about my specific role in staff meetings. I stated that an observer role was suited to my goals. The members agreed that this was appropriate. We contracted that in exchange for allowing me to be present, I would give them a summary of my observations at the end of the semester.

During the course of the pilot observations, members acknowledged me at least once before meetings began and usually once during it, either by glance or humorous remarks.

At the staff meeting in May where I presented the results of my observations, only about half the members were present. (The previous week I had met with four members who knew they would not be able to attend that week's meeting.) The members affirmed my observations. Several said that I had perfectly described several problems.
In August of 1977 I again approached the administrative workgroup through an individual and asked permission to observe meetings and interview members as research for my master's thesis. I wrote a one-and-a-half page "statement of purpose" which ended up to be more of a disclaimer for misconceptions I anticipated among members. It was decided that my request could be met, providing that I was willing to discuss the results and help them formulate solutions to problems if so desired. The woman who notified me of the decision stated that she would be my formal liaison with the center during the course of research. She notified me of the date and time of the first full staff meeting of the year. The day before the meeting I dropped into the center to confirm the time, and was told to come at ten a.m.

The next morning I appeared at 9:45, to find the staff meeting in session as I came into the room where it is normally held. I quickly sat down and began taking notes. The liaison rose and came over and whispered her apologies that she had failed to inform me of the new decision that the meeting would convene at nine. During a "break" in the meeting, other members, with whom I had previous contact, joked about this mistake with her. She had in fact known about the "new" time but had involuntarily told me the old one. She was embarrassed, and I saw her as sincere—she had not intentionally lied to me.

Structuring of field worker role. McCall states:

...It is extremely useful for the observer to acquire some advance knowledge of the role structure among the subjects and to determine where he is most likely to fit within that structure. The role which he claims—or to which he is assigned by the subjects—is perhaps the single most important
determinant of what he will be able to learn... The role assumed by the observer largely determines where he can go, what he can do, whom he can interact with, what he can inquire about, what he can see, and what he can be told.

Earlier I described some of the role structuring I had participated in unconsciously at the beginning of the pilot observation, which involved minimizing some objective differences between myself and members and emphasizing our commonalities, including the fact that I had been a marginal member of the staff for four months. During that time I moved from feeling like a total stranger whose presence was tolerated, and acting from a mechanical conception of my neutrality, to a stance that I believe integrated the demand of the role with self-expression and personal integrity. After repeated brief interactions, involving some self-disclosure on my part and theirs, members came to treat me like a colleague. I began to establish relationships with several members who continued on the staff this year. These members consistently sought to acknowledge me before meetings or during breaks to chat on the level of "how are you."

Within the context of interacting with members in these brief informal ways, I kept in mind my purpose, unobtrusive data collection. Gold's comments on informant relationships were helpful: the observer "strives to bring his relationship with the informant to the point of friendship, to the point of intimate form" yet retains "sufficient elements of 'the stranger' to avoid actually reaching intimate form" (McCall and Simmons, 1969).

Simmel's distinction between intimate content and intimate form contains an implicit warning that the latter is inimical to field observation. When content of interaction is intimate,
secrets may be shared without either of the interactors feeling compelled to maintain the relationship for more than a short time. This is the interaction of sociological strangers. On the other hand, when form of interaction is intimate, continuation of the relationship...may become more important than continuation of the roles through which they initiated the relationship.

During the course of the study, I was seen as a female graduate student who had experience working in the center and thus had some credibility as a "feminist," and who was interested in helping the center improve its effectiveness.

Incentives. There were no incentives provided to individuals for participating in the study, other than knowing that they were cooperating with someone who was sincerely interested in the organizational process of the center and was willing to help them work on perceived organizational problems. There probably was an incentive inherent in the interview process, in which they were closely listened to and in which their perceptions were clearly valued.

Process of selecting subjects. I interviewed the entire center staff, excluding the Work/Study students who work under supervision there. (The latter are excluded from staff meetings and decision-making.) The size of the organization was an advantage here, since I could interview all members.

Rumors. The context of the study is an organization which provides services within a certain philosophical or political framework that could be perceived as drastically different from "mainstream" middle-class values. The members function as a group that shares a common
ideology, or at least assumes common points of reference, and sees itself as embattled within a hostile environment. (This is not to deny the more "objective" indicators that could substantiate this perception.) I experienced entry as a difficult process that was facilitated to a great extent by my previous, if ill-defined and brief, membership in a group that was highly valued by staff and center clients.

I have attempted to be as explicit as possible about the purposes of my research without providing unnecessary details or speaking in professional jargon that would "distance" members from me. Although my initial written statement was directed to describing purposes and methods and guaranteeing confidentiality, I clarified this to each member I interviewed. To protect the identities of the members and the viability of the center as a service organization, I have discussed the specific location of the study only with members of the master's committee and those who I know understand the importance of professional confidentiality. In this way I hoped to prevent rumors, at least as a result of my behavior as a researcher.

How to report to members. The agreement I made at entry provided for a presentation of the results of the study to the staff when it was completed, in spring of 1978. I told staff members that it would not be feasible to provide intermittent reports of my perceptions of the center, and that I needed the period from September to May as a data base in order to formulate meaningful conceptions of the organization's process. As individual members inquired from time to time about how it was "going," I stressed the helpful nature of their cooperation and how
grateful I was to be allowed to conduct the research, rather than giving extensive detail of my analysis as it emerged. Handling these inquiries was a matter of moment to moment judgment according to what I felt I could say without biasing the content of the observations or interviews or biasing their attitude towards me in an unfavorable way.

**Ethical problems of research.** The main ethical concern for this study has been keeping the identity of members and the organization confidential so that it can continue to function vis a vis other organizations in a strategic manner consistent with its goals. Another concern is that the organization as a system cannot help but be influenced by my presence, and by the effects of raising organizational issues indirectly to staff through interviews. In meetings it is possible that I served as a constant reminder of the ongoing issues about the nature of the organization and its effectiveness, and that those issues have been made visible to members more than they would have been otherwise. While there may have been a possible beneficial aspect of this, it is also possible that it increased organizational stress, and it was not possible to assess the effects of this. Over the summer, the staff discussed organizational structure and actually changed some procedures. Thus, I began formal research at a time when awareness of organizational issues was already high, and some staff have stated that they feel my presence has been particularly helpful in light of this.
CHAPTER III
RESULTS AND COMMENTARY

Introduction to Results and Discussion Section

The results and discussion section are arranged in the following manner. For each dimension the interview data is presented first; major themes in the responses are identified, and the verbatim responses are grouped according to these themes. Following this is a brief "analysis," an abstracted summary of the responses. Then, the responses to the dimensions are discussed, elaborating on the dynamics within each dimension that result in its particular contribution to the climate of the work environment. Interrelationships between dimensions are pointed out, and areas of future research are proposed.

Through the interviews, staff frequently expressed strong negative feelings, attitudes and perceptions about the center. The concluding section of the discussion examines how contextual factors--the organization's environment, its history and reputation, the diversity of those who use it, and the philosophy of the women's movement--may have significantly contributed to this negative tone. The effect of methodology is also assessed.

Looking at the interviews alone one might assume that the organization was totally paralyzed by ideological conflicts; ineffective in decision-making, had great difficulties relating to any other agencies; and could provide only minimally adequate and partially satisfactory services to women. This is not the case.
The staff are highly critical of many aspects of the work setting, but the fact remains that they usually commit themselves to the organization, for a minimal salary, from anywhere from one to three years, and work many hours without pay. The center has existed now for over seven years, is considered to be a model for women's centers throughout the country, provides a meeting ground for a wide spectrum of the women's movement, and facilitates numerous events, services, and ongoing projects for women.

The study provides a detailed account of some tensions encountered in working collectively--between staff needs and organizational needs, between political ideals and the compromises of action, between egalitarianism and privilege based on expertise, to name a few examples. More research on these types of organization needs to be done and the findings disseminated, so that collaborative structure can be utilized more effectively and so workers in similar situations can more clearly analyze and change dissatisfying aspects of their work environment.

The staff's comments imply that individual shortcomings or organizational inadequacies are at fault for the atmosphere of discouragement, frustration, and resentment. This attribution is in itself significant data, and indicates one of the reasons why change is difficult for this organization. Convinced that individual characteristics or organizational peculiarities are the source of perceived "problems," staff are unable to see the interaction of forces between organizational structure, the legitimate needs of workers, and the organization's environment which produces the tensions which they experience. Feeling
hampered by these tensions, experiencing few immediate rewards, they tend to judge their own participation and the participation of others as "right" or "wrong," rather than viewing events as part of a process of organizational and personal evolution from which individuals and the organization can learn.

The results document the experience of confronting difficult and unfamiliar tasks—since, culturally, collaboration in a work setting is still a relatively unfamiliar enterprise—and receiving few tangible rewards for doing so. The collection of individual responses points to patterns of interaction, and acknowledgement of these patterns is what will be most useful to similar organizations.

Commitment

How do you compare working for the center, to which you have a moral/political commitment, with other work situations?

How does this affect your attitude towards working at the center, and towards other staff? How does it affect the way you accomplish tasks?

Results. The staff responded to the questions about commitment in a way that indicated that this dimension of the organizational experience has a strong effect on climate. In the course of their responses, most staff showed more affect than at any other point during the interview. They emphasized their high awareness of the political diversity that exists among them. They tended to downplay the positive aspects of integrating work and social change concerns, instead articulating what they
perceived as the consequence of working with a politically committed group of women--conflict, pressure, frequent critical comments about one another's work. They described the effects of all this on decision-making, and observed that they often felt less cohesive as a group than they are perceived to be by outside observers.

The major theme in the responses was the "diversity" of the staff's political views. Staff offered a number of comments about the difficulty of bridging these differences and the way this affected the course of center work. They identified four major aspects of diversity: (1) differences in political ideologies; (2) varying degrees of interest in the integration of political beliefs, personal development, and work; (3) explicit statements of value differences; and (4) disagreements about the relative importance of program development vs. center maintenance activities.

Elaine focused on the diversity of ideologies. In decision-making, this meant a continual series of "very uncomfortable compromises." Decisions were unstable--frequently challenged--because "grinding one's own axe" was a large part of the process: staff attempting to convince one another to act a certain way that would be consistent with their own political convictions. Then, repeated discussion of the decision would occur as various individuals became (or remained) unconvinced that the basis of the decision had been sound. In summary, she said, "Politics are used to manipulate--to make you feel you're not a 'good feminist'."

Julia, Deb, and Maria noted the conflict and outbursts of emotion
that arose as a consequence of some staff's attempts to integrate politics, self, and work. Julia defined "diversity" in these terms: "The continuum of commitment causes conflict." She described one extreme of the "continuum" as exemplified by herself, in her belief that the development of her political perspective should be integrated into her work at the center, with the other extreme represented by a former staff member who had stated that "she just wanted to do her work and go home." Deb compared her experience at the center with her previous work as a secretary in business. Like Julia, she stated, "Here, self and work are integrated." According to Deb, "issues are really felt" --it contributes to the general frenzy--it's a different kind of pressure than from external standards. It's mostly internal."

How commitment "contributes to the frenzy" and where the internal pressure comes from, is suggested by Maria's comment that her reactions to what happens in the center are much more "volatile and emotional because what it means in the larger context of the world is significant--it affects the women's movement, my life, and other women." She referred to the "continuum of commitment" already mentioned as "varying levels of commitment among the staff to various parts of issues...a difference in where the bulk of each person's energy goes." The consequences? "We have constant conflict." She elaborated on what she saw as the backdrop of the feelings of strong commitment: "You have to do more than your job. You're usually committed because you want social change."

Paula talked about the dynamics involved in recognizing the diver-
sity of values. She compared the center with her previous "odd jobs" outside of formal organizations this way: "Here we're more apt to debate and expose our values." Her assessment of these debates was that "they feed into personality conflicts." Like Elaine, she spoke of manipulation as concomitant to the expression of political values and their implementation in decision-making. "If people impose their perspectives in manipulative ways I isolate myself--it slows down tasks when we get into those discussions--it seems we never go anywhere when we have them." She described what she believed was another effect of "value differences" on decision-making: "In subgroups, we can ally with one another and trust that we have shared convictions...but I have never experienced an alliance with the whole staff on political convictions."

Ann discussed at length the ongoing "split" between time spent on program development and center maintenance tasks as a factor that "helps politics surface." She went on to say that staff members had various biases concerning the relative importance of program development and center maintenance, and that these biases were direct reflections of political beliefs and commitments. She judged the center to be "less political in the sense of collective action" than other groups with which she had worked. These groups shared a common goal and major tasks, and based their activities around these. In contrast, she saw the center staff as continually judging time and energy between center maintenance tasks and program development work.

Acknowledging that the tasks of program development often involved
"political" decisions as staff related to external agencies and involved themselves in social issues, Ann said, "There's no good way to balance objectivity and political sense. There's no hierarchy for checking out one's biases with others. I end up making some lonely decisions and hoping it works out." Combined with the diversity of political ideologies, and the opportunity for disagreements about ideological differences to disrupt the decision-making process, Ann believed that this lack of a way to "check out" decisions contributed to the sense of individual isolation and continual uncertainty about and reevaluation of decisions that did get made.

The strongest negative statement about the effect of moral/political commitment came from Geri, who said, "With the stronger commitment you get a stronger sense of oppression. There's more pressure to think the same way politically."

Analysis. Members of the staff see themselves as committed to social change, to be accomplished according to the ideological framework of a "feminist perspective." They originally sought positions at the center because the organization offered opportunities to integrate this perspective into the provision of ongoing services to women.

However, the organization lacks clear guidelines which staff could utilize in making day-to-day decisions as they implement programs. There is no systematic way for a worker to receive help in making decisions and developing her work within the broad "feminist" framework.
The staff perceive themselves as differing widely in their assessments as to what type of "feminist" work is important. This "diversity" of political beliefs, along with the unique sets of program tasks for which each worker is responsible, seems to create distance between workers. Each individual is seen by her coworkers as carrying out her responsibilities primarily according to her own political convictions, without regards for the opinions of others.

Members want to make decisions based at least partially on their political beliefs; they acknowledge that decisions made totally on this basis result in ineffective center operation. Workers want some assistance in deciding how to carry out program work, and, simultaneously, the leeway to focus programmatic priorities according to their specific political priorities. The lack of decision guidelines, and the diverse definitions of commitment to feminist social change, interact, producing member perceptions that one is not supported for one's work by other workers; other staff criticize one's work from their own "feminist perspective", but provide no reassurance as to how one's work is consistent with feminist values. When the staff is working together on center maintenance issues, the perception often arises that the decisions being made are "wrong" according to someone's feminist political perspective.

