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**THE FEMINIST PARTY OF CANADA:
THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG
FEMINIST VISION, PROCESS AND OUTCOMES**

by

Danette Steele B.A.

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

Institute of Canadian Studies

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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**"The Feminist Party of Canada: The Relationships
Among Feminist Vision, Process and Outcomes"**

**submitted by Danette Steele, B.A. Hons.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

Danette Steele.....
Thesis Supervisor

[Signature].....
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ABSTRACT

The Feminist Party of Canada (FPC) was active from 1979 until 1982. The party emerged out of a burgeoning feminist movement as a result of women's anger and frustration with the abysmal representation of women in the political system and due to the lack of prominence given to issues of concern to women. The goal of the FPC was to bring a transformative feminist perspective to electoral politics.

This study provides a critical analysis of the relationship among feminist vision, process, and outcomes through the experience of the FPC. The party succeeded in radicalizing many women new to feminism who subsequently brought the lessons from the FPC to other sites for feminist organizing. How alternative forms of political organizing in the FPC contributed to transformation in the lives of FPC members and the development of friendships and feminist networks is examined.

The FPC never achieved official party status and was split as an organization when it ceased to function in 1982. Several factors both internal and external to the FPC contributed to the party's demise. These factors are explored and contrasted with the experience of the feminist party in Iceland, Kvennalistinn, which has enjoyed electoral support in parliament since 1983.

The ways in which FPC organizers endeavoured to redefine politics are discussed as this was a central theme in the conflicts in the FPC and also contributed to the personal and political transformation of party activists.

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INTRODUCTION

As a feminist activist, I work alone and with others in efforts to bring about transformative social change. My decision to pursue graduate work was motivated by a desire to better understand change processes from a feminist perspective. In the course of my studies, I became aware of the existence of the Feminist Party of Canada (FPC). As I shared what I knew of the FPC experience with others, I found that women especially were interested in and excited by such an alternative for political expression.

I was particularly interested in the FPC's attempts to incorporate feminist principles into its organizational processes and curious as to how aspects of feminist process would be realized in a political system dominated by catch-all parties and a patriarchal model of domination. As I was to find out, the practical expression of a theoretical feminist vision was also a creative and an ideological struggle for the women involved with the FPC.

The FPC was formed in Toronto in 1979 due to "a growing dissatisfaction with the lack of impact women had made in and out of the formal structures, the scant attention paid by politicians to women's concerns and the very small numbers of women in elected office." (Zaborsky: 1987, 613). Women from across the political spectrum were drawn to the FPC and many women joined the party who did not have previous political party affiliation. The FPC captured the imaginations of women from all parts of Canada, as

evidenced by correspondence (FPC Newsletters and FPC files); however, the party remained active principally in Toronto. During the three years of its life, the women of the FPC wrote position papers, held public meetings, facilitated educational workshops and regularly published a newsletter. The FPC worked to develop an alternative organizational form in contrast to the bureaucratic hierarchies of traditional political parties, a project which was never completed in Canada. In Iceland, however, the women's party, Kvennalistinn, has been successful in developing a feminist alternative with electoral support in parliament since 1983. Their experience, which I examine in chapter four, sheds light on the FPC's organizing efforts.

The FPC ceased to function in the spring of 1982. The literature suggests (Zaborsky: 1987 and Hughes: 1982) that an unclear party structure and unresolvable differences among members regarding the participation of men led to the demise of the FPC. Interviews with former FPC members, while not disputing that these factors were significant, indicated that they were in fact symptoms of more deeply rooted issues in the party. These issues stemmed from differing feminist analyses and visions among FPC members which led to divergent notions of what politics is, questions about where the emphasis should be placed in FPC organizing efforts, and conflicting views about how the FPC goals could best be accomplished.

Feminist Frameworks

The FPC did not claim a particular feminist perspective, but rather professed to be a political space where the diverse interests and strategies of all feminisms could be incorporated. This new political initiative was described by FPC spokeswoman Mary O'Brien as a 'politics of integration'. Angela Miles, a founding member of the FPC, has written about the term 'integrative feminism' as a politic which transcends existing frameworks. She states that integrative feminism "must presume to transform and broaden liberatory struggle in general through the affirmation of a new set of female-associated integrative values and a new vision of the world." (Miles: 1989, 20). She explains that while many women may not self-identify as integrative feminists, "Their sense of feminism as a potentially complete politics nevertheless unites them more closely with each other across liberal, socialist, radical, and lesbian feminist lines than with other feminists of like self-definition." (ibid).

As a radical feminist, I have experienced the sense of connection, support and shared vision described by Miles with feminists from other positions. However, there are differences in the various political perspectives and analyses which are significant and which inform political strategies and priorities. In the case of the FPC, explicit discussions did not take place about the diverse feminist frameworks and approaches. When divisions stemming from the varying ideological perspectives emerged, it was therefore difficult for

members to clearly identify them, making conflict resolution an additionally complicated task. Women were nevertheless united in the FPC for the purpose of bringing a feminist agenda to the political sphere.

Liberal, socialist and radical feminist strains of thought were present in the FPC. There are several general texts which detail at length the complexities of these feminisms and their related strategies such as Feminist Frameworks (Jaggar and Rothenberg: 1984). For the purposes of this discussion, I will simplify and briefly sketch these three perspectives, as I believe the theoretical differences had an impact on FPC practices.

Liberal feminism, rooted in a liberal tradition, is most concerned about women's right to equal opportunity. Liberal feminists believe that the problem of sexist discrimination can be remedied through reforms in the educational, legal, political and employment sectors. This perspective suggests that by ensuring women's equal access to the existing system, discrimination will be eliminated and women's liberation achieved.

In contrast to liberal feminism, both socialist and radical feminisms seek a radical restructuring of society. Radical feminists name the problem as patriarchy - a system of domination whereby most men hold economic, political and social power over most women. Radical feminists see the oppression of women as a fundamental political oppression, centring on the control of our bodies. Women's specificity is valued by

radical feminism and strategies for social transformation include the development of women-centred culture and struggles against the institutions where male power is reinforced and reproduced such as heterosexuality, marriage, etc.. Radical feminists have been active in anti-violence activity by providing services such as shelters for battered women and rape crisis centres and through direct actions like anti-pornography demonstrations.

Socialist feminism has grown from a marxist tradition and brings a systematic analysis of the power relations which contribute to the oppression of women. Socialist feminists consider the interdependent relationships of capital, patriarchy and white imperialism within an historical context and challenge these systems in the work to eradicate all forms of oppression. Strategies include finding collective means to change oppressive relations and working with and advocating for social justice issues.

This summary provides only the most general distinctions among the three principal streams of feminism and does not attempt to deal with the depth and scope of these feminist currents and how they have developed through time. The feminisms described are not as distinct in practice as they appear. Women from most feminist perspectives often find themselves supporting each other's initiatives and taking up each other's strategies in efforts to make the quality of women's daily lives better. In the case of the FPC, the different currents of feminist thought did coexist for some time. However, over

time divergent understandings about the notion of 'politics' among FPC members split the organization.

The Personal is Political

"The personal and political are dialectically involved in all of our lives." (Levine: 1989, 235). Kate Millett in her work Sexual Politics (1970), was one of the early feminist writers in the second wave of feminism to challenge traditionally held notions about the separateness of the public and private spheres. She and other radical feminists expressed that politics was not a concept relegated solely to the public sphere and the activities associated with state government. Through consciousness-raising groups, women found commonality in experiences which had been considered isolated incidents, and they recognized the political significance of what had been thought of as 'private'. "Thus the determination of the contemporary women's liberation movement to weave the personal and political aspects of living into a unified whole." (Levine: 1989, 235).

The definition of issues which were traditionally relegated to the private sphere as political infused women with a new sense of power and a transformed notion of politics. Reflecting on the oppression of women, Millett expanded the definition of politics to be understood as "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of

persons is controlled by another." (Millet: 1970, 31). This unveiling of the 'politics of everyday life' moved some women to view themselves as political actors with political concerns, which in turn mobilized them to organize and to take action on issues which touched women's lives. This process had a profound effect on women as they experienced personal and collective power to do something to bring about changes in their lives.

Party documents demonstrate that the FPC was interested in making changes in the political arena of electoral politics by bringing a feminist perspective to this space. Many women who joined the party conceived of this occurring through the election of FPC representatives to provincial and/or federal parliaments. Others who were drawn to the party felt that the FPC would be a mechanism to transform the notions of politics and political activity. This did not necessarily preclude the election of FPC candidates. However for some the system of representative government was in and of itself an alienating experience which ought to be changed. Most FPC members saw feminism as a world view with a corresponding analysis which needed to be expressed in the realm of electoral politics. There were different ideas however about how this should be accomplished.

The FPC was preoccupied with developing an organizational structure and process which was consistent with feminist values. Many women in the FPC understood power as coercive, destructive and/or violent. Consequently, conscious attempts were made in the

FPC to develop an organization which avoided the expression of power as dominance. There were few models available to learn from at this time.

This dual agenda of creating a radically alternative party for the purpose of effecting change in the mainstream was a struggle. Nancy Hartsock describes this tension in her article Staying Alive: "Creating political change requires that we set up organizations based on power defined as energy and strength, groups that are structured, not tied to the personality of a single individual, and whose structures do not permit the use of power to dominate others in the group. At the same time, our organizations must be effective in a society in which power is a means of making others do what they do not wish to do." (Hartsock: 1984, 273).

Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail characterize this tension in Feminist Organizing for Change (1988) as a balancing of two politics; that of 'disengagement' or dealing with what should be, and that of 'mainstreaming' or dealing with what is. They argue that "mainstreaming and disengagement act as counterweights for each other: together they make it possible to develop a feminist practice that is finely balanced between abstract vision and concrete reality" (Adamson, Briskin and McPhail: 1988, 186). This study will analyze how this tension was managed in the FPC and what the outcomes of this innovative project were.

Significance of Research

The FPC experience articulated several of the recurring questions and concerns which confront feminist groups organizing for change. This is an important case study to research in order to deepen our understanding of these issues, particularly as they relate to influencing the change process in the traditional political system through the deliberate organization of an autonomous feminist political party.

I do not agree with Dorothy Zaborsky, who described the FPC as a "relative failure" (Zaborsky: 1987, 618). Zaborsky's criteria for success are traditional - the realization of a political party and the preparation of candidates for elections - and reflect a liberal feminist position. Many party activists considered the FPC a forum to develop an alternative vision of politics that is feminist. This latter position was informed by radical and socialist feminist agendas to transform the system. I understand that this objective of transformation was a central premise in the FPC.

The FPC's attempt to create an alternative political party, while challenging the existing system, was a complicated task. The fact that the FPC ceased to function after three years of activity was reflective of two problems. The first was the incompatibility of organizing according to a feminist vision for change with working in a patriarchal system. The second was the difficulty in bringing diverse ideological perspectives together to work

collaboratively for change.

The processes and structures undertaken by the FPC, informed as they were by the plural feminist environment of the FPC, also contributed to the outcomes. One could argue that these outcomes reflected both success and failure. The obvious failure was the fairly quick demise of the party (prior to contesting any elections). The successes include the experience gained in feminist process, the extension of feminist networks which continue to this day, and the transformation of the lives of women who participated in the FPC and who continue to work for change in a variety of locations.

Methodology

I have used both primary and secondary sources in my research process. I conducted interviews with nine former FPC members (appendix B) and drew upon an interview with an additional FPC member conducted by another researcher, John Cleveland, (CWMA). Of the ten women interviewed, four were founding members of the FPC, three considered their FPC involvement as limited or peripheral, and seven considered themselves as very active and participating centrally in the decision making process at some time during the life of the FPC. The information gathered was qualitative in nature. The nine women interviewed for this project had identified themselves to me as former FPC members in

the course of discussions at feminist conferences or events, or had been recommended by women who were aware of their involvement in the FPC. All women agreed to participate in an interview of approximately one and one half hours in length. Each woman signed a release form allowing the interview to be taped, the material to be used in my thesis and related works, and the sound recording to be filed with the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA) in Ottawa. This was not a random sampling of former FPC members and hence does not statistically represent the membership of the organization. However, due to the diversity of involvements of those interviewed, this grouping of women provides a comprehensive picture of the FPC when combined with other written materials.

Thirteen questions were developed for the interview (appendix A). The questions were created with the intent that the collective responses would illustrate, from the lived experiences of the members interviewed, the development of the FPC. Each woman located herself in the FPC and in her feminist politic and recounted her perceptions about the reasons why the FPC was formed, what it accomplished, how it went about trying to achieve its goals, what obstacles or problems emerged in its life cycle, and finally what meaning the FPC had for the women interviewed. The interview questions were open-ended. Many women anticipated questions and addressed them out of the planned sequence. In these cases, the questions were not repeated, although responses were usually restated and verified.

FPC documents, tapes and files, were reviewed from personal collections, the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (Ottawa), and the Women's Research Centre archives at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (Toronto). Articles and papers written about the FPC were also consulted. The primary source written materials consisted of FPC newsletters, pamphlets, flyers, press releases, position papers, working documents, correspondence, press clippings, membership lists, posters, and minutes.

The documentation of the FPC is only partial at the two archival collections. Complete sets of FPC Newsletters, position papers and pamphlets were available. Minutes, however, were scarce and were provided for the most part from personal collections. The committee minutes located varied in terms of completeness. Some dealt at length with discussions and decisions around issues the party was concerned with. More often, only bare agendas and key points were listed. Rarely were the members attending meetings identified. I found the source materials located useful to my work and believe that they reflected a good sampling of the documentation available regarding the FPC.

Chapter Outline

In chapter one, I discuss and analyze the context of Canadian electoral politics insofar as

it has nurtured the need among feminists to create an autonomous women's political party. The chapter begins with an historical overview of women's involvement in electoral politics in Canada, considering such factors as enfranchisement, voting patterns and representation in government. Obstacles to women's participation in the political process such as the recruitment and nomination practices in the established political parties, the 'first-past-the-post' system of representation, and the liberal democratic tradition in Canada will be elaborated. The role of feminist pressure group politics in bringing women's issues to the public/political system will be discussed, particularly as this relates to the role of autonomous feminist spaces in creating change. These were all important considerations for the FPC founding members as they organized to create an alternative which would challenge the existing system while transforming notions of power and the practice of politics.

Chapter two documents the experience of the FPC by providing a chronological overview of the party's development and activities. Drawing upon interviews with past FPC members, related documents and literature, several questions related to the internal FPC practices will be explored. I will elaborate on the vision which brought the FPC together and look at what politic was expressed through party activity and processes. In addition, the issues which the party struggled with during its life will be analyzed; these include the participation of men in the FPC, the tension between mainstream and alternative visions of politics, and the issues of diversity, difference and representativeness in the

party.

The FPC endeavoured to function according to a feminist process. Chapter three provides an in-depth investigation of the processes and structure of the FPC. It begins by detailing what is meant by feminist process and elaborates on what difficulties may be encountered when following a feminist process. It also considers the intent of the FPC to articulate an alternative politic in both theory and practice and examines the implications of this objective. Specific features of the party examined in this chapter are: leadership, process and structure, and the meaning of feminist alternatives for the relations among FPC members and for external relationships to traditional, hierarchical organizations/systems.