Because there are no avenues set up by which a worker could ask others for sympathetic constructive criticism about her work, the commentary that ensues after she has accomplished a task leaves her feeling that her work is not appreciated, and leaves other workers with
the feeling that their particular "feminist perspective" and input has been excluded from this feminist work. Discouragement about "correctly" accomplishing tasks arises, along with resentment towards other workers.

**Role Flexibility and Efficiency**

How are your tasks defined? By whom?

The staff focused on two major areas: the advantages and disadvantages of being able to individually define their work roles, and the consequences of this self-definition for their work relationships with others.

All staff said that they defined their respective program development tasks themselves, in accordance with their perception of client needs. Elaine commented that "we all have lots of flexibility, which is a good thing," and then added, "sometimes there's too much of it, we get spread too thin. We try to cover all the problems." She observed, "Women take on too much because the tasks aren't limited--we try to be all things to all people." Ann noted that she had "total leeway" for "what I set in motion" and that "coordination becomes a built-in demand along with everything else, which has its advantages and disadvantages." Deb, who had initiated an extra project beyond her usual role, said, "I can expand or contract my work to fit my needs--I schedule around other people's time--I don't have to feel trapped by my work." Paula said she could "procrastinate" and still get things done. "I can wait until the last minute--that's the way I work best."

When asked how relative flexibility in tasks affect the way work
was accomplished and relationships with other workers, a number of issues appeared which suggested that role flexibility, as currently handled in the center, becomes a hindrance to collaborative accomplishments. Everyone elaborated on the tensions arising from workers' attempts to balance their own program development and their involvement in center maintenance tasks. Here, the highly individualized mode of organizing work (suggested by the responses above) seemed to set up a situation where collaborative work was perceived as unrewarding—either because of the demands such work made on usually highly flexible schedules, or because of the poor quality of participation by other workers. Some workers discussed what they saw as unpleasant features of "center work" in particular. After describing how she defined her program work by herself, Maria went on to say, "but my center work—that's not defined by one person—everyone has a specific view of what it is and what's the best way to do it. I hear people's opinions on how I do the job indirectly. I'm not trusted to make decisions on my own."

Ann found that the time demanded by "center work" disturbed her. "I was unsettled by the amount of time I was expected to devote to center tasks—more than one-third of my time—the job description didn't indicate this." She went on to say that the center task process was "cumbersome" and took time away "unnecessarily" from programmatic concerns. She also stated, "There's always the conflict between the time spent on center tasks and on program work." Geri mentioned, "The center work is a drain on people—work gets done slowly in one of the areas—budget, administration, or program work. People resent having
time taken away from their program work."

Several workers had very specific comments about how the differences in roles, created by individuals in defining their jobs, affected the organization as a whole. In some cases, this has meant that an individual's lack of experience in self-directed work made them unable to use flexibility effectively. Paula commented, "Lots of projects we do here depend on self initiative. You can get involved in the center and other stuff and it can hurt your program work." She distinguished between workers whose jobs had built-in deadlines and those who didn't. "For people without deadlines it's harder to stay focused on program work."

One outcome of flexibility is that workers feel they must take on whatever tasks appear. Laurel stated, "With the flexibility, it's hard to step back and choose tasks. There's a collective pressure." Also, questions of accountability arise in the absence of standardized sets of tasks. Laurel noted, "People have totally different work styles, and I'm not sure that's accepted. People are judgmental--'how much work is anyone else doing' is always an undercurrent. Ann described one situation in which the way people exercised their flexibility became extremely problematic. She stated, "There are no clear guidelines. When people take vacation days, they simply leave and put a note in the log saying they won't be here, that they're on vacation. This creates problems for expecting people to be around in order to do things."

Analysis. Role flexibility makes its possible for each worker to
follow an idiosyncratic schedule (sometimes literally in isolation from others). Individuals want to be trusted to complete tasks on their own in this way. How much work each person does at a given time is determined by their personal needs, their work style, and the internal dynamics of their work. All three of these influences vary from worker to worker. The resultant differences in amount of work accomplished within the center are noticed by staff.

It sometimes appears that the expectations established through role flexibility directly conflict with the realities of the time and energy demanded by collaborative processes. Accustomed to structuring their time themselves and working independently, workers find that they are reluctant to engage in necessary but less intrinsically rewarding center maintenance tasks via a process which is perceived as time consuming and difficult.

Flexibility of this type requires a special kind of self-discipline in order for workers to fulfill all their responsibilities equally rather than focusing on the most immediately salient projects while ignoring others. At the other extreme, workers may allow themselves to be overwhelmed by client needs and because there are no externally imposed limitations as to what tasks they can assume. Because they work independently so much, workers sometimes neglect to communicate to others specific times when they plan to be present in the center and available to other staff. Along with their lack of enthusiasm about collaborating on maintenance tasks, this creates the impression that staff are not concerned about their work relationships with others.
The way workers utilize the flexibility inherent in center positions interacts with the staff's needs to work independently. This results in a lack of enthusiasm about participating in the more laborious collaborative decision-making processes involving center issues, and, to some extent, a lack of felt obligation to communicate with other staff about fulfilling center and program responsibilities.

**Economic Marginality**

Results. What is your salary? Do you feel it is appropriate for the type and amount of work you do? How does this affect your attitude towards your job?

How does the current funding situation affect your attitude about working at the center? Do funding uncertainties affect the type of work you do or how you do it?

The responses in this section indicated that the salary level is a major issue within the center, but one which is seldom discussed openly. Workers denied that it affected their attitude toward their work, but it seems clear that their frustration around salary does in some way color their experience of their job. Similarly, the uncertainties about funding undermine the staff's ability to systematically build on programs that already exist. This contributes to the lack of a sense of continuity from year to year about what the center is and what it does.

Five of the eight staff stated that they considered the present salaries to be inadequate compensation for the nature and quality of
the work they do. A sample of their comments follows. Elaine: "I'm resentful about getting paid on the same scale as clerical workers." Deb: "It's not an appropriate amount--the University is ripping us off. Given the professional caliber of our work and our dedication it should be acknowledged monetarily." Geri commented, "When I know I would be getting more elsewhere it makes it hard." Julia mildly stated that the salary was not adequate, and then reflected, "Any salary was good at the time I started...it does affect the way I live. I try not to let it get in the way of more important things. I blame it on the system, not the center."

Other workers qualified their answers somewhat. Maria said, "When I started it felt fine...it still is O.K. for the amount of time I put in (25 hours a week). But I have a hard time with it professionally--a cut in pay and hours after I've gained experience. I'm supposed to be committed to the center, so I won't complain. It's a ridiculous, a total guilt thing." Two other staff made similar comments, expressing an ambivalence about the salary level, and trying to weigh other advantages of their positions. Paula remarked, "Up until now I've only thought about what money I need to live. I'm thinking now in terms of a professional ethic about that--it is a comfortable wage, except for not being able to afford a car." Ann reported, "I have learned to live on little money--there are lots of non-monetary rewards (making independent decisions, flexibility)."

The staff commented on what they perceived to be the effects of the salary level on present members and the pool of candidates for
positions. Ann said, "Existing on our salaries is difficult for single parents. The salary level makes a difference in terms of who works here. Some have greater living expenses, others feel they need to be paid at a certain minimum amount in order to be productive and feel rewarded." Laurel said, "It's hard to attract women with skills we're beginning to need for that kind of money. Third World women with skills can get better jobs."

Some reported that the salary level affected attitudes towards their work in a negative way; others felt comfortable with it. Paula remarked, "It doesn't affect my attitude--the balance is in the flexibility I have." Julia described it this way. "I consider myself lucky to be working with other women for $4.80 an hour. There's a traditional joke around the center about making a living off the women's movement." Geri's assessment was, "It does affect my attitude towards the program work--the center work is a drag--I am overpaid for administrative work and underpaid for my program work." Given the staff's concerns about the effects of the salary level on their personal and professional lives, personnel selection, and attitudes towards work, it was somewhat surprising to find that the staff had recently agreed to keep the salaries at this level--and that at least two workers felt that they could not voice dissatisfaction about that decision. All staff expressed concern about the consequences of the center's funding situation, which all described as tenuous from year to year. Julia described the effects of the recent collective decision that wages should remain at the current level. "When we set our own salaries,
it's impossible to gripe about it inhouse--even though there's a discrepancy between University-funded positions for similar work and our pay rate." Geri said, "We divide up the lump sum that comes in to the center. We can't be angry about it. We have lots of discussions about our worth."

The staff all described the center's current funding situation as tenuous from year to year, with a host of consequences: an atmosphere that discourages any "long-term" personal commitment to the center; concerns about program viability; ineffective decision-making; a funding proposal process which the staff experiences as stressful and disruptive. Workers would prefer some assurance that financial support will continue to be available for programs they initiate, so that they can have a sense of continuity in their work and personal lives.

Deb and Laurel said that the greater job stability which a more stable economic base would provide for the center would be an improvement over the current situation. "It discourages long-term employment--there are no possible benefits in planning to work there long-term." "It would be helpful if you knew you could make a two-year commitment."

According to Ann, the situation is "problematic for running ongoing programs--it's hard to maintain credibility with other agencies when you don't know about funding--so you act like it will continue." Geri described another way that lack of funding affects program operation. "There is lots of frustration. We spend so much time trying to figure out how to make ends meet, not knowing how much money there is or how to divide it up. There needs to be more money. There aren't
enough staff to do what's needed."

Julia stated, "The center's financial crisis produced hysteria and anger for some people, while others were apathetic." Some clues as to possible sources of anger and hysteria came from Ann and Maria. Ann said, "There's a shortsightedness in the center about funding sources--and then there are the unknown funding contingencies of the University. We get hit from both inside and outside--we need to plan to avoid the annual hysteria." Elaborating on the effects of the year to year funding situation for decision-making processes within the center, Maria said, "We end up behaving most conservatively because we don't know what the reality of the University really is. We put pressure on one another to do things right according to University standards--we don't agree about what constitutes compromise of the center. By the time we finally do make decisions about what to do about University pressures, the situation changes again." Elaine found herself being very concerned about the center's public image--how staff behaved outside the center in the University context. "The funding situation affects my attitude a lot. I want people we hire to project a better image of the center. Most of the staff don't realize the implications of our activities for continued funding."

Analysis. The salary level of the center positions is low relative to similar positions in other parts of the campus. The low salary levels, interacting with staff's needs to feel adequately compensated for their work, and their perceptions that others are receiving more compensation for the same amount of work, result in resentment on the part of the
staff. They tend to see the university as being at fault for the situation, even though they themselves make decisions about salary levels within the center budget. Staff perceive the salary level as restricting the candidate pool for vacant positions to those who are willing to work for these lower wages. They are concerned about whether this group will possess adequate skills to carry out the work of the center effectively.

Also, according to several staff, the center is not particularly aggressive about seeking funding sources, so that the uncertainty about funding continuity could be alleviated. This lack of certainty created problems in program planning and weakens individual staff's commitment to the center.

The staff's reaction to the center's financial situation is one of strong though hidden, dissatisfaction. For reasons that are not clear, staff feel ineffective in coping with the financial maintenance of the center. They are angry about their low salary levels.

**Mutual and Self Criticism**

How do you receive feedback on your work? Formally? Informally?

What do you like/dislike about the quality of the feedback?

What do you see as the purpose of formal evaluation? Does evaluation as it is structured now meet your needs for feedback?

All of the staff stated that they received feedback from clients and others outside of the center, and received "none" from other staff. Each worker also stated that she needed feedback and wanted to be
evaluated, though not in the way it had been done in the past. Almost everyone also suggested possible factors which made feedback impossible or difficult to give or receive within the center.

Most directly stated that they found the feedback from their clients encouraging. Elaine said, "I receive feedback from the clients --they're very happy. There's a real vacuum within the center in terms of feedback." Ann commented, "The evaluative component is missing--there is a sense your work is being tested in some way, though." Paula stated, "I don't get any feedback except through those staff who are close to me personally. We need a formal evaluation process, we don't have one." Concurring with this, Deb said, "I would like more clear feedback on my work, to help me develop professional skills."

What emerged as we continued to discuss this area was that staff did in fact receive feedback from one another--but that it was perceived as "negative," as either the wrong type or focusing on the wrong aspects of the work situation.

Deb observed, "Evaluation now is a way of taking out personality conflicts on one another." Paula said, "I would like to be evaluated on my work, not my personality." The abuse of political, as well as interpersonal, concerns was another issue. Elaine dismissed a recent review process in which the staff had reported on the status of their various projects. "My work is evaluated on meaningless dimensions. The 'criteria' were a means to grind political axes." Deb's comment provided another perspective on this. "If someone is not supporting your political issue it's hard to reward them for their good work."
All of the staff seemed to be indirectly expressing a need to be acknowledged for their work. The explanations offered to account for the 'absence' of feedback seemed to indicate a desire for mutual support rather than critical scrutiny. "People are so involved in their own things--there is no appreciation of other's work," Laurel stated. Paula commented, "It's hard to do it with all the different schedules--people don't see each other and don't know what's being done. There's always the time element to prevent me from grabbing someone to tell them." Maria agreed with this assessment. "We need some mechanism for supporting one another doing quality work. We can't do that if we don't know what people are doing." Geri stated, "Channels are just not available for sharing and getting feedback." Julia mentioned that she thought "fears of inadequacy" hindered the creation of a consistent feedback process.

Analysis. Staff want their work to be acknowledged, and would like their colleagues to provide them with knowledgeable guidance with their programs in areas where they feel they need help. They would also like to gain an overview of their programmatic accomplishments. Currently they state they receive positive comments from those whom they serve, but receive inadequate feedback from those whom they see as potential resources to help them improve their programs. The lack of a feedback and evaluation system interacts with staff needs for this acknowledgement, and resentment arises.

One of the consequences of the present situation is that staff do not believe they can receive assistance in developing or refining skills.
They believe that lack of attention to their work means that other staff are not willing to help them in their own "professional development."

An important element of the work environment that seems to hinder the initiation of feedback and evaluations is the lack of a communications system. Since staff often don't know much about one another's activities, they cannot provide feedback on the nature or quality of those activities.

**Inequalities in Skills, Experience, and Information**

The category formerly entitled, "Differences in Expertise between Old and New Members" has been combined with the category entitled, "Inequalities in Skills, Experience, and Information." During interviews, workers usually spoke of inequalities in skills, experience, and information as a consequence of their status as an old or new member. The few exceptions are noted. It's possible that in the course of further interviews, differentiating characteristics other than the length of time at the center would have emerged. As they stand now, the results point to this difference as one of major concern to the staff. The effects of this become evident in the interview material that follows.