Chapter four examines Kvennalistinn, the Feminist Party in Iceland which has held elected political office in the national parliament since 1983. This chapter will not constitute a fully comparative analysis. Rather through the experience of the Kvennalistinn, I will outline the conditions which encourage the development of a feminist party and which contribute to its position of power in the traditional political system. The Kvennalistinn realized its goal under a different social and political context from that of Canada. However, it functions according to a feminist process and has gained power in a patriarchal system. As such, I will look at both the contributing factors to the Kvennalistinn's electoral success and, drawing on the available literature, consider what the implications of this involvement has been for the feminist vision of the party.

Chapter five concludes with my observations about the FPC experience. In the conclusion, I pay particular attention to the FPC's contributions to an understanding of feminist process, structure and outcomes and their inter-relationship in our work for transformative change.

CHAPTER 1

THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

The Feminist Party of Canada as I see it represents a feminist perspective, a human perspective, a compassionate perspective. I don't know if it's going to work, but the reason I think it's important to have a feminist perspective in public affairs is most clearly exemplified in the picture of the new federal cabinet on the front page of the Globe and Mail last Thursday. There you had all those grey men and one lone woman, Flora MacDonald, in white, and she stuck out like a rose among thorns. The top thirty policy makers in the country, only one of whom is a woman - why does this concern me? Because I'm sure that most women wouldn't produce the kind of defense policies that most countries have. Can you imagine a woman spending billions on tanks and planes, the instruments of death, when she could spend those dollars on daycare, services to the elderly, housing for families things to enhance life. As I see it, we're discussing a Party whose basic purpose is to ensure a whole and fulfilling life for all. Who can oppose that?

(Statement from Fiona Nelson, read at the First Public Meeting of the FPC, June 10th, 1979).

Introduction

The women who organized the Feminist Party of Canada (FPC) were interested in bringing a transformed notion of power and politics to the political arena. One of the founders, Mary O'Brien, referred to the political culture in 1979 as being a "politics of violation" (FPC audiotape, 1979). The FPC was developed then in response to the abysmal representation of women and women's interests in the federal and provincial governments and out of a desire to create a political alternative which was participatory

and life enhancing in nature.

This chapter considers some of the conditions which nurtured and mobilized the development of the FPC. The emergence of the women's movement as well as the structural and systemic barriers to women's participation in electoral politics are discussed. The issues of electoral and political party systems in Canada, gender patterns in voting, the under-representation of women in parliament, the question of leadership and the tradition of the Canadian liberal democracy are analyzed insofar as they relate to the organizing of an autonomous feminist politic - the FPC.

Women in Western Liberal Democracy

The Canadian political system is characterized as a liberal democracy. The principles which underlie such a system are justice, freedom and equality of opportunity. In a liberal democracy, which has grown out of the liberal tradition, there is an assumption that equality of opportunity exists for everyone. This assumption ignores the realities of unequal gender, class and race relations. The ideas which ground liberal democracy mystify our oppression. Women, for example, are often blamed or held responsible for our own (unequal, victimized or exploited) situations. This is due in part to the emphasis on individual rather than collective differences within the liberal tradition, which

implicitly holds individual women responsible for their condition rather than considering the context of a patriarchal society, recognizing oppression and taking collective responsibility for just action.

Historically, women were excluded from the political/public sphere as women's place was deemed to be in the domestic/private realm as opposed to the public sphere that was accessible only or primarily to men. Such distinct boundaries do not practically exist today to the same degree. However, this thinking has allowed for the development of a political system which is described as equal for all citizens, but which in practice privileges the participation of men over women.¹ This ideology has served to obfuscate the structural aspects of electoral politics which exclude or limit women's involvement. "In other words, the norms of politics, although narrowly defined and posed in gender neutral terms, are, in fact, male norms to which women are expected to conform if they are to achieve power. Put even more bluntly, these explanations propose that women, and not the electoral system, must change if gender parity is to be achieved" (Brodie: 1991, 11). The women who organized the FPC did so in order to try to create the possibility for women to participate politically, on their own terms.

Representation of Women

Table 1.1 - The achievement of political emancipation of Canadian women

Jurisdiction	Suffrage granted	Eligibility to hold office granted	First women elected
Manitoba	1916	1916	1920
Saskatchewan	1916	1916	1919
Alberta	1916	1916	1918
British Columbia	1917	1917	1918
Ontario	1917	1919	1921
Dominion (Federal Government)	1917	1919	1921
	relatives of servicemen 1918-all qualified by age and citizenship	re-affirmed and made permanent by the Dominion Elections Act, 1920	
New Brunswick	1919	1934	1967
Prince Edward Island	1922	1922	1970
Newfoundland¹	1925	1925	1930
Quebec	1940	1940	1961

¹ This was prior to Newfoundland's entry into Confederation.

Sources: Catherine Cleverdon, 'The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada', p. 2. Janine Brodie, The Recruitment of Canadian Woman Provincial Legislators, 'Atlantis', Spring, 1977, passim.

The first wave of the women's movement in Canada was regionally based with a focus on the struggle for suffrage. Women secured the right to vote over a span of time, from

1916 (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia) to 1940 (Quebec).

Federal franchise was granted in 1918.² Since enfranchisement, women have increasingly exercised the right to vote so that since the 1970's, there has been no significant difference in voter turnout between women and men. Despite 70 years of enfranchisement, women are still grossly under-represented in all aspects of government, a trend which is not unique to Canada. "Women are the most under-represented social group in the elected assemblies of Western democracies. Women constitute more than one half of the population, but rarely more than a handful of elected representatives are women. Few aspects of social life are more completely and universally male dominated than politics." (Brodie: 1985, 1).

Table 1.2 - Women candidates and MPs in Canadian general elections (percent of total)

Year elected	Candidates	Elected
1921-67	2.4	0.8
1968	3.5	0.4
1972	6.4	1.8
1974	9.4	3.4
1979	13.8	3.6
1980	14.4	5.0
1984	14.5	9.6
1988	19.2	13.4

Source: Elections Canada

Women's under-representation is evident at both the provincial and federal levels of government. Prior to 1972, women never constituted more than 1 percent of the elected members of the federal parliament. Participation has increased gradually to a total of 39 women, or 13.4 percent, elected to the House of Commons during the 1988 election. Women's representation varies territorially and provincially from 2 percent in Newfoundland to 31 percent in the Yukon, averaging 15 percent over all. (Brodie: 1991, 5-6).

Table 1.3 - Women's representation in the provinces (percentages, most recent elections)

Province	Women in legislature	Women candidates
British Columbia	13.0	21.0
Alberta	15.0	18.0
Saskatchewan	8.0	25.0
Manitoba	18.0	21.0
Ontario	22.0	18.0
Quebec	22.0	18.0
New Brunswick	12.0	16.0
Nova Scotia	6.0	21.0
Prince Edward Island	22.0	25.0
Newfoundland	2.0	8.0
Northwest Territories	8.0	--
Yukon	31.0	--

Source: Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991.

Janine Brodie, in Women in Canadian Politics (1991), cautions that these increases are not secure, nor did they occur as part of a natural trend. Rather, they are the result of much concerted effort on the part of feminist pressure groups.

System of Representation

Federally, Canada is divided into 295 ridings. Canadians have the right to vote for a member of parliament in their constituency, and the candidate with the largest number of votes wins the riding. This form of parliamentary democracy was modelled after the British system. The 'first-past-the-post' single member plurality system is limited in terms of the extent to which it is representative of the electorate. "Our present electoral system produces a weak relationship between the votes cast for the party and the seats won by that party. In translating votes into seats, it over-represents the leading party." (Irvine: 1985, 129). For example, during the 1988 federal election in Quebec, the Progressive Conservative Party (PC) won 63 of 75 seats, or 84 percent of the seats, with only 53 percent of the popular vote. The Liberal Party won 12 seats or 16 percent of the seats with a popular vote of 30 percent. The New Democratic Party (NDP) did not win any seats, yet had a popular vote of 14 percent. It appears that currently the voices and concerns of the NDP voters are not taken into consideration and that the PC perspective is over-represented.

A system of proportional representation where seats are allocated based upon the percentage of votes received by each party would be a more just system of representation. Proportional representation allows for more diversity in representation and enhances the opportunity for a marginal party such as the FPC to have members elected to parliament. In addition, proportional representation improves women's chances for being elected: "Countries that have adopted some form of proportional representation (PR) system consistently elect more women than countries with single-member plurality systems." (Brodie: 1991, 34). Further, "Women have fared better in PR systems where the women's movement has put concerted pressure on political parties to elect women." (Brodie: 1991, 35).

Women and Mainstream Political Parties

The major political parties in Canada are the New Democratic Party (NDP), the Liberal party and the Progressive Conservative (PC) party. They are generally considered ideologically left, centre and right of centre respectively, although in practice these distinctions are not always clear. The NDP has not governed federally, although it has governed and does govern in some provinces.³ Due to the vast size of Canada and the diversity of interests, these parties have developed a brokerage strategy in their positions and policies. The "Liberals and Conservatives, and to a lesser extent the NDP, act as

'brokers', offering the electorate an aggregation and accommodation of the myriad of conflicting interests that inevitably arise in any society." (Brodie & Jenson: 1990, 250). Brodie states further that "the absence of hard and fast party loyalties in the electorate encourages our parties to be conservative and expedient." (Brodie: 1985, 125).

Women's groups have exerted pressure on the federal and provincial governments in order to influence the issues of concern to women and to increase the participation of women in government. The results have been varied, including an increase in the number of women candidates running in elections since 1979 and the televised debate on women's issues by the leaders during the 1984 federal election campaign. It is, however, important to recall that these accomplishments happened within a particular climate and would not be easily replicated today. Around 1980, opinion polls were noticing that a gender difference was emerging with respect to party choice and positions on issues. Polls indicated that women were 10 percent more likely to vote Liberal than men and that women were more likely to support anti-defense positions, health and social programmes than were men. (Brodie: 1991). Following the organization of women around the Constitution in 1981 and given the changing public attitudes regarding the role of women in society, the major parties were inclined to take women more seriously as voters.

As candidates for political office, opportunities have improved somewhat, but there are still major barriers for women to overcome. Recruitment and nomination practices of the

major parties continue to limit women's involvement. Some say there is a problem on the supply side of women candidates for office as not as many women put themselves forward as do men. Others maintain that the material conditions of women's lives do not allow for the same level of participation as for men. These conditions include women's role as the primary caregivers and service providers in the home and the gendered division of paid labour where women's work is not valued to the same extent as men's work. In addition, women make strategic choices about their possibility for success in the male-dominated area of politics and screen themselves out.

Brodie (1991) contends that a major obstacle for women is that of financial resources, particularly given the high costs of running for nomination, political office or leadership. Women on average earn approximately 60 cents for every dollar earned by a man, and given that the profile of women who present themselves for elected office does not usually include a well-connected corporate network, women do not generally have the same financial advantages as men do.⁴ In addition, women 'choose' to run as candidates for the minor or marginal parties and when running for a major party, women are often placed in marginal or no-win ridings. (Brodie: 1991). Sylvia Bashevkin (1991) notes that within the political hierarchy, women are less likely to fill positions that have more power or influence.

The major parties have all taken measures to legislate some form of improved

participation by women. These incentives include funds to assist women candidates, workshops to encourage and develop women as candidates, legislated parity at party conventions, and in the case of the NDP, parity in the party hierarchy. However, these changes have not yet translated into significant increases in women's participation either as candidates or as members of parliament. (Erickson: 1991).

Building Consensus

Canada is a large sparsely populated country, which has intense regional differences, disparities and loyalties. The English/French language and culture division is strong and the issue of nation and self government continues to be hotly debated, especially in the context of Quebec and in the First Nations communities. Many aspects of this Canadian reality lead to a potentially divided, volatile and fragmented society. It is no wonder that in choosing a federal government, the choice is to select a party which will work to build consensus or at least negotiate compromises. While theoretically the FPC platform would indicate that building consensus was their way of working, given the patriarchal nature of Canadian society, this would likely not be perceived to be the case by most of the public.

Leadership

Both Engelmann (1983) and Van Loon and Wittington (1987) speak to the importance of leadership to Canadian voters. "Canadians are highly leadership-oriented when they come to making their voting decisions. Survey results indicate that orientations toward the leader do make a considerable difference." (Van Loon and Wittington: 1987, 398). This was likely a factor in the difficulties potentially encountered by the FPC in appealing to the electorate in its developmental stage and would have continued if candidates had been put forward for election. Central to feminist process and organizing is cooperation and collectivity, a non-hierarchical structure, and shared leadership which often translates into leadership not being explicitly named. As stated in the Introduction, and further developed in chapters 2 and 3, the FPC worked to avoid the reproduction of hierarchical structures and leaders who had more power than other members. In spite of this, Zaborsky states that this resulted in the FPC becoming "dependent on more or less powerful personalities to transact business" (Zaborsky: 1987, 619). A leader-oriented party is not a necessity for electoral success in all liberal democracies. Indeed, Kvennalistinn, the Iceland Women's party which holds elected office in parliament, operates with a collective approach to leadership. Although it took the Icelandic media and the public some time to adjust to this new concept, it appears that this alternative is finding acceptance. This point is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Women's Agenda

A party which articulates a solid ideological platform around a radical feminist analysis would have little hope in gaining federal office. Such a stance would tend to polarize and divide rather than bring together Canada's diverse population. Yet not all FPC members envisioned gaining federal office as the priority of the FPC.

In Fiona Nelson's speech cited at the beginning of this chapter, she asked the question; 'how could such a life-affirming platform be divisive?' By 1979, the second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement in Canada had been under way for some 15 years. During this time, organizations had been formed, services for women had emerged, consciousness-raising had happened on a large scale, research had been undertaken regarding women's lives and the status of women in society. In addition, within universities women's studies had developed, feminist publications blossomed, and women organized and mobilized around issues of concern such as rape, abortion, and child support. A Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) was appointed in 1967 in response to lobbying from concerned women. The RCSW report was submitted in 1970 with 166 recommendations, resulting in government funds being made available for woman-centred, equality-seeking initiatives. The recommendations were comprehensive and generally supported by women's groups. Indeed the report was seen by many as a major tool for change.

Such change in the status of women, both proposed and actual, did meet with resistance which was expressed in different ways. In electoral politics, more women were provided with and took the opportunity to run for office. However as mentioned earlier, women were encouraged to run primarily in unwinnable ridings.

The Role of the Media

In general, the media does not respect women as politicians, preferring to comment on their style of dress or personal life rather than on their approach to the issues. Gertrude Robinson and Armande Saint-Jean noted that political women and men are treated differently. They found that the media tends "to ignore the substance of a female incumbent's speeches in favour of her personal characteristics (looks, hair, dress)" (Robinson and Saint-Jean: 1991, 151). Given that the media focus is usually on party leaders, women in politics have limited visibility. "Because women are rarely selected for visible and strategic party positions, they also receive less media exposure" (ibid, 133).

The FPC Challenge

Despite the obstacles, some women do achieve elected office. The women elected generally have not been assigned portfolios associated with power and prestige.⁵ There are some parallels here with women gaining suffrage. As Siân Reynolds states in Women,

State and Revolution: "The relation between women and politics - the state, the world of public power - has always been a problematic one ... the modern woman recognises that when women did get the vote in various countries, that effectively demobilised the formidable energies that had been devoted to getting it, and served to mask the reality that women continued to be excluded from power." (Reynolds: 1986, xii). In much the same way, women's energies were diffused as they tried to participate in the existing political system but were not able to participate from a position of power. Given this lack of support, it is not surprising that some feminists chose to establish an autonomous place to organize for political representation and power.

The changing political, social and economic status of women throughout the 1970's along with the growing, vocal, complex and comprehensive women's movement provided a space for women to question their absence in the governments and the places of decision-making for the country. This questioning led the women of the FPC to try to envision and bring into being the third proposal of Hester Eisenstein in Contemporary Feminist Thought, as she considers the options for women choosing to live their feminism:

First there is the option of agreeing to compete in the male-defined world of politics on its own terms. Second, there is the option of withdrawing from the world, out of pessimism as to its essentially patriarchal nature, creating instead another world of female retreat. Finally, there is the option of entering the world and attempting to change it, in the image of the woman-centred values at the core of feminism. (Eisenstein: 1984, 144).

ENDNOTES

1. **Women are not the only social group excluded from participating in the political system. Janine Brodie (1991) indicates that those most often excluded from the political elite are women, the poor, and other marginal groups such as ethnic and religious minorities. Drawing upon Putnam's (1976) research, she notes, however, that women are the most under-represented social group in elected assemblies in the world.**
2. **First Nations women who were status Indians in Canada did not receive the right to vote in federal elections until 1960. (Jamieson: 1978).**
3. **The NDP has governed in five provinces and territories:**
 - in British Columbia from 1972-75 and from 1991
 - in Saskatchewan from 1944-61, 1961-64, 1971-82 and from 1991
 - in Manitoba from 1969-77 and from 1981-88
 - in Ontario from 1990
 - in the Yukon from 1985-93
4. **In recognition of the disadvantaged financial condition of women, all major federal Canadian political parties have special funds for women candidates. The NDP will allocate up to \$1000 to \$1500 per candidate, while the Liberals and Conservatives provide sums of \$700 to \$850. (Brodie: 1991, 47).**
5. **Only nineteen women have held ministerial portfolios in the Canadian House of Commons since gaining suffrage. The first was Ellen Fairclough, PC, 1950-63, who was appointed to the cabinet in 1957. Women typically have held junior cabinet posts or less influential portfolios. Exceptions include Kim Campbell, PC, 1988- (Justice and Defense), Barbara McDougall, PC, 1984- (Employment and Immigration and External Affairs), Flora McDonald, PC, 1972-88 (Employment and Immigration), and Monique Bégin, Lib, 1972-79 (Health & Welfare).**

CHAPTER 2 THE FEMINIST PARTY OF CANADA

The Feminist Party of Canada (FPC) was founded in Toronto on June 10th, 1979. The objective of the party was to bring a feminist perspective to the Canadian political arena. The FPC captured the imagination of the many women and the few men who were involved or who lent their support. Activities of the party were varied and included the publication of a newsletter, organizing public forums and educational workshops, developing policy and position statements, and bringing a feminist analysis of issues to municipal elections in Toronto.¹ Efforts were made to become an officially registered political party. At the same time, members tried to creatively structure the party in a non-hierarchical way, according to feminist values and principles.

During the three years of its life, the FPC did not field a single candidate in an election nor did it ever achieve official party status. The last published FPC newsletter was dated March 1982 and there is no recorded FPC activity after this date.

This chapter provides an overview of the life of the Feminist Party of Canada and explores several questions. These include how difference and diversity were dealt with, how the tension between mainstream and alternative visions were managed and the controversy concerning the involvement of men in the party. This discussion draws upon

interviews with former FPC members as well as FPC files and documents. In addition, I examine the vision which inspired the FPC and the party's activities and processes which expressed a feminist politic. Finally, the chapter examines the question of why the party ceased to function in 1982.

The Beginning of the Feminist Party of Canada

In 1978, several women involved in the Toronto women's movement began to meet and talk about what had been accomplished in the feminist struggle to date. The idea of a women's political party emerged from these exchanges as a strategy to facilitate women's full participation in the formal political process.

On February 11, 1979 about 100 women met at Hart House at the University of Toronto campus. This was advertised as an open forum to discuss the "principles, priorities and process of the women's political party". The women who organized this event were Laura Sabia, Johanna Stuckey, Shelagh Wilkinson, Maryon Kantaroff, Moira Armour, Sherrill Cheda and Marg Evans. These women represented a broad range of political perspectives, which was also true of the women who were interested in eventually joining the FPC. In this group there were women involved in right conservative mainstream politics, women working for equity in the educational system, women artists and peace activists, and

women with experience in organized left and grassroots politics.

During this initial meeting, discontent was expressed with the existing elected government. The need to effect change to increase women's participation was identified as a priority. The political sphere was targeted because it was seen as an important site for feminist struggle. However, there was a division in the group as to how this change could be achieved. "... we could not agree on the most effective approach: should it be that of a political party or that of a feminist caucus. A troublesome question was raised: how could we expect women, with only their gender in common, to take unified action ..." (FPC. Interim Committee, 1979).

During the February meeting and in subsequent discussions, differences were resolved among the women who continued to work with this project. A brief analysis was done of the work of women in power, that is of those women who had achieved elected office. It was noted that until 1979, most female politicians did not maintain links with women's groups or represent women's concerns while in office, regardless of their backgrounds. The conclusion was that male-centred political power structures marginalized women's issues and perspectives and caused women to deny their roots in order to survive in this system. "We recognized the necessity of a women's political party; for only then, when the potential candidate has a context within the party and is shielded by the party structure, would she be able to maintain feminist beliefs while in office." (FPC. Interim

Committee, 1979).

A new interim committee of some 25 to 30 women was established at the February meeting and continued to meet weekly to organize the first public meeting of June 10th, 1979. These women discussed philosophy, strategy and structure and prepared position papers regarding the FPC, a structure of eight working committees and an application form and process for interim FPC party membership.

This first public meeting of the FPC took place at OISE (the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) at the University of Toronto and attracted 600 to 700 people, predominantly women. The organizers were astonished by the response. An audio-tape recording of the proceedings (FPC, June 1979) captures the excitement and energy of this her/historic day which was celebrated with music, readings, speakers and general discussion. The day was unique, as one organizer and founder explains: "It could not just be straight old dull politics. You could not have a feminist party without music, without art, this was a feminist revolution!" (FPC/Steele: 1992, F. Forman). Margaret Evans facilitated the event, and the speakers included Laura Sabia, Angela Miles and Mary O'Brien.

The First Public Meeting of the Feminist Party of Canada

In the opening speech, Margaret Evans provided background information as to why and how the Feminist Party of Canada had come to be organized. Working with the established system was seen as taking too long to effect any meaningful change for women. She calculated that if women's participation in the federal government was to increase at the current rate, it would take 842 years to see the equal representation of women and men! Women had valuable contributions to make and did not want to wait. In addition, she indicated that these contributions should be made on women's terms. She considered that the FPC would speak for women whose concerns were not represented by the established political parties.

Laura Sabia, from the Conservative party, identified herself as a devil's advocate and did not speak in support of forming a feminist party. Rather, she called for a political caucus where women could be strong, have clout to "push around the boys if we had to". She did not believe women would be united under the feminist banner. She also cautioned everyone that practically speaking, establishing a political party required lots of money and energy, support which she doubted would be available to the FPC. She also pointed out that it would be difficult to build a national party from Toronto. She felt there were possibilities for women in the established political parties and that women should stop being nice and polite and should take up those spaces. Her words: "let's be sophisticated,

let's be like the fellahs" demonstrates her preferred strategy of 'fighting the good fight', as she stated, using the established political and organizational forms. (FPC: June 1979).

Another participant on the panel, Angela Miles, now a professor of Sociology at OISE, spoke about the FPC as part of a new phase of the feminist struggle. She indicated that much had been accomplished in terms of creating networks of support services for women by women and also in terms of the development of research and sophisticated feminist theory. She believed that women had been changed by the feminist movement, saw the world differently and were prepared to take action. She saw 1979 as a turning point, a time to explore new directions and expand the existing feminist networks. The FPC, which she imagined would be shaped over time, was a new form of organization which would provide a structure to translate women's consciousness into political power. The experience of the FPC, she believed, would be part of the struggle of changing the laws and structures in our society to reflect the values and concerns of women.

Mary O'Brien, a well known academic, activist and writer who authored The Politics of Reproduction (1981), called for the creation of a feminist party. Like Angela Miles and Marg Evans, she believed the FPC was critical because the present and the future could not be left to men and their systems of dominance and control of nature and of one another. She believed that this time required a political initiative with new values, which she and the others referred to as a 'politics of integration'. Mary O'Brien drew links

between the many forms of violence in society - sexual harassment, wife battering, exploitation of women's work, both paid and unpaid, and militarism - and argued that the agenda of the FPC was to change this. She recognized that this was a daunting task yet stated that "... we don't want that because it's good in the ethical sense or because it represents good theory. We want it because the conditions of our lives at this moment in history are such that if we don't do it, we won't be around. We must escape from the politics of violation." (FPC: June 1979). The resounding applause for Mary O'Brien's talk indicated that her words resonated with those in attendance.

In her closing remarks, Mary O'Brien remarked that the ideas expressed by the opening panel supporting the FPC were idealistic and utopian. She concluded, however, that such visioning is essential to the creative process. "We are not going to build a new world on vision alone. But we also know we are not going to build a new world without it." (FPC: June 1979).

Issues of Difference Emerge

Many of the issues which were to plague the FPC in the three years of its life emerged at this first public meeting. Laura Sabia raised the practical issues of the need for financial support and the difficulty of building a national party from Toronto. Comments

and questions from the floor raised several other issues.

During the discussion, the first speaker from the floor was a lesbian. She suggested that the CBC and other media should be asked to send women journalists in order to ensure that the FPC story would be told from the perspective of a woman, not a man. She asked pointedly if it would be possible to be visible in her lesbian identity while working with the FPC. In response to the issue of lesbian visibility, Margaret Evans indicated that the FPC "didn't have a position on that, although she didn't see it as a problem". Angela Miles responded to the question as part of the issue of difference and suggested that the FPC needed to build structures so that "all women could get to know each other as they are, not through the stereotypes which divide us". Mary O'Brien concluded that given "the energy and commitment which lesbians bring to the feminist community, that the FPC could not be built without them". In fact, lesbians did have a presence in the FPC, some of the women interviewed estimated that 25 percent of the active members were lesbian. Vocal and visible lesbian participation did appear to be an issue for some in the FPC. Gayle Laws suggests in her findings that there was a lesbian/heterosexual split in the FPC because "The heterosexual women felt that the lesbians were more concerned about promoting women's gay culture than in forming a political party" (Laws: 1989, 118).

From my research, the most distinct division in the FPC was around the issue of whether the party should focus on electoral politics and getting candidates elected or develop its

base through education, consciousness-raising, direct actions, and creating an alternative non-hierarchical feminist structure. This split was expressed sharply in the debate about the participation of men within the party, which has at times been characterized as a lesbian/heterosexual split. However everyone interviewed for this study, who recalled the debate on the 'man question', indicated that there were lesbians and non-lesbians on both sides of the debate. These themes will be expanded upon throughout this chapter.

No one responded to the comment about the male journalists and camera operators, even though throughout the event it was clearly stated that the FPC was a place for women and men. The FPC pamphlet (1980) indicated that the membership was open to men and women who supported their agenda. The question of men's involvement was not addressed fully at this first meeting, nor was it ever resolved in the FPC. According to Dorothy Zaborsky (1987) and others, this issue of men's participation was a catalyst which led to the FPC's demise.

Two women, who identified themselves as socialists and feminists, spoke strongly of the need for feminist perspectives on all political issues and saw that the best method of ensuring this was to work within the existing party system rather than diffusing women's energy or working in 'isolation'. This concern, which raised the recurring question of whether to work inside or outside the mainstream systems, ignored the essence of the arguments which Angela Miles and Mary O'Brien and, to a certain extent, Margaret

Evans brought to the panel - i.e., that the existing system did not value the contributions which women make to society; that the values of the male/mainstream political system were antithetical to women's values of nurturing, caring, etc.; that women must separate from their values and roots in order to 'survive' in such a male system; and that, most importantly, the processes and structures which make up the established political process engender a hierarchical, power-over model (which Mary O'Brien called the politics of violation) and that the FPC was looking to create a new model for political involvement which incorporated women's values and experiences in its processes and structures.

One woman commenting from the floor, reduced the FPC agenda to one of 'women against men' or 'fighting male chauvinism'. This understanding missed the nuanced analysis brought by the speakers on the panel. Another speaker reiterated Laura Sabia's scepticism about uniting women under a feminist banner. She raised the question of class differences among women in asking how the FPC could speak to working class women, immigrant women and women in the service industry while also appealing to those women who aspired to the elite and to the boardrooms, the sites of corporate and political decision-making.

The ideas expressed and discussed at this first public meeting of the FPC were rich and exciting. The commitment of the women present to redefine society from a feminist perspective was evident in the passion and emotion of the exchanges. Although a shared

goal was evident, there were differences of opinion as to how that goal should be achieved.

What Kind of Feminism?

The founders of the Feminist Party of Canada hesitated to define the politic expressed by the FPC. The alternative structure proposed, combined with the agenda of empowering women and transforming the patriarchal system, would seem to indicate a radical feminist agenda. The project of participating in the mainstream political process in order to gain power would suggest a liberal feminist agenda.

Naomi Black (1988, 94) ascribes a radical feminist orientation to the women who attempted to form the FPC. Adamson, Briskin and McPhail (1988, 73) concur and add that the platform was reminiscent of the maternal feminism of the first wave. "In the nineteenth-century maternal-feminist claim of female superiority and the link between biology and morality we can see the seeds of contemporary radical feminism." (Adamson, Briskin & McPhail: 1992, 31). This is expressed clearly in the early document "Toward a Canadian Feminist Party" (FPC: April 1979) where it was affirmed that through "moral values, social relationships - women have taken historic responsibility for all that which renders communities more fully human." Hence the conclusion, "If politics is the process through which society safeguards the humanity of its members, then women belong in

politics; and if politics is not such a process, then clearly women are needed to make it so."