This presents another paradox about this type of organization. Usually part of the intent of those who utilize a collaborative form of organization is to provide opportunities for everyone to participate in decisions. What is implied by these data is that one's ability to
influence decisions really rests on the length of time one has been working in the organization.

The degree to which staff emphasize this distinction in the interviews partly reflects their frustration at what they perceive as the discrepancy between the promise of the collaborative structure and the reality of their ability to participate. Their suspicion that other workers have consciously engineered this situation again reflects their tendency to resort to "political differences" as an explanation for the center's problems.

**Differences in Skills**

How do differences among workers in levels of expertise in skills needed to accomplish tasks affect the way tasks are accomplished?

**Results.** Workers articulated a number of different skills that they felt were important to the operation of the center, from managing one's schedule to participating in the group. They all implied that some members of the staff lacked these skills, and that this caused interpersonal problems and interfered with programs.

Paula was the only worker who denied that these differences had much effect. "I haven't seen anyone who didn't have adequate skills--people always seem competent." She went on to say that "lots of people leave the center feeling their skills are not recognized. I believe we can assume that people's skills are the same without it being detrimental to those who have had more experience.

The rest of the staff felt strongly about what they perceived as
the consequences of different levels of competencies. Elaine said, "Women new to nonhierarchical structure need time to get used to it. They need skills in groups. They need to be aware of what their role can be in decision-making."

Ann talked about the special set of work skills that she saw as essential for workers to be able to function efficiently in handling independent projects. She said, "If women have a hard time structuring their own time in their work here they're in trouble." She described a perceived difference in communication skills that might also be perceived as a difference in 'power.' "Some women are aware of how to present issues strategically, how to make it palatable, how to get their desired results. Some are more skilled and knowledgeable as translators and interpreters of what they have seen outside the center."

Ann said she was bothered by the attitudes implicit in the interviewing process for her position, which raised for her the possibility that many of the staff might have inadequate skills. "I didn't feel my abilities were being seriously scrutinized when I was hired--it was more my philosophy about the women's movement."

A comment made by another worker placed the by-now familiar ongoing conflict about program and maintenance tasks in a new context, suggesting other sources for that strain besides differences in political outlook. Geri traced her dislike of center maintenance tasks to the fact that "center work involves a lot of things I don't have skills or energy to do."

Elaine pointed out one area in which she saw the staff as both
lacking skill and resisting acquiring staff or training to correct the situation. "There's a belittling of secretarial skills in the center. We are all careful never to talk about all that stuff that needs to be done."

Geri also commented on the process of acquisition of skills in the center, describing how several coworkers had gained competencies in specialty areas and then moved on. "Women stay in the center to learn certain skills, and having learned them, they leave."

Describing much more fundamental differences in modes of working and exercising skills, Maria said, "Some women react intuitively with feelings, others with logic. These people are at odds with one another, and we fight it out. Women haven't been validated for intuition or for logic and rationality, and we continue to invalidate one another. None of us has ever felt validated."

**Differences in Experience**

How does working with other staff affect tasks given the differences between you in amount of experience at the center?

In their responses, new staff tended to complain about old staff's resistance to change, and about what they perceived as their own lack of power stemming from the difference in experience. Old staff commented that new staff were not immediately capable of handling the same degree of responsibility in participating in decisions, as well as acknowledging their own inflexibility. Both an old and a new staff member commented that they believed personal characteristics--asser-
tiveness, self-confidence—had a major influence on how well women adjusted to working at the center.

One new staff member, Ann, admitted her own lack of knowledge. "The new staff have a hard time keeping administrator's names straight. This is one issue for new staff—orientation to players, issues, flow charts." The next comment identified old staff as partially responsible for this situation. Laurel said, "Old members present a lot of information implicitly; you're supposed to know who the administrators are."

Julia, who had been at the center about six months, stated, "Old members collectively represent an inertial force. They give you the depressed feeling that they have tried it and it didn't work. You get the picture of work here as a circle and not a spiral." Ann said, "I'm not sure whether the resistance to new things is a need to protect themselves or a need to hide."

Other new staff stated that the influence of older staff originated from more than their "inertial force." They saw old staff as having more power, working to retain it, and as using their power in a variety of ways to shape the group's time and energy. Ann said, "Experience is one of several kinds of power that accrue over time and give some women more credibility." Her example of power that had accrued in an automatic way involved an older staff member who knew the history of major decisions and was frequently called upon to be a resource by less experienced staff at crossroads in decision-making. (This woman had reported to me that she resisted other staff's attempts
to put her in this role, asking them to utilize their own assessments to make decisions.) Maria also described how the accumulation of information equaled more influence, but from a more positive perspective. "People who have been there longer have a better knowledge of the University bureaucracy and how it affects the center."

While Ann's statements implied that the differential in power was due to conscious motives, Maria tended to view the situation as a consequence of the differences in experience in which staff were not "at fault" except for their unwillingness to look at the situation directly. She said, "Old members don't really 'take' influence. If that inequality in experience was accepted and recognized it might be different." As it is now, she explained, she feels "set up." "When I supposedly have influence and then don't have information I need, I defer to those who do."

In relation to questions about another dimension, Maria had spoken of the conflict between the staff as to the relative priorities of center and program work. Here, she commented that older staff were active in keeping that conflict alive. "Some women with more experience make a choice between 'process' and 'program' issues based on their experience. They have not found it worth the time and energy to be involved in both kinds of issues."

An older staff member stated that she was willing to give new workers responsibility, but didn't see this as appropriate. Deb said, "I'm aware that I want to forget that the new people are new. I want to depend on them to do things. Being new means they can't participate
as much. Nothing changes that except acquiring skills and people beginning to trust them." Another worker, Elaine, felt that new staff didn't view their work in the center in a realistic way. She stated, "They tend to make off-the-wall suggestions. One new woman pointed out to us she had the feeling of having her hand slapped, after making a suggestion. New staff expect the center to be a wonderful support group. It's not a supportive place, it's a job."

The comments of one older staff member provided some validation for new staff's complaints about inflexibility. Commenting on how she had changed since beginning to work at the center, Paula said, "I know I have less flexibility. I'm locked into stuff that's already in my head. Certain things seem impossible. Old people say, 'You can't.'" She described a recurrent situation which could be related to new staff 'having their hands slapped': "Old people don't think about the fact that new people might have ideas and solutions. When old people are burnt out on some issue and a new person comes along and wants to discuss it, they go berserk when they think about discussing it again."

From their different perspectives, Deb and Laurel suggested that personal characteristics contributed to some of the perceived difficulties for new staff. Deb observed, "It's hard for women who are not immediately aggressive and strong, because of the information lag--it takes longer for them to find out things." Laurel supported the view that less assertive women had a more difficult time adjusting. "Some women with a lack of experience participate equally with those who have none. They are self-confident and don't back down." She noted
that in general, "New people say they're afraid to say anything."

**Analysis.**

**Skills.** All of the workers except one described skills that they believed to be essential for effective participation in the center. They implied that some staff possessed these skills, some didn't, and that these inequalities caused problems in accomplishing tasks. They also noted the lack of training opportunities for individual staff to acquire any of these skills in a systematic fashion.

**Experience.** Differences in amount of experience at the center were seen as significantly affecting work relationships and decision-making. Staff who had recently come to the center tended to feel helpless and confused, and to doubt that they could substantially influence the course of center decisions. They felt caught between the expectations that had arisen from being told that they would be participating in a collaborative process, and what they perceived as the rather limited possibilities of participation due to their inexperience. Some attributed the perceived inequalities in influence to the manipulations of more experienced staff, while others say this as a natural outgrowth of some staffs' greater fund of accumulated knowledge about center operations.

The old staff stated that the differences in experience within the center meant that they were not willing to see new staff as capable of participating as fully. Some also said that they were aware of some rigidity in their attitudes towards what was possible in terms of projects within the center. Because of these attitudes they found them-
selves to be less receptive to potentially valid strategies proposed by new staff. More experienced staff seemed somewhat frustrated by the new staff's inability to function effectively immediately upon assuming their positions.

**Information.** The staff equate information with influence or "power" in decision-making. Both old and new staff believe that the longer an individual holds her position at the center, and the longer she accumulates information about the functioning of the center and the University, the more power she acquires. It is assumed that new members have less influence because of their lack of information.

As they responded to questions about other climate dimensions, several staff mentioned this equation of information with power. The way information is shared in the center seems to be a key influence on climate and the operation of the center. (This will be discussed in depth in the section on Communication.)

**Analysis.** The lack of explicit agreement about skills and information that should be provided to new staff (via orientation or on the job training) interacts with the staff's desire for equal participation in center affairs, and need to feel that they share a certain level of skills, experience and information with other workers. This results in individual workers feeling incompetent to handle certain parts of their jobs, and critical attitudes towards other workers who lack what they consider to be crucial skills and information. It also results in the perception that because of these inequalities, a "collaborative" decision-making process in which every person has "equal" influence is not
possible, and that certain individuals will be able to consistently wield more influence than others. Staff feel frustrated and disappointed about this.

**Shared Beliefs**

To what extent do you see center staff working on a basis of shared goals? Where do you see major differences between staff members about goals?

What effect do shared goals, or their absence, have on decision-making? What effect does this have on your attitude towards your work at the center?

These data give the impression that some shared beliefs about values and goals so exist, but they are never explicitly agreed upon by the staff. Consequently, the staff does not have a sense of the overall direction of the center. Individual workers defend their own programs in the hopes that the rest of the staff will allow them to continue; they do not perceive their programs as integrated into an organizational whole. In the absence of explicitly stated and shared values and goals, decision-making becomes even more of a battleground for competing interests than it might be otherwise.

Some responses implied that the staff share some beliefs about feminism and related areas, but that somehow the differences, rather than the commonalities, predominate whenever there is the attempt to translate these beliefs into goals. Deb said, "There are blocks of people with similar goals--university-attuned people, heterosexism,
racism, politics. If we compare the center to other agencies, there is a shared commitment on different levels. There are no blatant homophobics or racists on the staff."

Elaine stated, "There are no shared goals in the operative sense--there are always immediate ones, but there is a total lack of long-term planning." She suggested that differences in political outlook didn't have to make such planning impossible. "Here, diversity seems like a hindrance. Maybe the way you approach unshared goals makes a difference."

Two other workers elaborated on how staff cooperated with one another on specific issues. Geri said, "There are no shared goals. It gets defined in terms of interest groups or 'who's the most important this week.' I feel like I have to scream for 'my group.'" Paula described it this way. "We don't have overall goals. When specific events go against personal goals, people become involved. There's constant re-alliance, depending on the issue."

Ann's comments suggested that the diversity of the programs themselves, and the process by which workers come to be a part of the center through those programs, contributes to the difficulties of articulating a common vision. "There isn't a 'center' per se--we're not hired to develop the center's identity."

Other responses to the questions included attempts to explain why a sense of similar goals didn't exist. "We are all concerned about the same issues. We would just rank order them differently. We end up letting individual women "own" issues. We experience the differences
as conflicts because of that ownership. We all feel like lonely voices."

Staff identified several consequences of the absence of shared beliefs about the work of the center. Elaine said, "The lack of goals feeds in to constant conflict. Issues come up again and again without resolution because they are the results of bad compromises. When their implications are noticed a week later, we backtrack on decisions we made because we were afraid or too tired to go on." Laurel said, "It affects liaison--affects our image in terms of our professionalism. Paula remarked, "Old staff are relied on for information about how to deal with the present."

Analysis. The staff rarely see themselves as working together on the basis of explicitly stated shared beliefs about values and goals. Temporary alliances form among staff to influence the course of specific decisions. Otherwise, individual staff feel they must fight to make sure that their programmatic goals are met. Because there is not explicit agreement about values and goals, they do not assume that other staff will share their sense of priorities and will grant support to their efforts.

The absence of explicit agreement about values and goals, interacting with individual staff member's needs to have their programs validated as a significant part of the center's activities, results in conflict as staff compete for what are perceived as scarce resources (staff hours, funding). This interaction also results in ineffective decision-making, since decision come about through the coalition poli-
tics of the moment rather than through agreement about long-range plans. As the consequences of these decisions unfold, those who originally expressed opposition attack those who are trying to be accountable in managing consequences, which hinders the course of the work.

Communication

How are you informed about what activities other staff are involved in? How does information, or a lack of it, affect your relationships with other staff members?

What types of communication breakdowns have you experienced in your work? What do you see as the cause of these breakdowns?

Results. The responses to these questions were the most lengthy and detailed of those in any category. Except for one worker, all of the staff saw communications as a major problem. Some spoke of the need for access to program-related information within the center, while others talked about the difficulty of carrying out liaison functions knowing that one is probably not fully informed about relevant issues. The lack of a forum for information exchange was highlighted; some staff described how they felt they were struggling with too much information, while others focused on how information gets "lost." The equation of information with power, discussed in the previous section, also arose here.

Geri and Maria stated that they needed much better sources of information than were currently available in order to feel secure that they could accomplish program tasks. Geri said, "I am never sure I
will have the information I need." Maria explained, "I can't identify the information I don't know--there's a feeling of being lost because I don't have a grasp of it."

The staff talked about how ineffective communications affected their relationships with other agencies. Deb said, "I am constantly doing informal liaison. I need to have good information for the public." Ann was definitely frustrated by the situation. "I don't like being caught in public and confronted with information I don't know, and should know, about something at the center." Elaine summarized the problem this way. "We need skills in communicating information from outside the center, and we need liaison skills."

Paula and Laurel regretted the loss of the "information-sharing" segment of the staff meeting, one solution to the communications problem which had functioned for a brief period and been dropped. Laurel stated that there were a "lot" of "communications problems" and connected this to the fact that "we have never used the informal information sharing time we set aside in staff meeting." Paula talked about why she thought this should be reinstated. "If we could do program sharing more in appreciation of one another, it would cut down the resentment. When we're overworked we tend to lash out, when we don't know the importance of what others are doing. You can easily carry on in your job without knowing what others are doing."

Ann summarized, "We don't have a forum for information exchange." She explained, "Value differences affect communication. Women on the staff have very different ideas of what is significant to relay,
especially in terms of what should be checked out before acting--this is at the root of a lot of our difficulties. The significance of certain information is not recognized by everyone. There are different levels of fascination with University scuttlebutt, for example." Ann also noted that the process for information sharing would remain to be worked out even after common recognition of important content had occurred. "There are no guidelines on what we should be discussing in order to use our time in staff meeting productively." She added that interpersonal conflicts were frequently aired during staff meetings because people felt more "safe" there than if they had done so on a one-to-one basis.

Julia's comments echoed Ann's statement about the role of value differences in communication. "An incredible amount of information comes and goes through the center. Women make choices about priorities, and there are conflicts about what information should be shared." She also observed that the issue of "information sharing" became more important at times when different interest groups were struggling for influence. "When people are worried about how much power they have, there's more of a demand for information-sharing."