Among the women who were members of the party, there were different impressions about the nature of the feminism expressed by the FPC. "We were all radical - there was no question about it. It was a radical event." (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. Armour). It was "liberal feminism with occasional leaking through of radical feminism." (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. MacDonald). It was "radical and revolutionary!" (FPC/Steele: 1992, D. Wedlock). "On the face of it it was liberal through and through. There were radical pockets. I would see socialism as a radical agenda with different priorities and there were definitely socialists in our ranks." (FPC/Steele: 1992, H. Lenskyj). When asked what kind of feminism the FPC expressed, one woman who joined the FPC in 1981 responded, "By the time I got there, that was the question." (FPC/Steele: 1992, J. Blackwood).

Founding members Angela Miles, Diana Wedlock, Frieda Forman and Moira Armour spoke of the visionary nature of the feminism which the organizers of the FPC were endeavouring to express. Angela Miles in the introduction to Feminism: From Pressure to Politics (1989), uses the terms 'integrative' or 'transformative' feminism to describe a feminism which transcends the usual categories (liberal, socialist, radical, lesbian, and anarchist feminisms) and integrates the analysis and strategies of each in the work for transformative change. Mary O'Brien also used the term 'politics of integration' in her

opening talk at the June 10th, 1979 meeting to describe the feminist vision she imagined for the FPC. Another member described it as a 'world vision', that is, a feminist political analysis of the world, not just 'women's issues'.

The intent of the FPC appeared to be to bring feminists from the various ideological perspectives together to work towards common goals - the integrative feminism described by some of the founders. The politic of the FPC was purposefully defined in broad terms in order to create space for this diversity. It is important to remember that during the time of the FPC, an analysis and integration of the politics of diversity was limited. Certainly, the impact of race and ethnicity in creating divisions among women were not dealt with systematically in organizations in 1979. As a result, the FPC's concept of diversity had limitations. I will return to this point later on in the chapter.

What was perceived as a lack of clarity regarding the ideological basis of the party, created such ambiguity that in 1981 "nobody quite knew what it was we were supposed to be doing." (FPC/Steele: 1992, J. Blackwood). Due to limited resources and for strategic reasons, priorities needed to be established by the FPC. This resulted in internal tension among the different currents of feminist thought. There were few mechanisms in place for mediation or resolution because a formal structure had not been defined for the FPC and the process was very loose.

Feminist Party of Canada Activity

Following the June 1979 meeting, the core of the FPC stabilized in Toronto at between 50 and 100 people² who attended strategy sessions every two weeks and prepared FPC activities. The energy was intense. As one woman said, "We experienced that we were living in a revolution." (FPC/Steele: 1992, F. Forman). There was a burst of activity as study groups were established, courses, panels, and workshops organized. A newsletter was regularly published during the three years of the FPC, policy papers were researched and written, and an FPC presence was evident at municipal events. There was cooperative involvement with IWD (International Women's Day) activities, CARAL (Canadian Abortion Rights Action League), NAC (National Action Committee on the Status of Women), the anti-nuclear movement, and eventually with the Federal Ad Hoc Conference on the Constitution in 1981 and the "Fight the Right" campaign in 1982. Efforts were made to define an alternative structure for the FPC and members worked to establish the FPC as an officially recognized political party.

Initially, the mainstream media covered FPC activities and positions, but that soon ended. According to feminist reports in Broadside (1979), the media was generally derisive in its reporting on the FPC, reflecting a patriarchal bias with such commentary as; "women with political ambitions would do much better to do what men have always done" and headlines such as; "There's no sexy way to power" (Toronto Star as reported by Heather

Brown: 1979, 5). No value or space was given to the FPC's concern about the need for a feminist analysis and the frustration felt by women who attempted to bring this perspective to traditional party politics.

The FPC was visible in the 1980 Toronto municipal elections with members attending all candidates' meetings prepared to ask questions and discuss issues of concern to women. FPC women were also active in many other projects including organizing against interventionist obstetrics, organizing with the disarmament coalitions for peace, presenting briefs to the CRTC regarding women and advertising, celebrating IWD and linking with other groups such as the National Action Committee.

Some women in the Toronto FPC were also very active organizing study groups, workshops, and courses around topics as varied as "Feminism and Mental Health", "The Power of Feminist Politics", "Feminism and Spirituality", "Organizing for Political Change", "Women and Sport", "Women and the Media", "Consciousness Raising", and "Feminist Issues in Philosophy". High priority was given to educational activities in the FPC. These courses were seen as an important part of the educational and consciousness-raising process of women and critical to building a theoretical base for the FPC.

In discussions about FPC activity, it soon became apparent that there were two distinct perspectives or understandings about what the FPC was or could be. These perspectives

were not mutually exclusive and in fact could coexist, albeit with some difficulty. There were those who imagined that the FPC would focus on doing the work necessary to gain elected political office. Other women were concerned with education and consciousness-raising and building alternative organizational forms, consistent with feminist values, in the quest for political power. Those who had originally envisioned the FPC saw these two pieces fitting together. A founding member stated that the objective of the FPC was "to participate in the narrowly defined political arena, but not be contained within it and to transform it at the same time." (FPC/Steele: 1992, A. Miles). Few, if any, models of such a project were in operation and new ground was being charted. The Icelandic Women's Alliance was not yet created. FPC files included copies of the constitution of the *Partis Féministes Unifiés* of France and Belgium which was referred to but not adopted by the FPC.

The objective of gaining elected office is concrete and straightforward, though no less daunting than the second objective of consciousness-raising and transforming the notions of power and politics which is conceptually more vague and presents greater and different challenges. Consequently it was more difficult to express the latter clearly. This lack of clarity about the purpose of the FPC continued throughout its short life. While some women went to events, shopping centres, and door to door in an effort to collect the 10,000 signatures required to be registered as a political party (a goal which was never achieved), others were more focused on the study groups and their own processes of

growth as feminists. Women with both perspectives came together in the Strategy, Creative Bureaucracy, and Coordinating committees which attempted to put an organizational form to the feminist values of the women involved, for the purpose of building a political presence.

Membership

The FPC published thirteen newsletters from July 1979 through March 1982. These publications chart the activities of the FPC as well as the questions and concerns of the membership. The FPC remained an organization run completely on volunteer time and energy. It was a labour of love and hope. Given the context of women's lives, this also meant frequent turnover, burnout, and lack of continuity in some cases. Financial resources were scarce and the FPC survived on membership fees (ranging from \$1.00 to \$5.00) and the personal contributions of women involved. An office space was finally secured for August 1981 which provided some sense of stability. Until then, FPC files were carried around in the trunks of the cars of FPC members or kept in kitchens and basements throughout Toronto. The base upon which the FPC was building then was not solid in the sense that there was never enough money for the basics and the party depended heavily on women's time and energy for survival. Given the vague nature of the structure, it was difficult to involve and integrate new members. As a result, those

activists involved were over-extended in their work.

The FPC was a vision in the making. True to feminist process, the input of constituents (women) was essential to the creative process. Yet this very process of being "in the works" limited the involvement of women. As expressed by a Peterborough member who was working to set up a local chapter, "some (women) are hesitant to commit themselves while the FPC is still working on its basic principles. The platform is still wide open, and this is unnerving for anyone used to the old political parties." (FPC: December 1979).

While correspondence, the membership lists and the sprouting up of local chapters indicated a marked interest in the FPC by women from across Canada, the party remained predominantly Toronto-based. Dorothy Zaborsky states: "The membership of the FPC was mostly Anglo-Canadian and middle class ... In general, there was considerable self consciousness about the relative lack of variety in members' backgrounds." (Zaborsky: 1987, 616). There was perhaps need for a broader, more inclusive framework to facilitate a more diverse participation. Did the practices of the FPC contribute to this homogeneity in party membership?

The women who initiated the FPC came together because they were friends or had worked together in the women's movement or through their involvement with mainstream

political parties. Similarly, many women who joined the FPC had found out about the organization through friends or fellow students. Some women learned of it through public events, advertisements and the media. Most women interviewed perceived the FPC membership in Toronto as diverse in terms of age, sexual orientation, awareness of feminist issues and political perspectives. Social class was not specifically commented on although one member allowed that to participate in FPC meetings and activities required significant amounts of available time. There is no doubt that this factor consequently limited the involvement of women who did not have the privilege of determining their use of time. The FPC was not diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. It would appear that the FPC membership did reflect Zaborsky's observations.

There was a heavy involvement of academics and students. Women whose focus was primarily grassroots were less likely to become involved. "There had developed among grassroots feminists a real distrust of the political system and they didn't want to be associated with it." (FPC/Steele: 1992, J. Blackwood). "Most of the women were white, middle-class feminists, and a lot were from an academic background - either teaching or going to university. I can't specifically recall women of colour. And I can't recall other women with disabilities - I have a disability. The age range was a bit broader, there were women in their 20's to women in their 50's, probably even 60's, but still a cluster around 30." (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. Trafford) "There was a large representation of lesbians." (FPC/Steele: 1992, D. Wedlock).

As the FPC strategies and positions were discussed and decided upon at the every second Sunday meetings, "members outside of Toronto couldn't give much input and couldn't get much out of it." (FPC/Steele: 1992, H. Lenskyj). Women with paid work in addition to other responsibilities, as in the case of single mothers, would have found it difficult to make time for involvement in the FPC. Meetings often went on for three hours or more as much time was given to discussing issues.

The FPC did attract many women who were otherwise not interested in traditional politics. One member who was involved in the study groups for three years reflected on her participation; "I'm not a particularly political animal so politics and all that dynamic were a fringe interest for me." (FPC/Steele: 1992, A. Hill). Another woman involved in organizing stated, "I was never very interested in mainstream politics. Maybe I was drawn into the political party because of the women and the comradeship. Certainly ever since, I've never been interested in politics and never before as far as joining a political party." (FPC/Steele: 1992, D. Wedlock). These comments are interesting as the members speaking are defining "politics" in the narrow sense of electoral and party politics. Yet each have continued to be "political" within a broader definition of politics - working within a range of institutions and networks in civil society. After the party ceased to exist, FPC activists continued to work politically on a number of issues, bringing a feminist perspective.

While the structure, process and priorities of the FPC may have excluded some women, they also opened up the possibility for other women to participate who would not otherwise have done so if the party had taken another more conventional form.

One founding member indicated that women "self-selected" to become part of the FPC after considering the stated vision. Following the initial media bonanza in 1979, information about the FPC was circulated via the newsletter, in public and feminist forums and among friends and colleagues. White, middle class, academic, visionary feminists were doing the writing, and established personal and professional networks were depended upon for dissemination and recruitment. Thus, it is not surprising that those who 'self-selected' reflected the social background of the organizers. The organized movement of immigrant and visible minority women had not yet formed by 1979 in Canada. As a result, an anti-racist critique was not a part of the lived FPC experience and was to confront Canadian feminist organizations some years later.

Over time, there evolved considerable differences among members in their awareness of feminist issues and analyses. One founding member mentioned that with respect to articulating the FPC's feminist vision, "we didn't define it in too much detail. We more or less knew what each of us felt." (FPC/Steele: 1992, F. Forman). However, interviews and FPC minutes indicated that not all members were steeped in feminist theory. The unevenness in knowledge of feminist theory created difficulties. "There were some women

who really didn't know very much about feminism, but it interested them. Sometimes some women were annoyed at their lack of sophistication. I remember one woman who thought we should invite a male MP, mainstream politician to come and tell us how to do politics. She couldn't understand why women were so appalled at that idea." (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. Trafford).

The founders who carried on with the FPC wanted to change the notion of what a political party is. Strategically this meant commitment to a process of internal development which the FPC tried to build through educational workshops and outreach. The founding members were aware that building the political movement and consciousness which they envisioned would take time. Central organizing principles of cooperation, caring, and support were new to the traditional political sphere. The FPC platform was intrinsically tied to an articulation of these values in both party policy and practice. Thus the FPC worked to develop an alternative non-hierarchical structure without leaders and consensus based forms of decision-making along with party policy which expressed a transformative feminist vision. "We needed a fully established alternative system before running candidates so that we wouldn't become a creature of the system." (FPC/Steele: 1992, A. Miles). Another founder agreed that building political consciousness/movements is a slow process and felt that some members were naive in expecting changes to come quickly. "Some people lost enthusiasm because they didn't feel it was going anywhere." (FPC/Steele: 1992, F. Forman).

Structure

Recognizing the need to put form to the FPC vision, early on, Mary O'Brien wrote that "we must try to achieve as soon as possible the creative organization necessary to keep the party functioning as a true exponent of our radicalism." (FPC Newsletter, October 1979). In the same issue of the newsletter, the President of the Peel/Halton FPC chapter raised questions about autonomy, the distribution of money from membership sales, and communication via committee minutes. Already the organizational form of this chapter was mirroring that of the mainstream, hierarchical political party structure, rather than the radical alternatives imagined. Yet the FPC founders saw self organization locally as being the responsibility of the feminists involved.

A member from Thunder Bay in the same newsletter applauded the FPC project while explicitly naming the leadership issue: "Consider me a small rock in the building of a bridge that must be built between leadership and the working class woman. I shall be looking for that leadership in our new party and I suggest to you all that whether we arrive or not is secondary, just getting the show on the road will raise the political hair on the bureaucracy." (FPC Newsletter, October 1979). Unfortunately, these new forms of political organizing, although lived out in various ways in the context of the FPC, were never agreed upon and documented. The FPC tried to come to terms with an organization

which "reflects where we are, where we are going and what we believe in ... avoiding the too heavy structure which is typical of conventional political power." (FPC Newsletter, July 1980). FPC members could not agree to a structure which reflected the diverse priorities and politics of the group.

By 1981, the absence of an articulated structure resulted in the FPC not being invited to the deliberations about the Canadian constitution. In response, Mary O'Brien took the FPC members to task in her editorial comments: "It is very urgent that we face up to our feminist distaste for structure and leadership and ask how we can actually propose to do political things." (FPC Newsletter, April/May 1981).

Dorothy Zaborsky (1987, 617) argued that "what crystallized here was the divergence of opinion on this issue, namely, political party versus lobby group." From discussions with former FPC members, it would appear that the issue was not one of either/or, rather a "question of priorities" and, I would add, differing understandings about feminist organizing. Establishing an organizational form in the case of the FPC required the careful balancing of both liberal and radical feminist strategies. "The uncomfortable reality is that feminist practice is rooted in a central contradiction; it must somehow situate itself with respect to the apparently contradictory demands of two different but equally essential politics." (Adamson, Briskin & McPhail: 1988, 186). The two politics referred to here are 'mainstreaming' or interacting with the established systems and dealing with what is and

'disengagement' or creating a vision from an autonomous space of what could be. The FPC was trying to incorporate both approaches.

One member felt that the women involved in the Toronto core were visionary rather than organizational in their skills and interests. Basically, the structure was open so that women could put their energy into their preferred priorities, which varied. "Different people had different objectives." (FPC/Steele: 1992, F. Forman). Without a formal structure to mediate these differences, the FPC lost coherence.

Meetings continued on a regular basis, however the number of committees were reduced over time and general meetings never again received the same interest as the first public meeting in 1979. Women involved in the FPC were very busy - besides FPC activity and personal projects, many were actively involved with other social justice groups. It appeared that the focus of the FPC had been lost. By September 1981, after the opening of the FPC office, the editorial in the newsletter confirmed that the FPC had gone through a period of confusion and uncertainty about priorities which was now over. While some members had left the FPC, new women were continuing to become involved. A coordinating committee to facilitate the work of the FPC was formed and work was under way to meet the stated priority of establishing the FPC as an official party in Ontario.

Interestingly enough, the coordinating committee which was named at the September 1981

annual general meeting, was subsequently challenged by some of the FPC membership. This challenge was based upon what was perceived as a lack of support for electoral political organizing. In fact, most coordinating committee members' interests were in areas other than conventional electoral politics. The FPC priority of getting signatures and influencing municipal elections was not shared by everyone. The informal FPC structure allowed the focus of the membership activities to be dispersed among several interests. The discussion about politics and priorities was further muddled due to the 'man question' which began to gain salience in the fall of 1981.

The Man Question?

The question of men's involvement in the FPC became an issue at the September 1981 general meeting when a man proposed that he become a member of the coordinating committee. Three members quit in consequence saying they would not work with a man in this capacity. He subsequently withdrew and the women who had quit resumed their work on the coordinating committee. Reporting on this issue, the newsletter stated that the "opinions were divided and the issue was shelved." (FPC Newsletter, November 1981). By this time, one of the founders, Angela Miles, had moved out of the province and Mary O'Brien, who was a driving force and inspiration in the FPC, became less involved due to health-related reasons. As the question of men continued to divide the

membership, involvement in meetings and party activity fell off. The last newsletter published in March 1982 raised the questions of 'what does it mean to be a feminist?' and 'what does it mean for a man to claim to be a feminist?'. FPC involvement dwindled in 1982 after an explosive spring meeting dealing with the participation of men in the party. Women were bitterly divided on the question. Activity ceased and there was no closing meeting.

The women interviewed for this study were divided about whether the debate regarding men's participation contributed to the decline of the FPC. Some contend that it was an important catalyst; "the most immediate cause of the demise of the Feminist party was the role of men in the party." (CWMA, 1984). This member of the coordinating committee during 1981/82 believed that polarization occurred around the discussion of FPC politics and priorities due to men; "why it came down to an either/or was the role of men." (ibid). She felt that the real issue was a division over the definition of what constituted 'politics'.

Others asserted that the question of men was a 'red herring' and came at a time when the party was vulnerable. Another member did not recall the debate about men at all, although she remembered a lesbian/heterosexual split at the time and also noted an internal power struggle for the informal leadership of the party which centred on the question of what is feminist politics.

The debate of men's participation and the question of what politic was to guide the FPC were intertwined. Some members felt that if the FPC was to become an official political party, men could not be excluded from participating. Former FPC members Pat Hughes (1989) and Dorothy Zaborsky (1987) argued strongly for the inclusion of men in the party. Hughes suggests that excluding men from a political party would not make sense as a party should try "to appeal to as many people as possible within the confines of its ideological base" (Hughes: 1989, 414). Pat Hughes affirmed that women would be practising the same oppressive tactics as traditionally used by men if men were excluded from the membership of the party. She further states that a party would be practising discrimination based on biologically-determined criteria if men were barred from participation. Referring to political organizing, she concludes that "a feminist politics that is exclusionary in its most public face is not feminism at all - it is a continuation of the man's point of view, a continuation of male exclusionary tactics and politics" (Hughes: 1989, 416). She did feel there should be limitations on men's participation. For example, Hughes argued that only women should be spokespersons for the party.

Other FPC members disagreed with Zaborsky and Hughes and expressed an analysis similar to that of Christine Delphy. Delphy argues that men to varying degrees participate in, benefit from, and perpetuate patriarchy. "To accuse women of 'inverse sexism' ... is reactionary, because it posits a symmetry between oppressor and oppressed. To decry or exclude those who oppress you is not symmetrical with decrying or excluding those

whom you oppress." (Delphy: 1984, 110). Further, autonomous spaces for women to organize politically was viewed by some FPC members as a way to build strength and cohesion rather than as an exclusionary practice.

Mary O'Brien spoke out strongly against the exclusion of men. This was significant as for many, Mary O'Brien was the unofficial spokeswoman for the party. "Mary O'Brien was during the life of the FPC, the FPC." (FPC/Steele: 1992, J. Blackwood). "People really relied terrifically on her publishing, speaking, and her analysis." (FPC/Steele: 1992, . . . Wedlock). This development raises the question of leadership and informal power structures within the party - questions which I will take up in more depth in chapter 3.

The polarization arising out of these debates had lasting and unfortunate consequences. Some women who had previously been friends no longer spoke to each other. It was clear to those involved that the FPC was in decline. In any case, "It was the end of a dream, so to some extent it was somewhat bitter." (CWMA, 1984). Yet today, eleven years since the last FPC meeting, some members still refer to the party as being 'dormant' rather than dead, implying a possible future for a renewed FPC.

Conclusion

By 1982, what had begun three years previously as a vibrant movement, capturing the imaginations of many women across Canada, was now silent. Some attributed the demise of the FPC to the question of men's involvement. Others pointed to other divisive issues in the party. These included competing feminist agendas, the lesbian/heterosexual split, the Toronto focus of the FPC, the absence of an explicit party structure and leadership, limited financial resources, and the varying understandings of what it means to be a political party. All of these issues were exasperated by the lack of a clearly articulated vision. Still other members maintained that life intervened and that the women heavily involved with the party simply carried on with other activities in their lives. There were insufficient numbers of new members to carry on with the work of the party.

All women interviewed for this study indicated that their involvement with the FPC was personally transforming. Several FPC members disclosed that they discovered and deepened their feminism through their involvement with the FPC. The FPC "came at exactly the right time - the teachable moment - it totally transformed my life. Feminism gave me myself" (FPC/Steele: 1992, A. Hill). Another member added that the FPC "was a very good place to develop my feminist consciousness, it affected my life quite profoundly. Some of the people that I met there were enormous influences on my life" (FPC/Steele: 1992, J. Blackwood). "I think it (the FPC) changed a lot of women's lives.

It was my first card-carrying feminist activity, so I don't want to sound judgemental, but I did see women make huge strides in their personal lives, their political lives, their intellectual lives." (FPC/Steele: 1992, H. Lenskyj). "It galvanized my focus as a radical lesbian feminist and I became more involved after the mid-80's in the gay and lesbian rights movement" (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. Trafford). Several women indicated that the FPC was "a developing ground, a proving ground" (ibid) where it was possible to explore, develop and articulate feminist ideas. One member concluded that her confidence and feminist awareness of herself led to the realization that "nobody is going to sit on you - ever again" (FPC/Steele: 1992, D. Wedlock). Many women still keep in touch with other members, remembering their friendships and connections as very special.

How a political vision is practised through feminist process and structures has a bearing in determining the outcomes of feminist work for change. This theme will be explored in chapter 3 with reference to the experience of the Feminist Party of Canada.

ENDNOTES

1. Given the large number of FPC members from Toronto, that city was the site for FPC organizing around municipal elections. As a result, a local network of party activists necessary to have an impact was built. The hope was that this model would be taken up by FPC groups in other municipalities.
2. The people who attended FPC strategy meetings were predominantly women. Some members interviewed for this study recalled that a few men attended these meetings. Others had only vague recollections about men at meetings or had forgotten their presence altogether.

CHAPTER 3

FEMINIST PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES

Feminist process describes the dynamic of how feminist groups organize and work together for change. It is rooted in and reflects the feminist vision or political ideology of a group. Just as there are many expressions of feminism, so too feminist process varies. As Nancy Hartsock states: "Feminism, while it does not prescribe an organizational form, leads to a set of questions about organizational priorities" (Hartsock: 1979, 71).

Feminism has as its goal the challenging of institutions which support patriarchy. It follows that a central organizing feature of feminist process is the reconceptualizing of power as energy and strength. As feminism has grown from an understanding of the world through the eyes of women and a valuing of women's experiences and values, feminist process ideally reflects the values of caring, cooperation and support associated with women.

Several tools have been developed as a means of expressing a feminist process in organizations. These include a collective structure which facilitates information and skill-sharing, a form of decision-making which maximizes the involvement of everyone - such as consensus, a rejection of leadership and other forms of structured authority, a sharing of responsibility and tasks and a recognition that the personal is political. Feminist process is a challenge to the traditional hierarchical and patriarchal forms of organizing.

The Feminist Party of Canada (FPC) endeavoured to organize according to feminist values and principles. The FPC is a case study of a feminist group which grappled with the difficulties and contradictions of operating with feminist process in a patriarchal/hierarchical context within which many of the activists had learned their political lessons (i.e. left, male-dominated groups) and within which the FPC was located.

This chapter considers how feminist processes are articulated by feminist groups organizing for change and how such processes are related to the feminist visions and outcomes or products of the group's work. These questions are considered particularly as they relate to the FPC experience with a view to the question of which factors contributed to the demise of the FPC. The constraints and contradictions encountered in efforts to bring about feminist process are also examined.

Why Feminist Process?

We have inherited a world which is patriarchal, capitalist and white supremacist. Traditional forms of organization are hierarchical, reproducing unequal power relations and encouraging environments which are competitive and alienating. These hierarchical or vertical organizational forms are employed by such institutions as corporations, the state, the church and the traditional family and are considered the norm. Such structures

reinforce the dominant paradigm of never-ending accumulation, ever-increasing growth, unlimited production and exploitation of labour and nature, and ever-expanding markets (Mies: 1986). The values embodied within these dominant systems and structures have moved the world to a time of interlinked social, political and ecological crises in both advanced industrialized and third world countries.

Visionaries and activists have been struggling to build resistance to this pattern of domination and to create new visions of a world where all could live in harmony. Feminism comprises one part of this struggle. The feminist vision is multifaceted. Both radical and socialist feminist visions call for a fundamental transformation and restructuring of our world, where oppression and exploitative relations do not exist, and where diversity and difference are cherished. In such visions, all people live in dignity, caring for and respecting themselves and others in a balanced relationship with the environment. Power in this revisioned world is understood as energy, strength, empowerment, power-from-within, a creative force (Hartsock: 1974, Bunch: 1980, Starhawk: 1982 & 1990), rather than power-over or domination.

This restructured world requires organizational forms and processes which reproduce this life-affirming notion of power. Both radical and socialist feminist traditions have contributed to the conscious development of feminist process. It is important to note that not all feminists are concerned about feminist process. Liberal feminism is interested in

gaining power for women in the existing systems. A revisioning of power as it is currently constituted in patriarchy is not a priority. Rather, liberal feminists direct their work so that society's institutions will be more responsive to women's and feminist's concerns in order that equality of opportunity can be achieved. Also, there are feminists from all perspectives who make strategic choices to work in more conventional organizations where attention to process is not a priority.

Our world is steeped in the principle of domination or power-over, what FPC founder Mary O'Brien called the 'politics of violation'. This value/principle is integrated into all societal institutions and ways of relating. The systems and processes which articulate domination continue to reproduce oppressive relations in our patriarchal, capitalist, white imperialist world. If a group chooses to resist the dominant systems of power-over and envision a world of cooperation, processes need to be developed to reflect this vision. In this way, the processes undertaken create or define the product/outcome/goal. Such a strategy integrates the means with the ends as efforts are made to live a feminist vision now, and in so doing, participate in the realization of the vision.

Rejecting the Master's Tools

What is now called feminist process emerged in the late 1960's and early 1970's through

organizing in grassroots feminist groups. Traditional organizations had been experienced by many women as exploitative. As a result, feminist groups worked to create collective working arrangements which rejected aspects of traditional models such as Roberts Rules of Order (Roberts: 1970), voting for decisions, and hierarchical structures with identified leadership. Instead feminist models of organizing valued women's experiences and realities and created processes from this perspective. There was an understanding that traditional forms of working and living would not help to facilitate a transformative feminist vision. As Audre Lorde (1984) stated: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

If feminism is understood as dynamic, as "a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, a way of asking questions and searching for answers, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women" (Hartsock: 1979, 58), then feminist process reflects how a group works to create change drawing upon its analysis and stated goals which, if one agrees with Hartsock, can be a continual process of discovery. Feminist process is not meant to be a static, prescriptive set of politically correct rules about how things should be done. Rather, the processes and related structures should be fluid in order to be responsive to new and emerging experiences and analyses. "We must remember that we are involved in a continuous process of learning what kind of world we want to create as we work for change" (Hartsock: 1979, 73). Therefore, process is influenced by the unfolding awareness of a future feminist vision and the

understanding of what possibilities exist are informed by our lived experiences with collective process. The two are in ongoing relationship.

"The way we live and work changes the way we think (and vice-versa), and when changes in consciousness become changes in action and behaviour the revolution has begun" (Grund: 1977). Kathy Ferguson argues this point in The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy, by demonstrating how feminist discourse and practice open up spaces for people to experience different ways of thinking, living, working and loving. These experiences provide the foundation for imagining and creating new non-oppressive ways of organizing, relating and living. According to Ferguson, feminism is a radical project to fundamentally subvert conventional definitions of politics by articulating the suppressed knowledge of women of caring and connection. "Opposition voices are a vehicle for bringing power to light as well as for altering that power" (Ferguson: 1984, 155). This ongoing feminist process of self-discovery, insight and action when not distorted by subordination contributes to the creation of "a community that recognizes the dialectical need for connectedness within freedom and for diversity within solidarity" (ibid, 197). This contrasts with the patriarchal model in which freedom entails isolation and community enforces conformity.

Several feminist process handbooks have been developed as feminist groups have documented their experiences for the purpose of sharing this information with other

groups working to create alternative organizational models.¹ Most of these works were published after the demise of the FPC.

Feminist process, when rooted in a clear political analysis and vision, is praxis - the integration of knowing and doing, reflection and action occurring simultaneously. This dynamic, like feminism, is an unfolding process and so the documented lessons from feminists who have made efforts to develop alternative models are useful guides.

These guides provide a description of several tools which have been found useful in feminist process. It is important to note that the use of these tools is no guarantee of feminist process. Instead feminist groups working for change may find the tools useful if they reflect their feminist political vision. These tools of feminist process generally refer to the facilitation of meetings, the sharing of tasks, responsibility, knowledge and skills in a group, the process for sharing the leadership functions, conflict resolution, consensus decision-making and making connections with the 'personal is political'.

The authors of the feminist process handbooks agree that a group should consider how size will influence the degree to which feminist process tools can be effective. For example, groups with twenty or more members will find consensus decision-making and checking-in² at meetings to be time consuming. Therefore, groups may develop alternative tools to achieve the same objectives as checking-in and consensus. Checking-in is meant

to create a safe and open environment without hidden agendas. In large groups, members may document their agendas or positions prior to a meeting so that everyone is aware of each other's position without taking the time for a round. Personal connections and sharing could take place at refreshment or exercise breaks prior to and at intervals throughout meetings. Consensus is a decision-making process which endeavours to take all points of view into consideration. It should reflect and grow out of a group's political principles or statement of unity. In large groups, decisions may be delegated to a working or coordinating group which has been empowered to interpret the statement of unity on behalf of the group. Or a process may be put into place where members are polled by selected group representatives in an effort to build consensus on an issue. Several creative solutions have been developed by groups according to their particular needs.