Maria defined the problem in terms of "information overload," alluding, as did Julia, to the difficulties related to the sheer volume of information brought into the center. "We go over some things over and over without reaching consensus. People are sitting in the room juggling so much information it gets very difficult."

Ann described how differences of opinion as to what information
is most valuable affect communication. "There's a split between those who have information about the University and those who have information about the community and competition around who has the "real" information."

Other staff offered a variety of explanations as to why everyone found communication so difficult. Maria said, "Under the surface is the fact that we have never discussed the differences between us. We are supposed to be women who can talk to one another. We don't want to look at how we feel different. Things always have to be done a certain way, but no one talks about that. There are so many unspoken things." Julia commented, "Since January, when people talked about programs, it's been more clear. If it was done periodically, this would be a way to be connected. It's hard to be connected when you're trying to do so many different things well--I've come to accept that." Julia said, "We wasted hours in discussion at staff meetings because we didn't trust the women in the budget group. There was a lot of redundancy. That happens around discussion of center issues--confusion and suspicion about information."

Some staff had specific ideas as to what was needed to rectify the situation. Elaine said, "We need better communication with the University. There is a lack of training of staff and a lack of being clear in interviews that we are not a community center. (Maria had said, "No one ever explained to me what liaison was when I was hired.") Elaine went on. "I don't know what would work in terms of bettering communication. We need at least some sort of channels. Like a direc-
tor--maybe that could make a difference--better communications within a workgroup won't solve communications problems outside the center." "If we all knew about the center's connections to other agencies, Julia said, "we would have a better idea of how the center is perceived. We would have a sense of our context as an agency. It doesn't occur to us to talk about those connections except occasionally."

Analysis. Staff need a reliable way to gain access to information. They need information about the activities of other staff, and about events external to the center which might represent significant contingencies for their projects. Several factors make it difficult for information to be shared among staff. Staff prefer to work independently at their separate program tasks. Workgroups are separate entities that have no formal contact with one another except when everyone gathers for the weekly staff meeting. Within the staff meeting, currently the only potential forum for general information exchange, there are no procedures by which the amount of information entering the center from all sources can be shared either according to its general importance to the entire staff or according to its specific importance for individual projects.

The interaction of the staff's needs for information and their characteristically independent work styles, with the absence of a systematic process for information exchange, results in the staff's perception that communication is a problem. They believe that they frequently don't obtain information which could be directly relevant to their projects, and become frustrated because other staff can't provide
such information to them.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION OF INDIVIDUAL DIMENSIONS

Commitment

Staff are hired on the basis of their "commitment to feminist issues" (according to internal conversations with staff during the observations). This is defined very broadly—in fact, this criterion does not exist in any written form. It is interpreted by the individuals who form the hiring committee according to their own conceptions of feminism and what they believe other staff's conceptions of feminism to be. Consequently, there is a great deal of variation among the staff in personal background, work experience, and political ideals. Each person has some vision of what "feminist" individuals and "feminist" organizations should accomplish, and of the means by which, on an individual and organizational level, this can be achieved.

Kanter and Lurch (1973) propose that one of the distinguishing characteristics of "alternative" organizations concerned with social change is the existence of "ideals that implicitly criticize things-as-they-are and propose things-as-they-should-be." In this organization, the way staff actualize their commitment to these ideals seem to have effects which are experienced by the staff as personally uncomfortable or a hindrance to their work. Staff repeatedly spoke about "diversity" in "feminist perspectives", often implying "unreconciliable differences." Few acknowledged the commonalities in outlook which make
it possible for the group to continue to agree to present itself as a feminist organization. Instead, staff tend to focus on the perceived "diversities."

There are no discussions in which each staff member has the opportunity to share what they think "commitment" to "feminism" means. Apparent differences in meaning emerge during discussion about programs and center maintenance tasks, and the intensity with which individuals identify with their particular positions makes it easy for "differences of opinion" to evolve into conflict. Most staff feel that no one recognizes the value of the feminist activities they are able to implement. They anticipate that their work will be attacked by others because some aspect of it is "incorrect" according to another worker's political standards.

These feelings and perceptions are a source of stress for individual staff. They have identified themselves with a "feminist" organization, and all those with whom they have contact outside the center see them as engaged in "feminist" projects. They are often subtly attacked (occasionally, more openly) for their activities by members of both the university and local communities. A kind of "battlefield mentality" surfaces at times in staff meetings, a kind of camaraderie based on a feeling of being allied against opposing forces on the "outside." However, the reality is that staff do not experience much support from within the center, either. Rather, they expect to be criticized on political grounds, and this is often painful.

Because the nature of the commitment to their work is moral rather
than a result of monetary interest, critical opinions and comments from others take on a special significance. When another worker criticizes one's work, the implication is that not only has one demonstrated limitations in one's skills or capacities to accomplish a certain task, but that one is proceeding in a direction which is morally distasteful to the other person. One's work can be seen as reflecting one's sensitivity--or lack of it--regarding the needs of disadvantaged subgroups of women in this culture.

In such a charged work environment, some defensiveness by workers would seem inevitable, as would be conflict about programmatic priorities and the methods of implementing programs.

Workers seem unprepared for these aspects of work at the center, and very uncomfortable with them. They tend to distrust the motives of other workers and to feel personally debilitated by political disagreements. Some are disappointed that the integration of work and political and moral concerns is such a difficult process. They feel discouraged about the process and somewhat frightened by its implications for women being able to work together on common issues. Those who possess a well-defined critique of existing social realities and bureaucratic structures may feel particularly apprehensive about what they perceive as the "failure" of the staff of an "alternative" organization to feel a sense of alliance with one another.

The larger question raised by the staff's experiences in this organization is how the integration of work and political and moral concerns can be effectively handled. One could see it as another part of
organizational functioning beyond task and maintenance activities. Because individuals are hired into an ongoing organization (rather than being part of an existing group with similar perspectives who declare themselves an organization) the question becomes, more precisely, how the interface of individual political beliefs and the beliefs of the group affects the organization's functioning and the climate perceptions of individuals. The results of the interviews about the commitment dimension can be seen as data about the dynamics of this interface in a social-change-oriented, collaborative organization. What we see is that in this organization, that interface results in distress for individual workers. Further research might investigate how such an organization could handle the issues raised by the interface in a way that would be beneficial both to individuals and to the organization as a whole.

Handled in a different way, the commitment of staff to their political value systems could lead to a process of constructive interchange which could make them feel more comfortable in working with one another, and also provide an opportunity to refine their perspectives and become more solidly grounded in their beliefs (rather than holding on to them in a rigid way). Dialogue of this sort could also help staff to feel greater strength as a group and to engage in negotiations with administrators and others external to the center without experiencing the sense of intimidation that they have had in the past.
Interaction of Commitment with Shared Beliefs

From the data, it appears that the workers' commitment to social change ideals supplies a kind of heightened intensity to the center's work environment, particularly to decision-making. Ultimately, part of the considerations involved in every decision are the political views of staff. Staff tend to feel uncomfortable about the process of negotiating their own perspectives with other members of the group to arrive at a decision. It has been suggested that the experience of this "interface" has a significant effect on climate. The more negative effects on climate which the group experiences as they attempt to work together, negotiating political viewpoints, seem to be exacerbated by a lack of explicitly stated shared beliefs about values and goals.

It appears that one of the reasons why working with others committed to social change through various feminist perspectives is so difficult is that the staff has no sense of common commitments--shared beliefs about values and goals. It may be easier to enter into conflict about priorities when there is no recognition that, as one worker put it, the differences among staff exist in their rank-ordering of priorities not in terms of the basic priorities themselves. The acknowledgement of shared priorities (in terms of values and goals) could remind staff that the variety of considerations raised by others about a decision are based on certain common perspectives on social justice. This might lessen the tendency to devalue these considerations or for staff to become polarized around them in argument.

For example, in deciding how much conference time to allot to
workshops for single mothers, a suggestion from a gay staff member to offer closed group specifically for lesbian mothers might be accepted more readily if staff who were single mothers had previously experienced affirmation for activities and programs concerned with their issues from gay staff members. In the absence of such agreement it might be easier for single mothers and gay women to enter into competition for scarce resources (workshop space, paid facilitator time).

Role Flexibility and Efficiency

Role flexibility as it occurs in the center is qualitatively different from that which might occur in hierarchical organizations, where each position would be embedded in one level of the organization's structure, and where each worker would report to a supervisor.

Here, workers create, and are free to re-create, their jobs. There is wide variation in both the type of work being done and in the ways it's being accomplished. The only structural commonality that workers have with other staff is that they are "working for the center."

The advantage of role flexibility for individual workers is that each can accomplish her work at her own rate, according to the dynamics of the work and her personal needs. Workers like the sense of personal freedom this gives them. However, some workers, due to the nature of their work, are able to experience this freedom more often than others. (For example, the personal problem counselors seem to have the least flexibility of any of the staff. Their time is filled with client
hours, their workgroup meetings, and staff meeting. There is always a waiting list of clients.)

The benefits of role flexibility can be undermined by the workers themselves. It is necessary for the worker, for her own well-being, to be able to set clear limits and priorities in her work. As Burns and Stalker comment, in this type of organization the individual worker tends to take on a broader range of responsibilities due to the lack of a rigidly defined work role. This structural aspect of the center is particularly significant since it is a social services agency, constantly deluged by clients whose needs can never be "fulfilled" in an absolute sense.

The organizational advantage of role flexibility is that, as a social-change-oriented group, the center can respond spontaneously and immediately to the needs or concerns of those whose interests it serves. The organization can continually update its assessment of client's needs and rearrange its priorities accordingly. It is important for center staff to feel that they can structure their work independently and carry tasks out in ways that enhance their own development both within their work setting and away from it. The staff said that they were more satisfied with their jobs because of this.

However, this responsiveness means that the "organization" takes on more of the appearance of a collection of individuals. Each staff member is engaged in specialized tasks that are much different from those performed by anyone else. Coordination of those tasks becomes problematic. Staff don't exchange information which could result in
more effective programs and procedures.

For the staff to continue to enjoy the advantages of role flexibility without hindering the progress of other workers or reducing the effectiveness of the center as a whole, workers may need to agree on a few ground rules which facilitate "responsible freedom" (such as notifying others at least two weeks in advance when they plan to take vacation time). It may also be helpful for staff to talk about the extent to which they are willing to provide support for one another when events in individuals' personal lives require them to spend more time away from the center. This might reduce some of the feelings of "needing to get away" that would produce irresponsible behavior around work commitments to others.

**Interaction of Role Flexibility and Communication**

Role flexibility provides individual staff with more satisfying ways of accomplishing their jobs. It also makes coordination difficult. In particular, it seems to severely affect the quality of communication.

Staff complain about the lack of consistent access to information. The way staff work independently makes it easy to see why this does not occur. They are also resistant to attending staff meetings, currently the only possible forum where information could be shared. For communications to improve it would be necessary for staff to either accommodate to another's schedules and find times to meet and share information, or to devise some mechanical means to post information and con-
tinually update it.

The type of role flexibility enjoyed by center staff sets up a situation where collaboration on maintenance tasks (such as communication) is experienced as an inconvenient event, as time lost from individual progress.

**Economic Marginality**

The data on this dimension indicate that the "economic marginality" of the center (Rothschild-Whitt, 1976) contributes to workers' negative attitudes towards the center as a work environment. However, workers seem reluctant to act on their dissatisfactions. Staff experience conflict and ongoing uncertainty about how to judge the worth of their labor, and how to translate that into appropriate salary levels. They feel caught between a conviction that it's not "right" to be paid well for social change work, and their need to feel adequately compensated so that they can continue to work effectively. (It is not clear how the present salary of $7000 was decided upon, but my impression was that it was not the outcome of a careful process of assessing compensation for similar positions elsewhere.)

The two sides of this conflict are expressed in two statements made by staff while discussing their feelings about their salaries. Julia mentioned "the standard joke about making money off the women's movement," and her feeling that she was "fortunate to be paid for working with women at all." Geri commented on how, after accumulating experience and achieving a sense of her competency, she had begun to
think of herself as a "professional." She began to question the lack of monetary recognition for the "professional" quality of her work (as well as the lack of opportunities for thorough evaluation and professional development.) As she saw it, the lack of these opportunities was one reason why women left the center for other jobs.

Staff feel fortunate that they can hold a job which involves implementing feminist ideology in programs and services to women. This feeling, along with their commitment to this type of work, seems to undermine what would in other situations surface as unequivocal resentment that one's capabilities were being exploited for minimal salary. However, as the demands of the work become evident in the course of daily tasks and in the effects of the job on their personal well-being, they begin to appreciate the skills required and find that they want more compensation.

Underlying the confusion about the worth of their work as staff members of a women's center may be the more general issue of women's perceptions about the value of their work. Cultural norms frequently prevent women from acknowledging and valuing, let alone expecting compensation for, tireless labor in the service of children, spouse, and community. Women are traditionally placed in a larger proportion of the lowest-paying, lowest status jobs in private and public organizations. Many women are not prepared to assess realistically their skills and then negotiate with employers for appropriate entry level salaries or incremental salary increases as they acquire expertise.

Given the larger social context, and the center's position within
a traditional educational bureaucracy that employs large numbers of women in vital and underpaid positions, the reluctance of staff to confront directly their dissatisfactions with salary levels which they themselves have set may not be so unusual.

This underlying conflict may also be a part of the difficulties experienced by staff in the center budget negotiations with the university. Beyond this psychological handicap, the lack of skills and experience evidenced by staff in meetings which included budget discussions may contribute to the lack of confidence in this important area.

The lack of other kinds of "compensation"--such as occasional acknowledgement of a difficult task undertaken with sincerity and dedication--may make the issue of salaries more salient, also.

Interaction of Economic Marginality with Commitment

Although clearly unhappy with their salaries, none of the workers seem to envision initiating any changes in this area. Individuals seem to experience an internal tension between their desire to receive more adequate compensation, and their belief that one should not expect monetary rewards from social change work. In other words, the nature of their commitment to this type of work means that they are willing to continue to participate in an organization with just enough funding to stay alive.

There was also the sense, in staff meetings I observed and in the interviews, that salaries was a "dangerous" issue for anyone to initiate discussion on. My sense of this was that such discussion would involve
uncovering more "diversity" in beliefs about values and goals, which would have been difficult for staff to tolerate. In the process of negotiating a higher salary level, inequalities in skills among the staff might have to be confronted. Some staff might feel they should receive more because of specialized skills. For all the women on staff, discussing this issue could mean some painful exploration of their basic assumptions about the worth of their work.

**Mutual and Self Criticism**

Formal "mutual and self criticism" processes, which Rothschild-Whitt (1976) includes as a distinguishing characteristic of 10 alternative institutions, are not present in constructive forms in the center.

Currently, workers carry out their tasks not knowing how other staff see their work, or worse, hearing only indirect or critical comments on the adequacy of their performance. All staff expressed a genuine desire to have their work known by others, feeling that to have an uncomfortable discussion which would challenge their priorities and methods is preferable to knowing nothing or fantasizing the worst based on insufficient information. They state that they have had difficulty determining, on their own, the extent of their progress towards programmatic goals, and need the perspective of others to help them with this.

Because staff rarely experience a more than casual scrutiny of their work, they can maintain the belief that no one really cares about
their program. This contributes to their inability to seek out assistance in acquiring skills that might facilitate the accomplishment of their goals. Left to rely on their own idiosyncratic ways of organizing their work, they are not assisted in identifying skills they need to acquire.

Positive comments received from grateful clients and other external contacts heighten the awareness of the absence of feedback from colleagues. A structural flaw in the organization, the lack of a process for feedback, is taken personally by frustrated staff who feel burdened by an ever-growing clientele and workload, and for whom the most frequent "acknowledgements" from other staff are invitations to ideological debates.

Since basic ideological differences have never been thoroughly explained and discussed, staff are cautious about submitting their work to an "evaluative" process in which they fear being "set up" to be judged on the basis of someone else's values and political philosophy. Shortly before the interviews, staff participated in an "annual review," basically a series of presentations by staff covering the course of their work over the last year, and plans for program development. They stated that this had been unsatisfactory because of the lack of serious critical attention to their work, but were reluctant to support the reinstitution of "evaluation" as such.

An important element in the difficulties with the feedback and formal evaluations systems is the communication problem, which will be analyzed in detail later. Here it is sufficient to point out that what
staff don't know about one another's work can't be criticized, praised, or even acknowledged.

The current situation makes it difficult for staff to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their programs and gain fresh insight into possible directions. The sense of isolation, and what staff interpret as lack of interest towards their programs from others, makes it easier for staff to be defensive about their work. They are constantly aware that they may be criticized for both how they make decisions about programs and the political perspective that informs those decisions.

If the organization had structured processes for feedback and evaluation, it might be possible for staff to feel less isolated and to obtain helpful comments on their work from others sympathetic to their goals. As long as the commentary included both affirmations of what had been accomplished as well as suggestions for how aspects of it might have been done differently, these activities could facilitate the emergence of trust in staff's relationships with one another.

**Interaction of Mutual and Self Criticism and Shared Beliefs**

Staff don't like the absence of a formal feedback system, but their negative experiences in the past with processes labelled "self criticism" or "evaluation" make them reluctant to attempt to deal with the feedback issue.

A major factor in this reluctance seems to be the lack of trust that other staff will respect their work on its own merit. Staff who
were involved in center "evaluations" two and three years ago complained that their work was judged according to what felt like arbitrary criteria, such as affirmative action quotas and other staff's personal political beliefs. Those who were given feedback on their interpersonal style tended to feel attacked, again, mainly on the basis of political views held by others.

The lack of shared beliefs about goals and values seems to contribute to a context of distrust for this activity, as it does for other activities in the center. Staff are apprehensive about re-instituting a formal feedback process because they don't feel they can count on others to find any value in their work.

Inequalities in Skills, Experience, and Information

Mansbridge's identification of inequalities in the areas of verbal skill, self confidence, and interest in tasks under discussion was supported by a few of the staff's comments. However, the perception of inequalities between old and new staff seemed to most powerfully organize the way staff thought about "inequalities." The "ingrained inequalities" based on "varying expertise" and "information" (Mansbridge, 1973) were two of the most frequently mentioned aspects of the old/new distinction.

These data support Torbert's (1973) observation about the significance of the difficulties encountered when new members are invited to participate "equally" in collaborative tasks. Burns and Stalker (1961) and Holleb and Abrams (1975) have also noted the importance of
the differential in expertise between new and old staff. The section that follows discusses these perceived differences and their consequences.

**Skills.** The center does not provide its staff with training which would probably be provided in most hierarchical organizations. Training is not offered either in the specific skills staff might find essential to their programmatic work, or in the development of skills necessary to participate in a nonhierarchical organization.

The amount of training received by a new staff member is determined arbitrarily, by the staff member whom she is replacing or by the circumstances of her departure. When a worker leaves, the position may remain vacant for several weeks. She may go to another country, making it impossible for the woman who fills her place to receive a knowledgeable orientation to the position. In some cases, "overlap" occurs. The new worker is able to stay with her predecessor for a week or two, learning the basics of daily routine responsibilities.

Until quite recently there were no written job descriptions, which meant that the responsibilities of each position were defined by the intent of the individual worker, her personal preferences, and areas of special expertise. Some workers indicated that taking a position in the center is literally experienced as "filling someone's shoes" since personality is as much of an identification of the position as the function attached to the position itself. (One worker said that she felt as if everyone was watching to see how similar she would be to her predecessor. She felt insecure and intimidated because the woman she
was replacing was well-known and influential in the local women's movement groups.)

Just as it is assumed that new staff will somehow acquire vital skills without on-the-job training, it is also assumed that they will learn on their own, how to feel capable and confident participating in center decision-making processes.

One of the most important implications of the results of this study is that working and participating in the functioning of a collaborative nonhierarchical organization requires preparation. Few who were hired by the center had extensive experience in this type of work environment. Most had worked with political groups on a volunteer basis. None of those I interviewed had been employed by a nonhierarchical organization. While most said that they had positive expectations for their tenure at the center, they also said they had little idea of what to expect of day-to-day center operation. Worker after worker described her surprise (and in some cases, shock) at how chaotic staff meetings were, and at the intensity evoked by the type of work and group's efforts at decision-making. One woman stated that after observing events in the center for two months, she concluded "it was the center, not me, that was crazy."

The need for training to work and participate in a collaborative nonhierarchical organization is not recognized. Staff expect of themselves and one another that they will somehow be able to carry out their work effectively without paying attention to the uniqueness of their workplace. They approach any difficulties seriously, influenced by the
powerful imperative that a feminist organization must function successfully through a collaborative nonhierarchical mode. Staff assume if they are unsuccessful at this, they must look to their personal inadequacies or the inadequacies of their political perspective. As the interviews demonstrate, the inherent difficulties of the collaborative mode itself are not acknowledged.

Workers seldom suggested that any staff lacked the skills to carry out the specific tasks which they were hired to accomplish. What emerged was the sense that, individually and as a group, staff needed to learn the general skills involved in working collaboratively, without hierarchy. The effect of the lack of these skills is to "set up" the group to be learning, what it means to work without hierarchy and participate in running one's workplace as they try to accomplish difficult, complex, and politically sensitive tasks.

Experience. New staff come into the center eager to participate in shaping the programs and, overall direction of the organization. They bring some specialized skills, and a commitment to the ideal of collaborative nonhierarchical decision-making. What they lack is experience in implementing programs within the context of a nonhierarchical organization in which they are expected to fully participate.

Staff emphasized the frustration of coping with the ambiguities and complexities of the center as they experienced it in their first few months. It appears that the nature of communication in the center and the form of participatory decision-making that occurs in staff meetings makes adjustment to the center difficult.
Information flow is haphazard, and dictated by unpredictable internal and external events. For instance, if someone happens to talk about how volunteer help is organized in the center, the new staff member will learn about that; otherwise, she may not know anything about it until the day she has time to talk to the woman working at the front desk who turns out to be a volunteer.

New staff are told that they must voice their opinions in staff meetings in order to influence decisions. They come willing to do so, but find that the process of interaction and communication in these meetings is rather chaotic, and that the experience of trying to participate is an intimidating one. Individuals privately suffer through the self doubt that comes when their statements or perceptions are challenged, ignored, or lost in a rush of several responses to a comment made by a previous speaker. They carefully listen and observe in staff meetings, trying to establish what is possible in terms of work activities and what types of assistance is available from other staff.

Eventually, the new staff member observes that some staff who have been there for a longer period of time seem to have a familiarity with the workings of the center and the University bureaucracy, and an understanding of the constraints of various types of program work. She learns that she must rely on these "older" staff for resources she needs to take on the responsibilities of her new position. However, she may find herself questioning the rationale of some decision which older staff have made and find herself without the self confidence and information necessary to argue with them.
This is a situation which is not unique to a collaborative organization—it exemplifies the same dynamic that occurs between recently hired workers and those with more experience in hierarchical organizations. However, it is disturbing to new workers at the center because they take the promise of "collaboration" literally. They feel they have been led to believe that their contribution will be considered on an equal basis with that of the rest of the staff. They don't expect to be overridden in staff meeting and are not sure what to do about it if they are. Each worker feels she represents a particular point of view on the feminist spectrum that should be acknowledged by others, both in the process and outcome of decision-making. When this doesn't happen, the two most frequent responses are to "take it personally," as evidence of a "personality conflict," or to attribute it to differences in political perspective.

More experienced staff tend to accept the political maneuvering that occurs in important staff meetings as just another part of work-life at the center, although they too complain about it. The continual process of alliance and re-alliance described by several workers seems to provide a certain satisfaction to those who can participate in it successfully.

Information. Because the entire staff participates in shaping the center, new workers find themselves trying to learn both a new job and the functioning of an entire organization involved in a myriad of projects with numerous contacts both inside and outside the University.

New staff are highly conscious of all the information they don't
have, and remain in a state of confusion for several weeks. They struggle to learn center procedures, administrator's names, all the projects in which the rest of the staff are involved, and resources available to them in their work. All this occurs in an unstructured, haphazard way that leaves them feeling disoriented and "on the outside" of many events in the center.

As noted in the discussion of responses to questions about role flexibility, the varying internal constraints of the work performed by different staff means that some have the time to acquire a more sophisticated understanding of issues which bear directly or decisions about center functioning. To put it simply, some staff acquire more information than others. This contributes to a problem that is evident as a major theme of this study: the perception that all staff do not have an equal ability to influence decisions in a supposedly "collaborative" setting. New staff become aware that they have the least information, and they feel ineffectual about influencing center administration.

In this area too, the poor quality of communication has an effect. It results in yet another hindrance in the new staff's adjustment to the center. The two-hour staff meeting, which could provide a forum in which to piece together perspectives and begin to create that overview of the organization ends up being used for other concerns. All workers feel dissatisfied and pressured, but each woman, her attention focused on the demands of her particular tasks, is unable to step back and gain a perspective on the whole.
Interaction of Inequalities in Skills, Experience, and Information with Role Flexibility

The responses indicated that staff are particularly unhappy with inequalities in information, since they equate information with influence or "power" in decision-making. One of the sources of this inequality are the varying amounts of experience that staff have with the center and the university setting. Another source is the amount of role flexibility that the center sanctions. As described previously, this flexibility allows staff to make their own decisions regarding how much time they spend on "program" and "center" tasks. Staff who become involved with the latter may end up with more information relevant to important decisions. It would seem that as long as center maintenance tasks are accomplished through voluntary staff participation, and staff continue to have their current role flexibility, inequalities in information will continue to exist.

Shared Beliefs

The center does not have a hierarchical system or authority to direct its' activities. Neither does the organization seem to have a set of shared beliefs about values and goals, which Burns and Stalker (1961) suggest takes the place of such a system in this type of organization.

The lack of articulated shared beliefs, and the lack of a sense of organizational direction that would flow from that articulation, provides a detrimental context for all of the staff's activities. This
context makes diversity a centrifugal force. It lends each minor disagreement an air of dramatic importance, and invests major conflicts with the power to severely damage worker's capacities to sustain the level of activity demanded by their tasks. This cripples workers' abilities to negotiate their interests. The backdrop of commonalities in thinking and experience that would allow the staff to trust one another's ultimate intentions during temporary disagreements is too limited. Staff do not feel free enough to speak out in ways that would constitute personal risk. Personal and organization growth thus occurs by accident, in the most unsettling fashion, rather than through an intentional process.

The staff has never formally discussed what values and goals comprise their "feminist perspectives." In the midst of conflicts, values are thrust forward or "announced." They are not shared with the intent to formulate agreements about what types of work are most valued by staff and to find formats for that work.

How has this lack of explicit agreement come about?

One worker suggested that the lack of acknowledgement of shared beliefs was in some part due to the way staff experienced their entry into the center. They are selected for specific skills, often involving direct service delivery to clients, not for general administrative abilities. They are not, as she puts it, hired to help with the functioning of the center as a whole, although that participation is part of each job. They are encouraged to focus on program development that is consistent with their feminist political perspective and with their
assessment of client needs. Seeking other staff's views about values and goals becomes a relatively low priority as workers become involved in ongoing programs. They become occupied with their own series of deadlines, rounds of meetings with people outside the center, and the legwork needed to make programs happen. Staff are involved in dissimilar projects, come into the center from a variety of life situations, and are requested to spend only two hours each week in relationship to other staff, during the staff meeting. As we see, there are a number of influences that contribute to differentiating tendencies among the staff.

Interaction of Shared Beliefs with Commitment and Role Flexibility

A brochure which the center published to document development as a women's center includes a section on "goals." The preface to the section states that these are short-term goals defined for a collaborative nonhierarchical model of organization. The authors note, "We have not yet been able to reach consensus on long-term goals for the center," meaning specific goals concerning the form in which the center should exist, and the format and content of specific programs.

Although each member of the current staff stated that they did not subscribe to this goals statement, it seems to express several of their concerns. Most notably, one of the goals is to "create an atmosphere which fosters trust and openness." This indicates that difficulties in maintaining a positive organizational climate were present during the center's first three years and are not a recent development. (Two
years later, staff are revealing that they are "afraid to talk" in staff meetings.)

Another goal was to improve and increase rewards for the work. As seen in the sections discussing economic marginality, lack of perceived rewards currently has a major effect on staff morale.

Finally, the goal of "working toward clarity and agreement in our expectations for the center and its staff" included statements which, juxtaposed, seem paradoxical. One objective was "to hire those committed to feminism." Asterisked, the notation below stated that there was a "lack of consensus concerning the use of the term" feminism. A second objective was to "hire people committed to the goals," and a third was "to understand what is meant by commitment."