The definition of a basis of unity or statement of political value agreements related to the work of a group is central to bringing clarity to why the group is together and how it will function. A commitment should be made to define a group's principles of unity at the outset and to review them at regular intervals to ensure that they continue to reflect the positions of the members. This basis of unity is a living document used to guide and interpret decisions taken by the group. Ideally with feminist process, instead of a fixed set of procedures, the basis of unity acts as a guideline which provides a framework for thoughtful reflection and consideration of context in the process of decision-making.

The degree of diversity within a group profoundly influences its dynamics in challenging ways. A relatively homogenous group may be successful in consensus decision-making and demonstrate cohesion in their work. The absence of diversity in life experiences and political perspective may limit the possibility of diverse and creative directions. At the same time differences in groups can be divisive. This can lead to destructive or creative outcomes depending upon how a group works through these divisions. The feminist process handbooks suggest processes for dealing with difficulties in the group, what to do when consensus is blocked, and how to address power imbalances. Strategies are proposed for individual and group accountability through task and group maintenance functions which are the responsibility of the group. Recognition of achievements and time for laughter and celebration are also encouraged.

Much of feminist process, as described in the noted handbooks, describes a healthy, cooperative, democratic organization where members participate in open, direct and honest communication. Living Our Visions and Peace and Power speak to the need for developing a safe space so that women will be empowered to develop these skills. These processes are built on a foundation of trust and respect which explains why women's experiences in feminist groups range from exhilarating, when all members greet the process with integrity, to devastation when the trust has been violated.

Given that feminist process has grown out of the feminist movement of the 1970's, it has

been critiqued as representing white, middle class values. Women of colour did not have organized movements or critiques in Canada at the time of the FPC. This movement has developed through the 1980's and 1990's and has been informed and accompanied by texts such as This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color (Moraga and Anzaldúa) and the writings of several authors and activists including Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Makeda Silvera.

Most resource guides suggest that feminist process/practice and vision/theory should inform each other. Ristock (1990) has noted in her research that women's groups have taken up analyses of difference and diversity over the past decade. As these analyses are developed and integrated in theory, they will tend to be reflected in practice. Similarly, feminist practice has informed feminist theories of difference. These developments bring more depth and rigor to feminist visions and processes.

Difficulties Encountered with Implementing Feminist Process

In spite of the fact that collective arrangements developed through feminist processes encounter several difficulties, many groups continue to work to develop models which reflect their feminist values, principles and visions. There are a number of external and internal constraints which impede feminist process.

Feminists working for change are shaped by a patriarchal society and must develop some form of relationship with patriarchal institutions in the course of their work. These external factors provide the impetus for feminist resistance and struggle while limiting the processes and outcomes of feminist work.

First, feminists involved in the project of developing alternative models for organizing are socialized by a patriarchal society where patriarchal/male ways of relating are internalized. As a result, there are times when women, consciously and unconsciously, use power-over practices in their feminist work. Being aware of this potential, radical and socialist feminists suggest that in the struggle for change, each woman is responsible for scrutinizing and addressing her own patriarchal/capitalist/racist colonization. Each woman is also responsible for identifying oppressive forms in the group's work and for contributing to changes in line with a feminist vision. This expectation for personal reflection and change is demanding under any circumstance. It is especially challenging in feminist groups, which are often marginalized and ridiculed, where the group is collectively working for change and where individual women are often concerned with basic issues pertaining to survival and the quality of work and personal relationships.

Speaking out is a difficult task for oppressed people who have been systematically silenced, censored and suppressed. Yet finding one's voice is an essential component of changing ourselves and our structures, as Kathy Ferguson (1984) notes. While honest self-

examination, personal change/growth and clear expression in a safe environment are desirable in feminist group process, it is an ideal which is seldom fully achieved. Women carry over patterns of dominance from mainstream society to feminist work. It is not unusual for women to have their words used as weapons against them, at times by sister activists.

The second issue is the embeddedness of feminist organizations within the larger network of hierarchical/patriarchal organizations. We live in a patriarchal society whose institutions are hierarchical. Feminist groups must interact to varying degrees with power-over systems resulting in tensions and conflicts arising from the clash between cooperative models and hierarchical systems. The value bases of these two systems are very much in opposition, even if there exists some common purpose for working together. Maintaining relations with patriarchal structures drains energy from feminist groups and can influence the priorities and direction of the group, depending upon the power relations. The interaction between these two systems is difficult for most women who prefer to avoid conflicts and find ways of cooperation (Gilligan: 1982).

Janice Ristock conducted a national survey of feminist social service groups in Canada and found that there were recurring problems experienced by the groups: "Internal tensions such as power within collectives, differing feminist analyses, tensions between lesbian and heterosexual women, white women and women of colour, and service

providers and service recipients are issues which reflect the felt contradictions experienced in this work. There is a gap between the ideal vision of what it means to operate as a feminist collective and the real practices women engage in within collectives" (Ristock: 1990, 175).

Differing feminist analyses have led activists to take different positions about the relative importance of feminist process and product. Many feminist groups have struggled with how to balance the attention given to process and that given to achieving the end result or product. In some cases, those who focused on attaining certain goals or objectives were criticized as being male-identified/patriarchal in their way of working, while those whose concern is with process have been dismissed as ineffectual and having no direction or structure and being solely concerned with feelings. (Crow, et. al.: 1978 and Ristock: 1990). Process, structure and the completion of tasks (product) are all integral to feminist organizations.

Feminists working to transform society have repeatedly stated the need to resist traditional organizational forms and to develop forms based on feminist principles. Yet at the outset of the second wave of the feminist movement, any aspect of organizing which activists associated with the patriarchal dominant system was immediately dismissed. Structure and leadership were two of these components. Initially, many feminist groups did not develop formally defined structures because of the sense that all structures would be oppressive.

As Joreen so clearly points out in her work, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" (1973), the result was that informal systems and hierarchical structures arose, as was the case within the FPC. Similarly, leadership was conceptualized as it had most often been experienced - as authoritarian and/or paternalistic. It was not seen as a function or quality which could be transformed from its oppressive form. This continues to be an issue in feminist organizing. The result has been that those women who take on leadership functions or who have this responsibility thrust upon them, who are articulate visionaries or are known as good organizers, are not always valued or appreciated. These leaders are often plagued with guilt and burn out, as leadership is viewed as intrinsically "bad".

This suspicion of leadership has emerged from experience with mainstream organization and from the value accorded to equality in feminist groups. Within feminist circles, equality is often interpreted as sameness. If a woman takes up leadership, she sets herself apart, is seen as different and the relations of power shift. This was a key concern for feminists who initially wanted to eradicate power differences in the FPC because the assumption was that power differences resulted in oppressive behaviour. In reality, women bring diverse life experiences to feminist work. This false notion of equality minimizes differences and in some cases can be divisive. At the same time feminists are generally working to create groups where equity is a central organizing principle.

Ristock's research suggests that feminist groups find difficulty in dealing with these

contradictions and tensions. This often results in denying the differences among members and developing a homogeneous organization through the establishment of group norms or 'politically correct' standards of behaviour and analysis. This creates a cohesive group identity, a strength when confronting external forces. The cost however is the silencing and alienation of women and a denial of difference and diversity in life experience, feminist analysis, skills, and identity among members. She further states that the homogeneity claimed in the groups studied was actually a myth. "A closer examination of internal practices and assumptions points to the contradiction and power differences that are already in existence within collectives because power identities, locations and political analyses are valued over others" (Ristock: 1990, 177).

Ristock also attempts to demystify consensus decision-making which is used by collectives for the purpose of sharing power and developing group responsibility for leadership. She challenges these ideal notions by questioning the assumptions which underlie these practices - "that everyone in the group is equal in terms of sharing power and having equal skills for the process" (Ristock: 1990, 178). Women reported that "in reality it is those who are more articulate, who have been with the collective longer, and who are louder when voicing their opinions that benefit from this decision making process" (ibid). Her conclusions note that many feminist collectives are in the process of analyzing their practices and working to create changes which acknowledge diversity.

The FPC Experience

Both internal and external factors presented difficulties for the FPC in the realization of feminist process. Socialization and the patriarchal context influenced the work of the FPC. Internal obstacles included conflicting feminist analyses, power differences among members, tensions between lesbians and straight women, the issues of structure and leadership, and the question of men's participation in the party.

During the first public FPC meeting in June 1979, Mary O'Brien stated; "...this moment calls for new political initiative, new values, a politics of integration rather than a politics of violation" (FPC audiotape, 1979). The FPC pamphlet (1980) continues to express why the FPC has come together:

"The FPC-PFC has no Utopian blueprint for the future: it has the determination to act now, to act with a sense of urgency to restructure society, to make political systems respond to the mounting resistance of women to those powers which are currently paralysing our present and jeopardizing our future. It has the determination, the will and the courage to redefine life, to assert the value of integration over separation, of sufficiency over poverty, of collaboration over conquest, of creative work over drudgery, of peace over war. The FPC-PFC will become a vortex of action for women and men who believe that the process of making decisions about the disposal of wealth we create and the conditions of our lives must become an integrated, democratic, community based process. We shall struggle to learn, to teach, to resist, to create, to be hard-nosed and visionary, to be constructively enraged" (FPC pamphlet, 1980).

There were divergent notions of "politics" within the FPC. The FPC at first glance would appear to be undertaking a radical feminist project of restructuring/transforming society within the liberal feminist framework of electoral politics. It was often quoted in FPC documents that, referring to women's political representation at the federal level in 1979: "if we continue to increase our representation in Ottawa at the current rate, it will take us 842 years to get equal representation. We who are interested in forming a Feminist Party of Canada don't have that long to wait" (FPC/Marg Evans: June 1979). Given this focus, many women who supported the FPC felt that it was organizing as a political party in order to achieve elected political representation. Others interpreted the FPC vision as an opportunity to transform the notion of politics and power in feminist directions. One member reflecting on her experience with the FPC indicated that; "There were different understandings of what politics was all about. There were people who saw it more broadly than a political party" (CWMA, 1984). Another member adds to this discussion: "There were women who were very goal-oriented around becoming a political party and were frustrated that some women put a lot more priority on process than product. For some, getting a political party registered was not on the top of their list, for others getting there was the name of the game" (FPC/Steele: 1992, H. Lenskyj).

The founders of the FPC anticipated that both the liberal and radical feminist understandings and related strategies could coexist in the FPC. However, this dual or multiple strategy was not explicitly named. In addition, although there were active

committees, programs, an office, and stated principles and objectives for the organization, the FPC never clearly expressed a model of operation outlining its structure and related processes.

Dorothy Zaborsky, a member of the FPC, contends that, "A formal structure in the form of a constitution with various articles, by-laws, etc., and an executive, would have been desirable for the smooth functioning of the party" (Zaborsky: 1987, 618). In fact, the FPC was struggling to develop a structure and related processes to reflect the principles of the organization through the Creative Bureaucracy Committee (CBC). Committee minutes demonstrate that the members worked to create a new model but had difficulty bridging the theory to practical concepts. Committee notes demonstrate that the members were aware of the difficulties related to their task: "Effective organization and decision-making present serious problems for feminists because we are suspicious of power, we are distrustful of bureaucracy, we are fundamentally democratic/egalitarian and we operate in societies which are organized around power, bureaucracy and authoritarianism" (FPC, CBC committee, 1).

Notes from the Creative Bureaucracy Committee outlined a rough draft prepared by Mary O'Brien for the FPC which addressed structures, process and strategy. The tension of trying to blend liberal and radical feminist ideologies in this project was evident in comments such as: "we cannot get elected if we are too radical" (ibid) and by the

question: "Can any innovative organization work effectively within the State?" (ibid, 6), the answer on file was "No".

The CBC tried to "elaborate a feminist version of efficient organization" (FPC Newsletter, July 1980, 7). "The FPC wants to do things efficiently, but it wants to do them in a way which avoids the sort of too heavy structure which is the social face of conventional notions of political power" (ibid). The CBC never completed its work, so the FPC structure and processes continued to be informal and dependent upon the women who had the time, energy and interest to invest in the organization. From the FPC documents, it would appear that the formal structure based on traditional forms, as proposed by Dorothy Zaborsky was not desired by members of the FPC. In fact, it was rejected. As a result of not coming to terms with a clearly articulated formal structure, an informal structure evolved.

All women interviewed for this project indicated that forms of feminist process were undertaken by the FPC. Minutes of FPC meetings were not always documented. The minutes located were generally summaries of key issues and decisions, shedding little light on the processes used to arrive at decisions. The documentation of issues and processes is found predominantly in the FPC Newsletters. All members stated that consensus was the FPC practice in decision-making and that there was opportunity for members to provide input at meetings. One member defined the decision-making process

of the FPC as "ultrademocratic - a form of consensus where recommendations were made at meetings and we talked about it until a decision was arrived at" (FPC/Steele: 1991, F. Forman). Not all members felt comfortable contributing in this form however. One member who was very active in the study groups stated: "I did not participate in (strategy) meetings as I'm shy in public forums" (FPC/Steele: 1992, A. Hill). Another woman who was a member of the coordinating committee described her involvement as a learning experience: "I didn't feel like a leader. I didn't have much input - it was just good experience" (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. Trafford). Rotating the chair was standard practice at meetings as was providing funds for childcare and transportation for those women who needed support. Issues were taken up as they were identified by the membership. Women self-selected/volunteered to act as spokespeople for the FPC when requests were received. Consciousness-raising was accomplished in the study groups of the FPC, which was the longest standing activity of the FPC.

The FPC had a structure at the outset of eight working committees.³ This structure changed with the FPC and by the fall of 1981 had dwindled to a coordinating committee which was responsible for the ongoing operation of the party including the newsletter, study groups, membership, media, and outreach. This structure did not have a mechanism for conflict resolution. Consequently, many divisions and differences were ignored or dealt with on an ad hoc basis.

Formal leadership was rejected as a concept by the FPC as it was linked in women's minds with authority and domination as experienced in patriarchal organizations. The work of the Creative Bureaucracy Committee on file did not explicitly address leadership. When asked if there was leadership in the FPC, most members interviewed responded in the affirmative. "There were clear leaders, not in a taking over way but it was clear that they had maturity in the issues" (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. Trafford). "There was an informal hierarchy and an assumption made that the women who started the group were leaders" (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. MacDonald). "The party really revolved around the charismatic presence of Mary O'Brien" (FPC/Steele: 1992, D. Wedlock). "Mary was not a leader apart, she was part of us, we never felt led by her" (FPC/Steele: 1992, F. Forman). Dorothy Zaborsky suggested in her work that the FPC was "dependent on more or less powerful personalities to transact business" (Zaborsky: 1987, 618).

There were in fact leaders in the FPC, although this was not formally recognized. When combined with a lack of an explicitly named structure, this became a problem when divisive issues arose as there were no mechanisms in place to mediate conflict.