Perhaps we can see the paradoxical nature of these statements as indicative of some of the organizational difficulties that arise out of the political nature of the center's existence. It is doubtful that the group will ever agree on one definition of "feminism." As a political and cultural movement, the meaning of "feminism" evolves as those who consider themselves "feminists" evaluate their experience and theoretical positions and modify their activities accordingly. Under these circumstances, to "hire people committed to the goals" means that those who evaluate applicants look for a form of involvement in feminist activities and a way of thinking about those activities that seems congruent with their own tentative definition of feminism. Potentially, this allows individuals with a wide range of skills, experiences, and beliefs to become staff members.
We see this diversity among the current staff. Furthermore, role flexibility provides staff with the opportunity to pursue their chosen tasks according to their individual aptitudes and preferences. This situation allows the center to respond to a variety of women's needs through its events and programs. At the same time, this situation contributes to a feeling of isolation for individual workers, and to their sense that the center lacks coherence and direction in its day-to-day operation.

Communication

The nature of the center's work, and the nonhierarchical structure of the organization, demand a rich, constant flow of information among the staff and between the center and its environment.

Each staff person is engaged in a continual series of contacts and negotiations with individuals, groups, and agencies external to the center. Many staff see a number of clients each week, and this work triggers a multitude of ideas for program development as well as bringing yet more information into the center.

Each worker has a great deal of leeway for defining the boundaries of her responsibilities and involvements. Each is constantly reformulating, or implementing ideas for, additional extensions of her primary task.

The information which results from these activities should be channeled through defined communication "paths" within the organization for it to be consistently accessible and useful to all staff. From the
interview data, it appears that there is no communications "network" which meets the needs of the staff.

As a result of the nonhierarchical structure and the absence of guidelines specifying the relation of staff positions to one another (which would be inherent in hierarchical supervisory relationships) the relationships between positions are never articulated. This provides opportunities for spontaneous exchange and collaboration. It also means that information is usually relayed at the discretion of individual workers, and the "characteristics" of those workers become the constraints on communication flow. These constraints may include the lack of time to seek out other workers, or to reflect on what may be important for other staff to know for the benefit of their own programs. Perceived "personality" or "political" differences between two workers may make the likelihood of verbal contact low. A staff member may also choose to withhold some important information until what she judges as an appropriate moment for sharing it arises.

The isolation of individual staff is another potential constraint on communication. As mentioned in the discussion of role flexibility, the individual's work styles and diversity of projects tend to propel staff away from one another.

Staff complain about what they perceive as other workers' discourtesy, incompetency, or deviousness in not passing on information which they deem to be important. They seem unaware that this failure to share is due to the fact that no one knows what types of information are important to anyone else, and that even if they did, the organization's
processes provide no formal time and space for such communication.

Staff are upset when "communication breakdowns" occur. They tend to interpret them as an indication that the staff as a whole has failed the center's clients, even when clients are not directly involved. Failures in communication are usually attributed to the skill inadequacies or political motives of individuals.

There was no rationale for the elimination of the information-sharing segment of the staff meeting. It existed for about six weeks, and then, once the staff allowed discussion of other issues to "run over" into that time, it gradually shrank. Finally it disappeared. There were some comments by staff to the effect that setting aside time "just to share information" was unjustified, given the urgent press of decisions which they felt should be discussed by the group.

Interaction of Communication with Role Flexibility, Shared Beliefs, Commitment

The effectiveness—or ineffectiveness—of the communications network in the center seems to directly affect the dynamics of several other dimensions. Role flexibility would not result in so much isolation of individual staff if it was easier for them to remain in contact with one another. With a more effective communications system, it might become possible for staff to develop a fuller understanding of the political views and life experiences of one another, and begin to work to identify shared beliefs about values and goals. The depth of staff's commitment to feminist principles might result in fewer severe conflicts if staff had opportunities to communicate other than during
staff meetings (in the midst of highly charged issues, feeling the pressure from a crowded agenda, aware of time limitations on discussion).
CHAPTER V
GENERAL DISCUSSION OF DIMENSIONS

Evaluation of the Use of the Climate Concept

This study has identified and investigated interactions between specific aspects of the structure and process of a collaborative non-hierarchical women's organization, and workers' attitudes, feelings about, and perceptions of that organization. The method of research maps essential internal characteristics of a nonhierarchical organization—the climate dimensions—and the staff's experience of the effects of those characteristics on their work and personal well-being.

There are a number of ways that workers' experiences could have been investigated. The approach that was taken, the use of the climate concept, focused on the interaction between the psychological states of individuals and certain aspects of organizational structure and process. This was seen as the most appropriate method given that the primary aim of the study was to describe workers' experiences. A study which carried out an organizational systems analysis could have identified structural problems, problems resulting from inadequacies in certain parts of the organization (composition of a hiring committee, lack of a director, etc.). This approach could have provided suggestions for structural changes which might have improved the quality of work life without directly providing information about the feelings and perceptions of workers in response to their work environment. Or, the
research could have focused on individual characteristics and their relation to the amount of satisfaction individuals derived from center work. This approach could have resulted in a method by which to distinguish between "types" of individuals and their respective ways of coping with organizational life. It would not have provided information about relationships between workers' attitudes and the nature of the work environment (although it could have been used to develop a more effective process of personnel selection).

The use of the climate concept made it possible for workers to state their perceptions about the level of personal and vocational well-being they experienced within the center. From this material, it would have been possible to identify problematic organizational structures or processes and to have developed an understanding as to what made them problematic, as well as what their effects were on workers' attitudes towards the organization. In this way, the interview data could have been used to make changes in structure within the center itself, as guide in constructing similar organizations, or in helping them function effectively.

A secondary aim of the study was to communicate the data summarizing workers' experiences back to the staff so that they could clarify for themselves what feature of their work environment they wished to eliminate, modify, or transform. It was hoped that the method would provide information that would be easy to understand and directly useful to the staff in their ongoing efforts to find a structure suitable to their tasks.
It may be possible that the staff interpreted the negative tone of the interview responses that were presented to them as a discouraging commentary about the center—so discouraging as to lead them to avoid further organizational self-study. An analysis of the organizational dynamics of the center, stated in terms which described structure and process rather than a collection of individual attitudes, might have been less threatening. Perhaps presenting information about individual feelings and perceptions in an organization where the staff seldom felt enough trust to express such views was bound to be overwhelming and result in an unwillingness to work with the information that the interviews produced. In future research of this type, it would be important to gauge the potential impact of presenting such information. It might be helpful to provide a structured process that the staff could use to discuss and evaluate the data, a process that would encourage that staff to share feelings and to discuss strategies for redesigning problematic structures and processes.

**Evaluation of the Use of Climate Dimensions**

What have been characterized as "climate dimensions" include individual characteristics (commitment, inequalities in skills), the identification of processes (mutual and self criticism), and the identification of organizational characteristics (economic marginality, role flexibility, shared beliefs). Previous literature highlights these dimensions as important in organizational functioning or in workers' perceptions of the work situation, in nonhierarchical organi-
zational settings ranging from sectors of the English coal mining industry to American youth employment programs to social change organizations.

It is not known whether the significance of any one dimension could be generalized across a number of these organizations, much less across the class of nonhierarchical organizations. The literature is really a collection of observations about these various aspects of nonhierarchical settings, and does not provide any tested conceptual frameworks that can account for the relationships between these aspects, or measure their relative importance in various nonhierarchical settings.

A brief survey of the literature from which the dimensions were drawn shows that this study provides new perspectives on the meaning of these aspects of nonhierarchical organizations. The dimensions will be reviewed in order: commitment; role flexibility; economic marginality; mutual and self criticism; inequalities in skills, experience, information; communication; shared beliefs.

Commitment. The center can be included in that group of alternative organizations for which, as observed by Kanter and Lurch, organizational ideals involve a critique of current social conditions and proposals for change. They note that such organizations are "in the midst of the social change process" and "may and perhaps should contain within their own structure dilemmas generated by the meshing of the old and the new."

Individuals choose to seek work in the center because of their
commitment to a feminist orientation to personal life and social change. What staff said in the interviews was that in reaction to the stress generated by their involvement in social issues which held deep personal meaning for them, they tended to fragment into subgroups of ideological stances along the lines of individual political perspectives. After a certain period many staff began to look at the integration of their work and feminist social change ideals as a hindrance to the completion of short-term projects.

How the staff can implement their organizational ideals in their daily decisions in a way that honors the spirit of their commitment, without becoming bogged down in factionalism, is a question with which they continue to struggle. Examination of other social-change-oriented organizations may be necessary to determine how much of this is part of the politics of the women's movement, and how much of this divisiveness can be expected to occur in any institution committed to social change.

Role flexibility. In the center, role flexibility clearly allowed workers to involve themselves in a broader range of commitments, consistent with the observations of Kanter and Lurch, and Burns and Stalker. However, the isolation produced by commitment to a few chosen tasks eventually meant that staff lost sight of the common bases of their commitment to feminism, began to evaluate the relative importance of one another's work, and began to feel alienated due to lack of recognition of their efforts.

The experience of center staff implies that less specialization does not necessarily result in an increased sense of satisfaction or
wholeness for workers in this type of organization. Workers' tendency to pursue tasks in an individualistic way resulted in a sense of fragmentation similar to that experienced by workers in more traditional situations, even though workers in the center were not limited to a prescribed set of tasks.

**Economic marginality.** Rothschild-Whitt described how alternative institutions often operate with minimal funding, and provide relatively low salaries. She noted that those who create them often choose to stay "poor" rather than risk having to alter the structure or activities of their organization to please a funding source. At the center, workers seem to deny that they have in fact decided how much compensation they will receive for their work. They tend to blame the University for not recognizing their worth, even though they themselves determine their salary levels. This adds to the staff's overall negative attitude towards the rest of the University, contributing to the tendency to see the University as "the enemy," and results in staff wishing to withdraw from it even further. By lessening the amount of information available to the staff about University politics and financial matters, this withdrawal reduces the center's chances of receiving any greater amount of funding in the future. This suggests that such organizations may become engaged in a cycle of inadequate funding and resentment of potential funding sources. The organization's financial situation may have less to do with members' commitment to "honest poverty" than with their denial of their own role in the situation.
Mutual and self criticism. One of the several characteristic aspects of alternative institutions described by Rothschild-Whitt, mutual and self criticism processes are seen as an opportunity for members to continually communicate with one another about the goals and process of the organization, evaluating to what extent their ideals are being realized in their work. Workers' experiences in the center emphasize the importance of making the ideals explicit. The staff were unwilling to participate in such processes because they didn't trust other workers to base their feedback in values which were relevant to their own work. Their fear arose from the perception that, in fact, there were no ideals held in common against which everyone's work could be evaluated.

Mansbridge stated that inequalities among members of collaborative structures are based on different levels of individual expertise, personality differences, verbal skills, self confidence, access to information, and interest in the task. The responses from center staff verified the staff's recognition of all of these inequalities within the center, stressing access to information as the most significant factor in allowing some staff to be seen as more influential.

She speculated that in the women's movement, the disenchantment with "heavies," with women who are seen as influential and significant leaders in the feminist movement, does not arise solely from a resentment of their power. She suggests that they are criticized partly as a result of the disappointment of women who see them as surrounded by interesting friends, having no time for "lonely newcomers." None of
the staff interviewed expressed this point of view, but clearly, the discrepancy between the lives of more experienced staff (with an established network of friends, more information, and nearly irreplaceable skills and knowledge) and the loneliness, shyness and isolation experienced by new staff was interpreted by the latter as evidence of the absence of the type of "support" which they had expected to be present in a feminist organization.

Communication. Burns and Stalker proposed that communication in this type of organization consists of information and advice rather than instructions. Included in the staff's responses to questions about communication were some statements that sounded as if staff missed the kind of guidance traditionally provided by supervisors' communications, and were searching for at least some advice, along with accurate information, that they could utilize in making decisions about their programs. Communication in the center did not seem to be even "informally structured." According to the perceptions of staff it was relatively haphazard, which may have accounted for some of the staff's expressed desire for more thoughtful feedback from other staff regarding their own decisions.

Shared beliefs. To the extent that shared beliefs about values and goals were not made explicit, the work environment in the center seemed to suffer from the staff's lack of clarity and confidence about its direction. This was consistent with Burns and Stalkers recognition that such shared beliefs were important as a counterbalance to the
absence of a hierarchical system of authority in such organizations. Difficulties in many areas of organizational functioning—communications, evaluation, hiring, decision-making—seemed to arise from the staff's weak sense of shared beliefs. Concern about others' views of their work and the political implications of these views results in individuals distrusting and, to some extent, withdrawing from the group process.

The Effect of Contextual Factors on Organizational Climate

Theoretically, for every climate dimension one could identify positive aspects of workers' experiences. Yet, the staff's responses to the neutral interview questions were most frequently critical of themselves, other workers, or organizational process. These critical judgments are a potentially useful counterpoint to the rhetorical advocacy of nonhierarchical work environments.

It would be incorrect to interpret the results as constituting evidence as to the inefficacy of nonhierarchical forms of organization. Below, the parts played by differences of political opinion among staff, a variety of other contextual factors, and the staff's lack of experience in organizational life are examined, to more fully explain why staff perceive the center as being a difficult place to work.

The data from the interviews and observations show that perceived political differences (differences in the form of "commitment" to the women's movement) are often the point of reference when staff reflect on the factors that make the center a difficult work environment. This
occurs in the responses for five of the seven dimensions: commitment, mutual and self criticism, inequalities, communications, and shared beliefs.

Political differences are considered to be problematic because they are covert. Workers' comments run like this: "We never take the time to talk about these differences--they always come out in conflicts about decisions." It is paradoxical that staff come to the center because of their desire to integrate their work and political commitments, but are reluctant to share their views openly. They end up complaining that this integration actually disrupts collaboration with others.

It is possible that the staff's identification with their primary political beliefs, rather than projects and programs, would contribute to a more positive working climate. This would require a process for reaching political compromises; perhaps the consensus approach would be more effective when the political value bases of decisions were directly discussed, rather than half-concealed.

The reluctance to open up discussion of political differences may also be due to the staff's feeling that the center is already in danger of being pulled apart by the constraints of the University on the one hand and the needs and judgements of various feminist constituencies on the other. It may be more difficult to look clearly at internal politics when enormous tension around meeting the demands of these external groups already exists. Staff are frequently called upon to defend their activities both to relatively unsympathetic individuals in the University structure and other feminists who criticize them on some
aspect of their feminist politics.

Given this situation, the prospect of engaging in evaluation and reconsideration of the beliefs which rationalize staff's commitment to their programs may be quite threatening. Staff may feel that to engage in this kind of dialogue may result in the collapse of the only stable point of reference they have for guiding and appreciating their work. It may be easier to only occasionally acknowledge differences with their coworkers, at times when it's unavoidable--as in discussions which involve the prioritization of program needs. Then, political value differences surface quickly, as workers propose courses of action which are obviously grounded in their particular political perspective.