There were unacknowledged differences in power among the members of the FPC. Some women had years of grassroots feminist and left political organizing experience while others were new to feminist political organizing. There were also a number of women involved in bringing a feminist analysis to their academic work and who were skilled in

articulating their positions, others were just beginning to explore feminism in their lives. Many differences in skills, knowledge and experience existed and the membership generally deferred to those with more skill/experience. A resulting informal core group or leadership emerged which was never acknowledged as such. One member recalled that "the core group got tighter and tighter and the people who didn't hold that vision were discounted" (FPC/Steele: 1992, D. Wedlock).

The participation of men in the FPC became a divisive issue in the fall of 1981. Problems arose when a man proposed himself as a member of the coordinating committee. Some coordinating committee members challenged the FPC founders' policy of welcoming the participation of men in the party as a result. The division of opinions was sharp and Mary O'Brien, an unacknowledged leader of the FPC, returned after an absence at this time to affirm her position that the FPC could not exclude men. As discussed in Chapter Two, the debate about men's participation in the FPC was split between members who believed that men could not be excluded because women would then be using the same discriminatory practices as those used by men in patriarchal organizations, and those who maintained that an autonomous women's space was critical to developing an alternative feminist political project. Many members remember the final meeting of the FPC in the spring of 1982 when the issue of men was hotly debated. Women left the meeting deeply divided. One member recalled that Mary o'Brien "was extremely upset - she more or less said, if it doesn't go my way, I'm through with this organization" (FPC/Steele: 1992, J.

Blackwood). Members on both sides of the question maintained their positions and the FPC was unable to find a satisfactory compromise or the energy to continue.

There was also tension between lesbian and heterosexual feminists in the FPC. Interestingly enough, of the nine women interviewed, three indicated that they were coming out as lesbians during their involvement with the FPC. Several women spoke about the visibility of lesbians in the party. "The outspokenness of some lesbians in the party might have been a problem for some other women in the party ... lesbians weren't such a huge component, but they were pretty strong ... they were less willing to compromise their feminism, I felt, than a lot of straight women who seemed to have a lot more invested in making that connection with the patriarchy so that the feminist party would be accepted, could survive, or become a 'real' political party" (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. Trafford). Another member noted: "there was a small contingent that began an 'Are the lesbians taking over' kind of campaign" (FPC/Steele: 1992, J. Blackwood) which stemmed from concern about how lesbian visibility would affect the credibility of the FPC.

The political and ideological base of the FPC was inclusive of several feminist visions. The type of integrative feminism represented in the FPC brought together feminists working for radical transformation (socialist and radical feminists) and reformists working for changes in the system (liberal feminists). This made it difficult to ground the

organization's process in a coherent ideological base. The split between women holding these various visions was not as apparent as other divisions. Thus, tensions existed in the FPC which were framed as "the man question" or "the lesbian problem", rather than as differences in political visions.

Despite or because of the absence of a defined process, there were informal processes in place, reflecting the various politics of FPC members. Regardless of these difficulties and because of the vision and welcoming aspect of the party, many women were attracted to the FPC who had shunned other forms of political organizing. Women who were involved found a safe space to reflect, take action, develop skills and analysis, to express themselves and try out new things. For many women, it was a transformative time in their lives. "I think the Feminist Party gave women a forum; a place in which they were safe and comfortable and also had role models ... it was a developing ground, a proving ground" (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. Trafford). The FPC "changed a lot of women's lives ... the opportunity for women to strengthen and improve themselves/ourselves was more important than something more tangible. One could say women's consciousness was being raised" (FPC/Steele: 1992, H. Lenskyj).

Examples of power being used in efforts to create a united, homogeneous group were experienced by some members. One woman stated that a fascist, 'politically correct' feminist element was evident in the FPC and she did not 'make it' because she "was not

a marxist, not a dyke, had children and had a mainstream job" (FPC/Steele: 1992, D. Wedlock). This member nevertheless continued with the party to its demise. She facilitated workshops and study groups, participated on committees and overall regarded her involvement with the FPC as "such good times" (ibid). Her experience reflects the complex and contradictory nature of involvement in the FPC - a feminist group 'in the works'.

Conclusion

Several factors, both internal and external to the FPC contributed to problems in defining a feminist process and related structure which was reflective of its vision. I maintain that this is because the plural nature of the FPC politic was diffuse and difficult to define. This resulted in a lack of clarity about party priorities. When combined with the myriad of problems that emerged, an absence of both a defined process for working and an explicit structure, along with an unacknowledged and informal leadership, resentment, frustration and burnout exploded around the issue of the participation of men in the party.

The central divisive issue of the FPC appeared to be the absence of clarity about what the FPC priorities were with respect to realizing objectives of social, political and economic transformation. Some members chose to put energy into preparing the FPC for

engagement in the electoral system, while others tried to create ways to revision what is understood by politics, hence contributing to the goal of feminist transformation. The inability of the FPC to resolve this dilemma led to its demise. The difficulties experienced by the FPC in coming to terms with a desired structure and process may be due to the fact that the distinct feminist agendas in the FPC required separate strategies and organizational models to achieve their stated goals.

Chapter Four examines the Kvennalistinn, Iceland's feminist party which has achieved electoral support in parliament. Kvennalistinn was a feminist organization using alternative processes in a patriarchal/hierarchical political system. It grappled with some of the same issues as the FPC. The political party system and the social and historical context of Iceland made it possible for a feminist party to gain electoral support. As discussed in the next chapter however, Kvennalistinn developed in a different direction from that of the FPC. Kvennalistinn took a more conventional liberal feminist position in their platforms despite their agenda to change the system.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

ENDNOTES

1. Books such as WORKING COLLECTIVELY (1984), LIVING OUR VISIONS: BUILDING FEMINIST COMMUNITY (1984), PEACE AND POWER: A HANDBOOK OF FEMINIST PROCESS (1984), DREAMING THE DARK (1982), LEADERSHIP FOR CHANGE: TOWARD A FEMINIST MODEL, RESOURCE MANUAL FOR A LIVING REVOLUTION (1978), and CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM: A HANDBOOK (1976) provide clear guidelines and suggestions about how groups can integrate models of feminist process into their organizations.
2. Checking-in describes a process where in a round, each group member shares briefly how she is feeling and/or what her intent is for the meeting. This process is meant to contribute to creating a safe space without hidden agendas. Charlene Wheeler and Peggy Chinn summarize the check-in process well:

Check-In is:

- making explicit what you expect to gain through group interaction and what you hope for the group during the interaction.
- sharing circumstances or events that are likely to influence your participation during the discussions
- reflecting briefly on what you have integrated or gained from the last group interaction
- actively expressing your commitment to be fully present for the group during this interaction
- committing yourself to creating a safe space, arising from the love and protection of each individual and the group.

Check-In is not:

- true confessions
- spilling one's guts
- making excuses
- a counselling session

(Wheeler and Chinn: 1984, 17).

3. The original eight working committees of the FPC were the Membership, Fundraising, Education/Outreach, Study Group, Newsletter, Media, Office and Strategy committees. The Creative Bureaucracy Committee developed in 1979 and was active until 1981.

CHAPTER 4 AN ACTIVE FEMINIST PARTY IN ICELAND

Kvennalistinn has set itself a hefty goal: working within the system as members of parliament in order to change the system ideologically - two tracks which are difficult to keep parallel. (Edgar: 1987, 36).

Women in Iceland have successfully organized a women's political party, the Kvennalistinn, which has held elected office in the Alting, the Icelandic parliament, since 1983. In this chapter, I trace some of the factors which have contributed to the Kvennalistinn's electoral support. These include the women's movement in Iceland, the party and electoral systems of the country, women's representation in the Alting, voting patterns, and the ideology and approach to leadership of the Kvennalistinn. The limitations of success in electoral politics of a feminist party is also examined.

A Profile of Iceland

Iceland has a population of 244,000 people. Sixty percent of the population lives in one of the two major urban centres of Reykjavik and Reykjaneskjordaemi. It was settled by the Vikings after discovery in the 9th century. Due to very limited immigration, Iceland has a largely homogeneous population. According to a spokesperson with the Embassy

of Iceland in Washington, the country has no racial diversity. "Iceland has a homogeneous, white, nordic population." Between 80 percent to 90 percent of women are involved in waged work, earning 60 percent of men's wages. The cost of living is high. Childcare facilities are very limited. (Jonsdottir: 1990). Abortion is legal and Iceland has the lowest rate of all Nordic countries. At the same time, there is very little sex education. There is no social stigma attached to being a single mother and many women are single mothers by choice. (Edgar: 1987).

Women gained suffrage for local elections in 1909. In 1915, women over 40 could vote in parliamentary elections, an age limitation not applied to men. This age restriction was lifted in 1920. Fewer women than men have typically voted in parliamentary elections. In the 1970's this trend changed so that the difference became minimal. Of note is the great surge of women who turned out to vote in the 1980 election of Vigdis Finnbogadóttir, the first women President (Haavio-Mannila et al.: 1985).

Few women have been elected to the Alting (parliament) and even fewer proportionally are involved in party leadership or are members of the powerful governmental committees. The first woman was elected to parliament in 1922. Women have consistently comprised less than 5 percent of the Alting and those women elected were usually conservative. The percentage of women in parliament edged above 5 percent in the late 1970's (Haavio-Mannila et.al.: 1985). With six women elected from Kvennalistinn in

1987 along with seven other women, the percentage of women in the Alting increased to 20 percent (Edgar: 1987).

Iceland enjoys a proportional election system. This form of representation is such that each political party is responsible for compiling a list of candidates for each election. The total number of votes for each party determines the percentage of seats allocated in parliament. Representatives for each party are chosen in the order in which they appear on the list, which gives the political parties the power to control which individuals will have the most likelihood of being elected.

Proportional representation allows for more diversity in representation in contrast with the 'first past the post' model in Canada. With proportional representation, there exists a direct relationship of votes to representatives. It also facilitates women's involvement; "Wilma Rule's (1981) research established a clear connection between proportional elections and women's representation, since there was a noticeably higher percentage of women in parliaments elected by a proportional election system" (Haavio-Mannila et al.: 1985, 54).

The establishment of autonomous women's lists has had a tradition in Iceland and in other Nordic countries. They "were most prevalent in the initial period following the enfranchisement of women." (Haavio-Mannila et al.: 1985, 46). Women's lists were

entered by women's organizations at local elections at Reykjavik from 1908-16 and at the parliamentary elections of 1922 and 1926. In fact the first woman elected to parliament was as a result of a list which a women's group put up in 1922. The Kvennalistinn then, had a history of women's lists to draw upon when they renewed this tradition in their organizing efforts beginning in 1981.

The Alting usually has representation from the four established parties, two with a conservative orientation (the Independence Party and the Progressive Party) and two with socialist roots (the People's Alliance and the Social Democratic Party). In 1983, two new parties joined the parliament, the Women's party or Women's Alliance, Kvennalistinn, and the Social Democratic Alliance. Due to the Icelandic system of representation, coalition governments are typical as parties seldom receive sufficient votes to form a majority. The patterns of government change often and voting patterns are volatile. The Independent Party currently enjoys the largest voter support. After the 1991 election, they formed a government with the Social Democratic Party.¹

The Women's Movement

Women in Iceland have a rich tradition of women's organizations. Unlike Canada where there was a distinct lull in women's organizing between the first and second waves of

feminism, in Iceland, women's organizations have had an uninterrupted history of activism. In 1930, for example, the National Organization of Icelandic Women's Societies had a total of 25,000 members and 247 member groups. (Haavio-Mannila et al.: 1985, 14). Their membership included local housewife associations and others concerned with the traditional role of women. A second organization, Kvenfettindafelag, represents 45 women's groups and focuses on women's rights. Women's organizations also exist in political parties and in labour organizations, where employed women are more likely to be unionized than employed men (Lovenduski: 1986, 169).

In 1968, the Women's Rights Organization (WRO) was formed mainly by school teachers who were concerned about sex role stereotyping in textbooks in the classroom. A renewal of the feminist movement was introduced to Iceland via the Icelandic Redstocking Movement in 1970. The Redstockings were influenced by the New Women's Liberation Movement in Holland and Denmark. The founders were women who had studied abroad. The Redstocking and WRO fought for women's right to self determination in abortion cases in 1973/74. The Redstockings focused their efforts on parliament, state institutions and labour unions (Styrkarsdottir: 1986). Although concerned with liberation, the Redstockings were soon divided on the question of the relative importance of gender and class oppression. After adopting a Maoist platform in 1974, the Redstockings became increasingly isolated. The Redstockings split in 1981 and had completely disbanded by 1983. Many women left the Redstockings to form an action group to put up women's lists

which eventually became the Women's party, Kvennalistinn.

The most visible mobilization of women in Iceland took place on October 24, 1975 when women across the country went on strike. This "women's day off" was organized to demonstrate the value of women's work. The action was planned as part of the launching of the UN Women's Decade. The strike was organized by women's groups, women in political parties and women from the trade union movement. The media provided excellent coverage leading up to the event, the union support was overwhelming and the organizers were very thorough. As a result, the action was a success. It was estimated that 90 percent of women went on strike - including women working at home, women in waged work, women in cities and women in isolated fishing communities. Gudrun Jonsdottir describes the day:

Women's social contribution became evident as society came to a standstill for a day. The telephone services were not working; offices were closed or could not function properly as all the secretaries were on strike; men could not go to work as nobody was home to take care of the children, or, if they went to work they had to take the children with them, and most of them did not know how to take care of children; all the schools and the health services were closed or half closedit was really unbelievable. (Jonsdottir: 1990, 27).

All over the country during the strike, women got together and held meetings to discuss

their situations. The Reykjavik meeting involved 25,000 participants. Yet, despite this incredible demonstration of the strength of women, or perhaps because of it, no country-wide feminist organizing took place again until 1981.

The Kvennalistinn

In 1981, women came together in small groups to talk about putting up an autonomous Women's list in the upcoming local and parliamentary elections. Women began to organize because the gatekeepers in the established parties were not about to place women high on their lists - the only way to guarantee women in decision making positions. At the regional level, two women were elected in both Reykjavik and Akureyri from the Women's lists in 1982. In Akureyri one of the women became mayor. Kvennalistinn had three representatives elected in 1983 to the parliament. Women organized the Women's list and subsequently the Women's party or Women's Alliance after meeting with resistance from the established parties to include women. "So successful was their challenge that women nearly doubled their representation in the 1983 elections, partly as a direct result of the feminist party winning seats and partly as a result of the other parties bowing to pressure to nominate women candidates." (Lovenduski: 1986, 154).

During the 1987 elections, six women from the Kvennalistinn were elected on a clearly

expressed platform which dealt with the economy, children, social issues, and the military. They were subsequently invited to form a three party coalition government with the conservative Independence Party and the centrist Social Democratic Party. The Kvennalistinn declined after both parties refused to meet one of their non-negotiable demands - to raise the minimum wage to meet the cost of living. If accepted, this would have had a major impact on the quality of life for women. Reflecting on the negotiations, one of the elected representatives, Kristin Hallsdorsdottir, said they were only being offered "goodwill and a committee" (Edgar: 1987, 36), which was not enough.