Staff find that they must invest their energy in two difficult tasks. The first is maintaining the organization's identity within the University setting, keeping a balance between representing the center in ways that will help it survive fiscally, and continuing to advocate controversial proposals that deal with women's needs. The second is coping with the center's internal diversity in a way that excludes no one yet allows tasks to be accomplished.

However, there are a number of other factors which affect how staff view their work at the center. They are often aware of these forces--in the course of the interview process, all of the following were mentioned at least once in passing--but they don't take these forces into account when attempting to explain the sources of their dissatisfaction with their jobs.

This context is comprised of the center's history and reputation
as a feminist center, and the subsequent expectations of women who approach the center for assistance or employment; the diversity of the groups from both campus and the community who refer to it as a resource and source of political support; the larger organizational environment in which the center is located; the current economic situation, and its effect on higher education; and the political philosophy of the women's movement. These individual, group, and systems-level factors are strongly related to the staff's negative perceptions and feelings about the organization.

Expectations. Over the last seven years, the center has served as a meeting ground and resource for a wide range of feminist projects, events and programs from both University-based groups and the community. It has embraced women with widely divergent viewpoints concerning feminist politics who have somehow managed to coexist together over time. Potentially, any woman with related concerns can imagine herself receiving the sponsorship of the center, because the center does not have a statement of goals which could be read as excluding anyone. The history of the center's advocacy of women's issues lead to expectations of the center's support from everyone who defines herself as "feminist". Often, women who identify themselves as such feel very strongly that feminist organizations should be willing to assist them in any way possible in attaining their personal and political goals. When it happens that the center does not provide "adequate" support to a feminist project those involved may accuse the center staff of a lack of sensitivity to their needs, political partisanship, etc., without
regard for the basis of the staff's decision (which may well be motivated by lack of funds or staff time to take on another project).

Diversity of agency contact. The center has connections to a variety of agencies and groups at the University. The organization relates to other women's centers in the residential areas (which are modelled on its structure and intent, and are initiated by students). It has contact with programs serving Third World students, and agencies serving students with a variety of special needs (older women returning to school, welfare mothers in bachelor degree programs, gay women, gay men, etc.). It frequently communicates with groups identified with distinct political issues (racism, the passage of the equal rights amendment, violence against women in the media, etc.).

Because of its structure and feminist orientation, the center is seen as an "alternative" by its clients, those who work within it, and those in other agencies and groups who have contact with it. However, it faces the same constraints as other University agencies: annual negotiation of an operating budget, the maintenance of liaison relationships with upper levels of the administration, expectations about adherence to budget and administrative procedures.

Inevitably, then, stress is created for staff by the very different and occasionally conflicting expectations of the University's bureaucracy system and those in its "constituency" who see the center as a source of support for social change activities. Staff must constantly assess the potential impact of their political activities on their relationships with funding sources and other important figures
within the hierarchy. They face criticism from those outside the University who see them as holding an influential position from which to press for changes within the system; often there is no appreciation for the risks they take given the constraints. Those who are involved in other campus groups advocating social change may attribute great influence on administrative decision-making to the center because of its larger budget and more established ties with upper level University administrators. Their criticism may come from impatience with what they perceive as an unwillingness to use more militant tactics in petitioning for change. University staff with traditional values may not see the center as a legitimate agency because of this "lack" of a director, someone whom they could easily identify and relate to as an individual characterizing and representing the organization.

The organizational environment. The center is located within a large university. It could more appropriately be described as existing on the margin of that organization, according to both the staff and the judgment of the administrators who are responsible for its funding. (During the period of the observations, it was discovered by staff that the center had been omitted from an organizational chart of programs made up by the administrator through whom it requests funding.)

The complex politics of the University administration have often made it difficult for center staff to formulate strategies by which to be acknowledged for their services to the University and the community, both in terms of verbal recognition and through funding. Complicating factors may have included the center's open support of Third World
causes, Affirmative Action, and union organizing among secretaries. These activities have probably meant that some administrators have formed negative opinions of the center, either because of sexist attitudes or because of the difficult challenges which these issues represent to them.

The ambiguity and frustration of working within a University setting were repeatedly mentioned by the staff (outside of the structured interview sessions) as a low-level but continual source of irritation and strain.

The effects of the economy. With the national recession, the administrative politics of the University have become even more Machiavellian, creating more stress for workers in all agencies, including the center. Uncertainty about the continuity of funding at the state level has generated anxiety among all University staff, who often feel they are in the position of "waiting for the axe to fall." Center staff have always coped with funding uncertainties, but the present situation has intensified their worries.

The economic situation has also affected the alternatives available to those who decide to leave the center. Inflation has been used as a rationale by city and state governments to decrease the proportion of revenue allocated to social service programs, which in the past have represented major employment opportunities for center staff. This may account for some of the staff's reluctance to leave despite their job dissatisfaction, and to remain in a work situation which may have many negative aspects.
The philosophy of the women's movement. The philosophy of the women's movement, specifically its treatment of the terms "personal" and "political," plays an important role in the staff's evaluation of the center as a work environment.

There is a catchphrase in the women's movement that the "personal is the political," echoing the insights women gained in consciousness-raising groups when common themes were first discovered in women's stories about their families, their relationships, and work. Recognition of these themes allowed individual women to become aware of the pressures of sex-role socialization, and to more consciously choose ways of constructing their lives so as to facilitate creative self-expression and satisfaction.

This fundamental tenet is manifested in the way women approach their work and their relationships with other workers in the center. Often staff identify with those they are serving, which means they put more emotional energy into their work than they might in another setting. They feel they should identify with, or at least respect and validate, the needs and personal development of other workers in order to create "solidarity" with other women who also face discrimination, though perhaps in different forms.

In an effort to move away from patterns of behavior which they see as self-defeating and unfulfilling, they subject themselves and their co-workers to constant scrutiny. They aspire to new "feminist" ethical, interpersonal, and political standards of conduct, which are constantly defined and redefined through interacting with other feminists.
A good deal of the intensity that the staff experiences regarding their work seems to result from their constant re-evaluation of old habits of thought and feeling, and their attempts to bring their work into line with new visions of possibilities for women's social power. This is why they put pressure on themselves and others to be "correct," to seek the right course of feminist action in response to every situation.

Working in this way on a daily basis can be rewarding as personal change occurs, but also exhausting and unsettling. In the midst of all this, workers search for ways to make their work consistent with these evolving feminist perspectives. This introduces a wide range of variation into how staff accomplish tasks and what they visualize their tasks to be.

Reviewing the gloomy image of the center which arose from the interview data, one can see the impact of these influences in a number of ways. Inconsistent hiring processes are the result of different interpretations of what commitment to feminism is. Highly charged discussions occur as to how much the staff should focus on the process of center work, and how much on content. Most of the staff prefer to focus on specific tasks rather than risk opening up political issues which would then feel unmanageable in the context of the amount of work to be done.

It is very difficult for staff to agree on goals because each person sees her particular form of service to other women, linked with her own experience, as vital and not to be compromised. Compromise means the invalidation of her needs, the needs of the group which she repre-
sents. Requests for compromise demonstrate that others lack commitment to her particular feminist cause.

Lack of experience in organizations. The staff's lack of experience in organizational life, (as distinguished from the failure to adequately socialize new staff into the culture of the center) seems to contribute to the perceived stress of worklife at the center, as well as presenting some actual hindrances to organizational efficiency. Only two of the staff interviewed had extended experience working in an administrative or direct service capacity within any other type of organization. For the rest, this was the first time they had been responsible for planning and implementing their own programs, as salaried employees, for an organization held accountable by a larger administrative system.

This means that the staff simultaneously struggle with two levels of learning. The first level involves acquiring competency in basic skills such as budgeting, allocation of time and energy to tasks, coordination with others, and personnel decisions. The second level involves developing the previously discussed capacities which are needed to work collaboratively, and to adapt successfully to a nonhierarchical mode of accomplishing tasks. The lack of experience by staff also meant that it was difficult for them to articulate what they needed, as they confronted the demands of both levels of learning, which, until they actually began working, were only acknowledged briefly during the hiring process.
Conclusion. After examining the contextual factors discussed above, it is evident that staff are exposed to stress which must affect their feelings, perceptions, and attitudes about their work setting. Feeling pressured by the demands they put upon themselves and one another, and which the organization's environment places upon them, staff easily lose sight of their achievements, and the value of the work and the personal growth processes in which they are engaged.

A Methodological Comment on the Nature of the Findings

To some extent, the structure of the interviews contributed to the negative tone of the data, by eliciting a particular kind of material. As discussed earlier, staff feel a great deal of stress in relation to their work, and rarely discuss this with one another in an extensive way. The open-ended interview questions provided them with an opportunity to express feelings and attitudes which they may have withheld for a long time from other staff, either out of doubts about the validity of their perceptions or out of concern for the effect their expression would have on their relationships with others and their status in the center. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that in the interviews, protected by confidentiality, they chose to talk about negative issues that were most troubling to them.

A more balanced picture of the center and its climate might have been obtained if the interviews had required staff to describe the center as they would to a site visitor from a funding agency, and as they would to a feminist who shared their particular political view-
point. This would have focused them on their accomplishments, and also provided them with an opportunity to directly express their political assessment of the way the center currently operates. In the present data, the staff's cathartic expression of the latter tends to overshadow and distort the former, making the situation sound worse than it might otherwise.

The staff did not seem willing to utilize the data to clarify organizational strengths and weaknesses. The original research agreement included a provision that the data would be summarized and presented to the staff so that it could be used as a resource for identifying areas where change was needed. The researcher was also asked to provide suggestions as to the form of those changes.

When the data were presented, the staff had nothing to say about it. There were two questions from staff who had left the center and who had returned to hear the presentation; one asked for clarification of a statement, and the other requested a summary of the key elements of staff's dissatisfaction with the center. The presentation included an explanation of the entire research process, but it is possible that new staff, who had not participated in interviews, had not been informed by other staff about the study and were unable to respond "off the top of their heads" to the data as it was presented. A second presentation was offered, to occur at a later date. Staff members stated that they appreciated the information, and felt no need to further discuss it.

There are several possible explanations for this lack of response,
which was puzzling given the cooperative attitude demonstrated by individual staff during the course of the interviews. One factor might have been that the findings, mostly negative, had threatening implications for the staff's view of their competency and the effectiveness of the center. Another might have been the staff's resistance to functioning as a group concerned with common issues, in order to look at agency issues raised by the study. This would be consistent with the individualistic, mistrustful stance that emerged from individual interviews regarding group situations. When gathered as one group, staff seemed unwilling to participate in discussion and decision-making around the type of issues that were raised by the presentation.

The lack of response to the data presentation suggests that the study of resistance to "organizational learning" in alternative institutions may be useful to workers and to those who intervene in such organizations. The method of the study is evaluated below according to schema on "organizational learning" and its consequences.

Ingle (1979) identifies three "levels of learning" which must occur in alternative organizations if they are to avoid gradually taking on the form of traditional organizations. At the first level of learning, workers "learn more formally about their internal functioning" as an organization, in order to "make informed choices about the future of their respective organizations." During the center interviews, the staff repeatedly expressed their hopes that the results could be used in this way.

The second level of learning involves the "accumulation of more
generalized and comparative information regarding alternative institutions." The data are presented in a detailed way that would allow comparison with studies of other organizations, but only limited implications can be drawn from the results since they represent the outcome of a case study. In this instance, the weakness of the case study method is its exploration of the applicability of the climate dimensions for only one nonhierarchical organization. The research does not demonstrate whether the relationships between workers' psychological states and organizational structure hold for other organizations.

The third level of learning is the "learning of those who intervene in faltering alternative institutions," who "need a more systematic way of understanding the institution and the effects of the interventions." The climate dimensions provide a framework which could be used to analyze problematic organizational dynamics as part of an organizational "diagnosis." The data provide a description of a nonhierarchical institution which could be compared with other descriptive studies to help those involved in the organizational development of alternative institutions construct theories of organizational dynamics in nonhierarchical workplaces. Herbst (1976) acknowledges one of the most positive aspects of this type of in-depth study, its identification of "emerging innovative trends" and "existing situations which are known to be problematic in order to generate possible directions for development."

The issues raised by the staff's assessment of climate dimensions
suggests that certain aspects of organizational life require special attention if the organization is to maintain itself and continue to "learn" and develop. The dimensions point to a number of crucial organizational "developmental tasks" which are fundamental to this type of organization by virtue of its structure and membership. These tasks are comprised of certain skills and processes which, from the results of this study, seem essential to actualizing a nonhierarchical mode of accomplishing tasks.

These tasks are summarized, beginning below, categorized by the dimensions to which they relate most closely. The questions which follow on p. 127, also listed according to dimensions, could be used to assess to what extent the staff of a collaborative organization is acknowledging the issues raised by these tasks and is actively responding to the challenges posed by this organizational form.

One could say that workers in the center are still experimenting with a collaborative model, confronting those tasks in an indirect and individualistic fashion. Unless the staff can more successfully confront those tasks as a group, it is doubtful that they will be able to improve their ability to function collaboratively. Without renewed efforts to confront those tasks, it seems unlikely that the organizational climate will become more positive.

**Developmental Tasks for Collaborative Organizations**

**Commitment.**

1) To find ways for individuals with a variety of political be-
liefs to co-exist and to support the overall public political stance of the organization.

2) To select staff in a way that allows enough diversity to stimulate creative approaches to tasks, but which does not degenerate into conflicts over dogmatic positions or over fundamental organizational values.

3) To devise communications patterns that maintain the degree of coordination necessary for organizational effectiveness, and allow staff to share concerns, ideas, and feedback with one another.

4) To develop ways to be aware of and to support the process of integrating work life and personal and political concerns, and allow time and energy for coping with interpersonal conflicts and personal stress reactions that may accompany this process.

Role flexibility. To designate individual roles, and provide a set of guidelines for coordination between roles, in such a way that staff gain a wide degree of latitude in scheduling and ways of accomplishing tasks without sacrificing the quality of task performance or the quality of organizational coordination.

Economic marginality.

1) To determine the level of monetary compensation that will make it possible for workers to commit themselves to the organization without experiencing resentment that interferes with their work.

2) To provide the organization with a level of funding which will support that salary level.
3) To determine other benefits inherent in the work and find ways to maximize these benefits, particularly in the absence of adequate monetary compensation.

**Mutual and self criticism.**

1) To devise a periodic and systematic way for allowing staff to give one another feedback on their work and to share their self-evaluations of their work.

2) To establish general criteria for the content and process of feedback that are explicit and reflect the agreed-upon goals and objectives of the organization.

3) To agree on the purpose of the feedback process and the uses of any written records regarding mutual and self-criticism.

4) To incorporate ways to discuss both interpersonal issues and political viewpoints in the feedback process.

**Inequalities in skills, experience, and information.**

1) To find appropriate ways for new staff to collaborate with more experienced staff that allow for true participation in shaping the organization, and provide opportunities for skill acquisition and information exchange.

2) To monitor decision-making processes in order to insure that all staff, new and experienced, have equal opportunities to communicate their views.

**Communication.**

1) To create a communications network that is accessible to all
staff, takes into account the time-limited value of certain information, and encourages effective internal communication.

Shared beliefs (about values and goals).

1) To discuss beliefs about values and goals in order to negotiate agreement on a set of shared beliefs which the staff can use as guidelines for individual projects and in representing the organization to other agencies.

2) To provide for periodic renegotiation and revision of agreements about shared beliefs to reflect the staff's evolving personal and political perspectives.

Questions for Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Collaborative Organization

Commitment. How can the interface between individual political beliefs and the overall political stance of the organization be handled constructively? How much "diversity" can exist among staff before it becomes impossible for them to work together? Can a more effective interpersonal and organization-wide communications system allow workers with a broad range of perspectives to function together despite important differences?

Do workers experience involvement in social change-oriented organizations which demand political/personal "commitment" differently than their involvement in organizations which lack this focus? (It seems that some of the difficulties which arise from the choice to integrate one's work life and political/personal concerns might be attributed to
the sheer unfamiliarity of that integration process. The intensity evoked by this integration deserves to be studied in its own right.)

Role flexibility. How can individual workers' self expression through work styles and varying schedules be harmonized with the organization's need for coordination? How can workers utilize opportunities for independence without being isolated, and/or discarding their responsibility to be accountable to other workers?

Economic marginality. Are low salaries felt to be as problematic when workers feel more satisfied with the quality of communication, have agreement on goals, and feel supported by others in the organization? Is there some minimal level of monetary compensation that needs to be recognized for workers to be able to commit themselves to the organization without resentment?

Mutual and self criticism. How can staff facilitate feedback processes among one another that provide useful information and that avoid the pitfalls of personality differences or political rhetoric? How can staff be assisted in examining the quality of their own work? What is the aim of evaluation in this type of organization, where evaluation is not serving the aims of cost effectiveness or judgments about employee performance? How can both interpersonal and political issues be acknowledged in a constructive way?

Inequalities in skills, experience, and information. To what extent is it true that more experience and/or more information guarantees indi-
vidual workers greater influence in decision-making? How can the needs of new staff to collaborate in tasks be reconciled with more experienced staff's desires to accomplish tasks in what they perceive to be an efficient manner?

Communication. What are possible forms which the "network" of communication necessary in this type of organization could take? Can communication flow be managed so that workers have equal access to information which is significant in decision-making?

Shared beliefs (about values and goals). In this type of organization, to what extent can agreement about values and goals be negotiated among individuals with a broad range of perspectives, and what facilitates a process of successful negotiation? How can evolving political/personal perspectives of workers be reconciled or integrated with formal statements about values and goals?

Contributions of the Research

In 1972 Freeman urged women's groups to move beyond an ideological commitment to "structurelessness," to undertake a search to find a structure suitable to the task of feminist work. This study has looked at workers' experience of their jobs in relation to the outcome of such a search in one organization—a collaborative organizational structure. The study has provided a detailed picture of what it has been like for one group of women to participate in the creation of a different way of "experiencing, enacting, and perceiving" work. The study has great
value for feminist groups, who can use the data directly as a starting point for evaluation and discussing the quality of their work relationships and task effectiveness. Other alternative groups can assess the applicability of the climate dimensions to their own situations, and find clearer ways of talking about events within their organizations and their experiences of those events. Both feminist and other groups can use the study as a basis for organizational "diagnosis" and intervention, a particularly important application since there are currently relatively few consultants who specialize in work with these types of organizations.

Torbert (1973) has said, "what has never been adequately delineated is a theory of collaborative structure. In fact, it is generally assumed that to advocate collaboration is to advocate no organizational structure, or, what amounts to the same thing, to advocate an organizational structure that may be questioned and renegotiated at any point." The study depicts a brief period in the life of such an organization, supplying information that can be used to move away from these extreme assumptions towards data-based and useful theory.

More importantly, the study can be seen as a source of information which lays a foundation for a theory of human relations within collaborative organizations. The data suggest that there are certain difficulties characteristic of collaborative enterprise. The translation of feminist beliefs—or any political beliefs—into a collaborative structure and process seems to involve continual reevaluation of personal needs and philosophies, testing of individual commitment to broader
goals, and experimentation, with modes of group process and decision-making (Kanter, 1973). At this stage, choosing this form of organization may mean "living out" and adapting to changes in one's experience of work which are difficult to articulate and understand at first. For some time to come, it will be especially important for workers in these types of organizations to have access to resources (in the form of literature or consultation) that will assist them in finding personal satisfaction amidst the uncertainties of organizational evolution.

This study indicates possible relationships between workers' experience of their jobs and structural and process aspects of the collaborative work setting. In doing so, it emphasizes the importance and usefulness of looking at these organizations in terms of social systems, and not just as aggregates of individuals with potentially conflicting beliefs and personalities. Approaching collaborative organizations with this perspective makes it possible to more clearly analyze some of the volatile and frustrating problems that arise, and to design solutions which support the integrity of the collaborative model. While some organizational difficulties may well result from the behavior or attitudes of individuals, from this study it seems much more likely that the "growing pains" of the collaborative form itself are behind many such problems.

This research has documented the efforts of one group of women to actualize their ideals about work and society through the use of the collaborative organizational form, which they feel more fully supports their individual growth and collective purpose. At this point, the
staff of similar organizations can benefit from teaming up with researchers in order to develop a more self-conscious perspective on the collaborative process and its difficulties. Researchers can directly benefit workers in collaborative organizations by providing them with ways to differentiate various aspects of their experience and to engage in effective problem-solving. In turn, as workers develop more sophisticated means for coping with the vicissitudes of the collaborative process, they can supply researchers with information that can be used to build and refine theory that will further support the evolution of a collaborative model.

The development of this model may make it possible to discover new ways of creating organizational contexts which can benefit individual, collective, and societal welfare in a technological culture. In a time of massive social change, and change in paradigms of "work" and its place in society, the potential value of the collaborative form, or any form of organization that supports creative problem-solving and satisfying human relationships, is obvious.
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APPENDIX A

Staff Meeting Transcript

A transcript of the major portion of one of the center's staff meetings is presented in order to illustrate the relationship between the climate dimensions and the staff's experience of their jobs in a more vivid and less mechanical way. This excerpt demonstrates the characteristic ways staff dealt with major issues at the time of the study. The lack of resolution of those issues was typical in the months of meetings that were observed during the period of research.

To the left of the text, the content is coded according to the climate dimension to which the speaker's comments are most closely related, and a brief comment clarifies this relationship. Another set of names, different than those used to present the interview material, has been substituted for the actual names of the staff. This was done to eliminate the possibility of identification of the participants through comparison of interview and transcript material.

Transcript of Meeting 1

Marty: I feel in transition--now working on a project people feel negative about--leaves me feeling very ambivalent and not reinforced...just too much work, and I know I haven't done project or center tasks thorough enough, and have felt inadequate a lot...particularly because of center tasks that seemed to make it clear I was not performing on the same level as other people...
APPENDIX A (CONTINUED)

Communication
Jan is one of those most concerned with staff's ability to share feelings with one another.

Mutual and Self Criticism
The purpose of staff meeting had been discussed often. One suggestion had been to make it a place where staff could receive feedback and assistance with problems.

Communication
Individually, all workers said that they tended to think they were the only ones with problems. Here, Jan comments on the isolation that is partly a result of inadequate communication.

Mutual and Self Criticism
In the next part of the discussion staff acknowledge that feedback is usually experienced as negative and tends to degenerate into "nit picking." They examined possible reasons for this.

Val: You got your job, I created mine.

Jan: Have you had any chances to bring up these feelings before?

Marty: You mean like channels I could have gone through?

Jan: Did the staff meeting give you opportunities to make changes in your work or to find ways to deal with it?

Marty: There might have been...maybe I didn't perceive them or my style is not to share this kind of thing. Or, just thinking other people were doing their work alright.

Jan: Other people don't feel confident about their work all the time, either...if we had a forum to express feelings of inadequacy, at times when we felt overwhelmed we could just say it was "too much" and get input from others...I know it's very painful to be in that situation.

Marty: In the past year I didn't have the feeling I could do my job...there was no freedom for independent decision-making or thought...when I did something I was scrutinized or held accountable--I didn't have "permission" to do it.

Val: In some ways we don't want responsibility for decision on a day-to-day level...we become unwilling to take it because we get picked at if we do.

Ginny: Why do we chisel away at each other's creativity?
APPENDIX A (CONTINUED)

Val: It's enshrining the collaborative process in the particular way we do it...whether anyone knows anything or not, she can get her two cents in...in a collaborative structure, you're supposed to participate...if you have a finished product in front of you, there is nothing to do with it except analyze it and pick it apart.

Jan: What is the reason for this?

Val: I don't know why...why do we as individuals all buy into that?

Ginny: Maybe it has to do with how we are as individuals.

Val: We have all been leaders in other settings...

Marty: You are seen as having power and leadership if you do or know too much, or have too much information...

Val: I admire the people who do the newsletter. I couldn't do that...

Iris: The collaborative process does not negate that people can do better in some areas than others.

Marty: But we do tend to think that we can all do everything...

Cass: People don't share their feelings of accomplishment here, they don't say when they've done something well.

Iris: It falls dead.

Ginny: No one picks up on it.

Cass: We're not apt to give ourselves credit...

Inequalities in Skills, Experience, Information
Marty begins to describe how being seen as a leader has negative implications in the center. Others suggest that the lack of appreciation for competency and the avoidance of discussing "mistakes" is frustrating for everyone. Staff end up feeling penalized for sincere efforts.
Val: If one woman does give another something to check over, we buy into not looking at the details but saying instead, I would have done it differently from zero—that's not collaborative effort, that's monitoring... different from saying, there are no typographical errors but the graphics stink.

Ginny: Why do we say those kinds of things to each other?

Val: Cause women don't get along!

(Laughter)

Val: There is something underlying all this that creates an atmosphere where we are acting out of resentment, that makes us withhold approval as punishment or something.

Cass: You mean, the fact we have no heat, or something else? (Joking.)

Ginny: I've felt it since I came here--some underlying thing in this group, as all others--unspoken and unwritten norms that hover--things that make you feel as though you can't make a decision.

Jan: Not blatantly though.

Ginny: Ghosts that are hard to pin down and dispossess ourselves of. Maybe we need an exorcist as a group facilitator.

Val: There are a lot of things. We don't know about other people's jobs. We look at other people's work in a supervisory way and our lack of confidence--being terrified of the University--may set up a lot of things. You know how much we love to do liaison,
Inequalities in Skills, Experience, Information
In the next part of the discussion it becomes clear that staff vary--some are terrified of the University; others are not.

Val (cont.): to talk to them...it's like pulling teeth to get us to go somewhere to do something or call someone on the phone.

Cass: I get intrigued by agencies and the people in them. Those miscellaneous telephone calls are basic building blocks. They seem really tiny but that's what liaison is.

Val: Liaison is not mysterious. Attention to detail is not grandiose. To make a phone call to someone to say they're off the wall you have to know what you're talking about.

Gail: We all have a fear we don't know what we're talking about. We'd like to have someone else talk to them. At one time in my life I was very afraid to say I didn't know something. Now, I find the courage to say I am just starting, and there's some things I can't keep in my head, and I'll call them back. People are impressed when they know they can trust you. When they know that what you say is true. We shouldn't be afraid to say "I don't know."

Val: When someone calls up who wants to know five minutes ago, it's good advertising for a nonhierarchical organization to say, "I don't know that, she'll call you back tomorrow. If it's a real emergency it's different...I don't think handling that kind of "panic" call is bad liaison.

Cass: At the "Ad" Building they say he's stepped out for three weeks.

Gail: And what's worse, they give you the wrong information.
APPENDIX A (CONTINUED)

Shared Beliefs
The way Cass begins to talk about her long-range objectives for the center is typical of the way in which staff periodically express their beliefs about goals. Only one person responds in kind. No one acknowledges that goals are being discussed.

Cass: I've been intending to articulate the kind of reputation I'd like the center to have. I'd like us to give accurate information, to let people know that major problems stop here...now I'm not sure that's accurate. How we handle information is a real issue.

Val: I'd like it to be a place where women could bring their brainchildren and if we couldn't help, we could refer them with suggestions, etc.... I hate to see it stop, yet I can't squeeze it in here...

Gail: If you know who would know, it helps a lot. This place is like a city. If you are sent to the wrong place, your whole day is wasted.

Ginny: I would like to ask for feedback for the advice group as to the nature of the last hour, the way we structured the time...Has it been helpful?

Cass: You mean you don't know?

Marty: This last hour you mean?

Val: It didn't feel especially structured. I was left again wondering about norms of participation. If they don't want to talk, it's O.K. yet not O.K. Everyone is supposed to talk if we talk about feelings.

Bonnie: It's nice to have agendas. I think it was fine to have this discussion. There's nothing that was really an issue or feeling for me. I felt completely out of it, just detached. So I turned in on myself.

Ginny: I want us to get out of our heads. We just can't take time for
APPENDIX A (CONTINUED)

Ginny (cont.): ourselves.

Val: If everything was running smoothly I'd like to have the luxury to talk about what I would like the center to be.

Marty: I'm glad we did structure it, it went very well. Talking about feelings can't happen just this once, it has to come in periodically to what we're doing.

Cynthia: I didn't enter in to the discussion because I felt a little blocked off from the center. I have been going up and down in the transitional period, and still haven't been able to enter in in some ways. I'm still trying to define personal goals in the center. I feel very confused about my life right now. I will share this with you at a later date. I thought this was very well done, thought the people planning it did a very good job.

Iris: I have no feelings now about anything, I may in about three weeks time. One thing that is screwing me up right now is spending two mornings a week on center business. That leaves me with Monday from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. to see clients--it's really bad.

Gail: I can't say I don't have any feelings about the meeting....

Cass: Yes but I don't have time for them.

(Communication) Cass is angry at the person who left. Val is angry at what she sees as the disorganization of the center. (The meeting ends. Val talks about a member who left without cleaning out her desk. She jokes about needing an administrative policy to deal with the problem, and Val responds with a
Communication (cont.)
No one is committed enough to discussing support and criticism issues to respond to Jan's closing comment.

Meeting ends (cont.)
Comment that the center is the kind of place where a person can leave without thinking about cleaning out their desk. Jan states that she would like others to be conscious of how they relate to other staff particularly around the issues of support and criticism of each other's work. No one responds to this statement. The group splits up.)