The Kvennalistinn was criticized for being unrealistic and irresponsible in taking this decision, although others supported their integrity. Sigridur Duna Kristmundsdottir, an elected representative, insists that they were ready to form a coalition but "being a 'minority within a majority' would not have been easy for Kvennalistinn. In the final analysis they can overrule you easily, in spite of all the gentlemen's promises. You will have to go along with things you don't want, and that in the end is much more dangerous to your goals than being able to speak freely in the opposition." (Edgar: 1987, 36).

From its place in the opposition, the Kvennalistinn feels it has been able to influence policy and remain true to its feminist principles. An example was the issue of maternity leave. Kvennalistinn's position was that the leave should be extended to six months. Other

parties who supported an extension wanted four months and pressured Kvennalistinn to join them, which they did not. Eventually the Alting passed a bill for six months, although at a lower financial rate than the Kvennalistinn had proposed. The presence of the Kvennalistinn in the Alting, with obvious public support, has influenced the other parties to make women and women's issues a priority and more visible.

Women's Alliance members describe the Kvennalistinn as "a movement rather than a political party." (Amer, 8). Their strategy is to bring about radical change by working within the established system. In keeping with this agenda, their methods are unusual for the political arena.

The Kvennalistinn is a non-hierarchical organization. With no one identified leader, members take turns as spokeswomen for the party. The leadership function is a shared responsibility so that power is not vested in one person. Decisions are made through consultation and consensus by a very active membership.² Power is shared in practical ways such as through sharing jobs, skills and information as well as through grassroots organizing. Kvennalistinn members share their work on committees, in public debates and representing the party internationally. This active involvement is critical to the life of the Kvennalistinn as one of their principles is that no one may hold office for more than 6 to 8 years. This is done Kvennalistinn affirms, because "its ultimate goal isn't political power for a few but a change of policy and process." (Edgar: 1987, 35).

Kvennalistinn organizes from the basic assumption that women have a different set of values from those of men. "They celebrate those values which are traditionally women's and have no desire to live as men do in the male designed system." (Amer, 8) One of their policy statements expresses this:

The aim of the Women's Alliance is to make women's perspectives, experience and culture a no less important policy making force in our society than that of men. The Alliance wants to nurture and develop the things that are positive in women's attitude to the world, and to harness it for the benefit of society. The Alliance wants to change society and put respect for life and shared responsibility first. (Ollson).

This agenda is very similar to that articulated by the FPC in 1979.

Thornhildur Thorleifsdottir, a Kvennalistinn spokeswoman visiting Canada in 1988, recognized that the Kvennalistinn agenda required a shift in consciousness. She stated her belief "that the women's goal of changing the world or 'the little part of which is Iceland,' can be achieved". (Amer, 8). Such a goal requires a revolutionary change in people's thinking. She says that to do this and to also maintain their values, women "must have faith in themselves and in other women" (ibid, 8).

The Kvennalistinn has achieved much in its short herstory. After the 1987 elections, women held 20 percent of the seats in the Alting, half of these (six) were from the Kvennalistinn. This was a considerable change given that women had held less than 5 percent of the seats from 1922 until the late 1970's. Attitudes are changing or at least

some behaviours are, with women's issues and a women's analysis of all issues more likely to be a part of the political scene now in Iceland. As Salome Thorkelsdottir, an experienced Alting member from the conservative Independence Party stated: "Kvennalistinn has even helped in our party by opening the eyes of men. They cannot ignore women any more." (Edgar: 1987, 36). Writers have said it is early yet to comment on the impact of Kvennalistinn. "However, it is clear that they have influenced the political system in an irreversible way: The political parties must show more consideration of women, both when deciding their lists and when deciding on political topics." (Styrkarsdottir: 1986, 156).

How was a feminist party possible in Iceland and not in Canada?

First of all, the small land mass and population along with the relative homogeneity of the population are factors which privilege feminist organizing in that it is possible to meet and discuss issues and information from a common experience, building trust and consensus among members and constituents. In a country as large and diverse as Canada, this same possibility does not exist.

In addition, the strong and active tradition and network of women's groups formed a solid foundation on which it was possible to build support for a women's party. Women in

Iceland are active in unions and women from all sectors have a history of working together to achieve identified objectives such as in the women's strike in 1975. The development of the Kvennalistinn came about due to the refusal of the mainstream system to respond to women's concerns at a time when the women's liberation movement was growing in the western world.

Certainly the structure and process of the Kvennalistinn with their non-hierarchical organization and strong adherence to a stated feminist value base met with mixed responses. They were accused of not being "real politicians". "Opponents charged that the women weren't serious politicians and that they didn't understand the 'real' issues, that they only cared about the 'soft' causes like daycare. In a live television interview with three Kvennalistinn members - the first such program in their five years of existence despite years of pressuring for coverage - two flustered reporters lectured the women about discrimination against men." (Edgar: 1988, 84).

In response, "The women of Kvennalistinn agree that they're not 'real' politicians in the traditional sense, that their intention is to change the political system and women's lives in the process." (ibid). Political polls in 1988 showed that support for Kvennalistinn had surpassed all of Iceland's major parties, having grown to 31.3 percent. "Kvennalistinn credits its skyrocketing popularity to its no-nonsense approach to the survival issues that concern women, as well as to grassroots organizing." (ibid).

The issues which so divided the FPC such as men's involvement, sexuality, the lack of clarity in the structure and decision-making process, and differing ideologies did not appear to be problems for the Kvennalistinn - at least not to the point of upsetting or dissolving the party.

The question of men's involvement with the party was never raised as an issue in any of the documentation. Apparently men were not excluded, but those who did get involved saw providing support as their role. Women have been organizing autonomously in Iceland for some time and as such, it appears that there was a tradition and a general understanding of the necessity for women's spaces. Thus, the issue of women's autonomous space was not tested as it was with the FPC. This is not to say that women representing Kvennalistinn did not meet with harassment and resistance - they did. In the Alting, the Kvennalistinn members were derided as women not connected with the reality of politics, calling into question their abilities. At the municipal level, Women's list representatives were attacked by the mayor at a beauty contest. He stated that if the Women's list representatives were good looking he would need to be concerned about losing the next election. The women retaliated with a humorous demonstration in the city chambers where they all dressed up as beauty contestants with banners listing feminine traits supposedly desired by men.

Clarification about where women stood regarding the ideological debates among liberal,

radical and socialist feminists happened on two occasions prior to the forming of the Women's Alliance. First, the Redstocking Movement linked the class struggle and the oppression of women equally in their strategies which caused debates and an eventual split in membership. A group of women who left the Redstockings formed the Women's list for the 1982 Reykjavik elections. These women joined together around a pro-woman platform which valued women's culture and women's work. The Redstockings dismissed this idea of a Woman's list as "bourgeois". Secondly, following the experience of Women's list candidates elected to local government, some women disagreed with the move to establish a Women's list for the 1983 parliamentary elections. The basis of their argument was that women's concerns could be dealt with in ways most consistent with women's values through local, grassroots organizing, not through conventional government. This final split resulted in a relatively cohesive group of women organizing the Kvennalistinn around a predominantly liberal feminist agenda.

One woman involved in the early stages of organizing and who was elected from the Women's list to the Reykjavik city council in 1982, Gudrun Jonsdottir, has left electoral politics and does not feel that the Kvennalistinn represents her or other feminists' interests. Gudrun Jonsdottir recalls that the organizing focus when the Kvennalistinn was formed was on the importance of women's work - both waged and unwaged. "We did not engage much in the ideological discussion; we all felt if we went too deep into that, it was bound to split us right from the beginning." (Jonsdottir: 1990, 28). The work of the

Women's Alliance was to bring about changes in the material conditions of women's lives - wages, transportation, housing and childcare. The Kvennalistinn focused on platform issues, and even process issues, which were tangible and easy to define. Their success snowballed with each concrete achievement. Potentially divisive issues were presumably dealt with in internal meetings, and as in the example of Gudrun Jonsdottir, perhaps women who did not agree with the direction of Kvennalistinn left and brought their organizing skills elsewhere.

Heterosexism is very strong in Iceland and lesbians are afraid to come out for fear of hostile discrimination. The Kvennalistinn has not taken up or challenged this issue and at least on one recorded occasion, has been lesbophobic: "At one time they (the lesbians) tried to get a room for themselves in the building where the Women's list had its centre, but this proved difficult as many women in the Women's list did not want them in the same house as it would scare away voters from the party!" (Jonsdottir: 1990, 31). There were no apparent lesbian/heterosexual splits in the Kvennalistinn as was experienced by the FPC. Sexuality was not addressed as an issue by the Kvennalistinn except in the case of sex education and the rationale used to support this policy was the concern about AIDS.

Sexual violence such as battering, rape and incest have not been explicitly addressed by the Kvennalistinn and these have been taboo subjects in Iceland until the last decade.

Grassroots feminists in Reykjavik set up a shelter for women battered by their male partners in 1983 and a rape crisis group in 1986. As some government funding has been used for their functioning, it is likely that the Women's party has at least indirectly contributed to these services/movements.

Clearly, the Women's party has been strategic and very political regarding the issues which they have chosen to focus on, not taking up issues related to sexuality, for example, which would have been divisive internally and in terms of electoral support. Kvennalistinn has challenged and tested the limits of the established systems, but within a largely traditional framework. For example: "Kvennalistinn's platform tackles each issue based on the economic model of a housewife who uses her resources cautiously and balances her budget." (Edgar: 1987, 35). In addition, party members usually list their first occupation as housewife. This practice gives value to women's work which is usually not recognized, but it in no way challenges male dominance and the traditional gender division of labour.

Referring to the Women's party, Jonsdottir states: "The ideological base is still muddled, emphasis on the family as a valuable institution seems to be increasing. The feminist representatives both in the city council and parliament are respectable politicians." (1990, 29).

The controversial issues related to ideology which could have split the Women's party have been avoided by the Kvennalistinn. The members who remain involved blend a radical, women-centred structure and process with a progressive, liberal platform working within a traditional system for change. It remains to be seen whether the vision of the Kvennalistinn will influence the system or whether the system will shift the Kvennalistinn from its objective of changing the system from within. Jonsdottir's remarks are suggestive: "My feeling is that more and more feminists are realizing that trying to change the system from inside is not working well." (Jonsdottir: 1990, 30).

The system of political representation has also worked in favour of Kvennalistinn, as it facilitates the participation of smaller parties and marginal interests. Such a system has a more direct correlation between voters and representatives, which would certainly enrich Canadian political activity, and create the possibility of elected representatives from a feminist party.

Finally, in accounting for Kvennalistinn's success, one must consider that there was an overall readiness for change in Iceland.³ There is no doubt that no matter how compromised the Kvennalistinn's agenda is from a radical feminist perspective, their involvement has improved the condition of women and their alternative model of organization has created the possibility for new horizontal, cooperative organizational forms to emerge.

The Kvennalistinn's feminist process and structure grew out of its politic of valuing women's experience and the desire to build systems of cooperation. Yet it was also influenced by the state structure and the social context which it was trying to change. Zaborsky (1987) criticized the FPC for being too 'pure' in the work to develop an organization which was consistent with ideal feminist principles. The Kvennalistinn, it appears, found a balance in the processes of disengagement and mainstreaming, drawing on the ideals of radical feminist principles and applying them to the context which they must organize in.

Reflecting back on the original debate as to whether or not they should put up a Women's list for the Alting, Gudrun Agnarsdottir stated: "I felt so keenly that time was calling us, that what we were doing was so much bigger than this old dilapidated red house on a little square in a town on the Northern Atlantic on the edge of the inhabitable world. So, I stood up and spoke. When the timing is right, we can work miracles." (Edgar: 1987, 36).

ENDNOTES

1. The results of the Parliamentary elections in Iceland, April 1991:

Independent Party	26
Progressive Party	13
Social Democratic Party	10
People's Alliance	9
Women's Alliance	<u>5</u>

63

The ruling coalition government was formed by the Independent and Social Democratic parties.

2. Membership numbers were not available in any of the documents consulted. However, the initial women's list meetings in 1982/83 attracted 500-700 women.
3. Women in Iceland had always been poorly represented in government and women's issues and concerns were not treated seriously. Women's wages continued to be far less than those of men in equitable circumstances. When mainstream parties refused to take up women's concerns, the women's movement was radicalized to take action. A network of women's groups was in place to facilitate the discontent and change in consciousness among women.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Feminist Party of Canada (FPC) set out in 1979 to bring a feminist perspective to the Canadian political sphere. Party documents express the aim of the founders: "That women's full participation in the political arena will bring a new perspective and a new direction to government in general" (FPC: April 1979). The view of politics in FPC documents is connected with women's reality and experiences: "This politics, in the feminist view is not seen as a business set apart from life as it is lived, but rather as an integral part of our communal existence, a very necessary form for the public discussion of the concerns which so intimately affect our lives" (ibid).

Women were motivated to establish a feminist political party in response to the biased male-centred political system which included few women in positions of power, and which gave scant attention to issues of concern to women.

The FPC functioned from 1979 until 1982. Although the party was extremely active during this time, inspiring and changing the lives of many women, the FPC never gained

official status as a political party or presented a candidate for election.

In this research project, I chart the three year experience of the FPC through party documents and through the voices of women who had been involved in the party. I have focused on the political vision, processes and outcomes of the FPC and how they were intertwined.

This concluding chapter examines the factors which inhibit and enhance the articulation of a feminist political project through the experience of the FPC. Divergent notions of what constitutes "politics" were never fully resolved in the FPC. This is discussed further here as the definition of politics is a central strand in the connections among feminist visions, processes and outcomes. Many women affirmed that their involvement with the FPC transformed their lives. How personal transformation and political change are linked is explored via the experience of former FPC members. Recommendations are made regarding changes in the political system to facilitate women's participation and future research needs. I conclude with observations regarding the importance of feminist process to the project of social and political transformation.

Factors Influencing the Radical Feminist Challenge

The Feminist Party of Canada like Kvennalistinn, Iceland's feminist party, was grounded in a value base of caring and cooperation - those values associated with women. Both feminist parties expressed that they intended to bring these much needed alternative values to the sphere of conventional politics. From this position, the objective was to change the nature of politics while remaining rooted in an alternative feminist vision.

Earlier chapters examined how factors both internal and external to the FPC influenced the party's vision, processes and outcomes. The patriarchal context of society inspires feminists to take action in order to resist and make changes to the existing system. Concurrently, the hegemonic practices of institutions in this system suppress, distort and coopt feminist resistance, forestalling or squashing the feminist process of change. Conventional politics reflect the principles of competition and exploitative power relations. There is an obvious clash of agendas when an alternative feminist party endeavours to work within the established system to create change. In liberal democracies, concessions may be made by those in power until such alternatives challenge or threaten the power base of the established system.

The FPC was perceived as a radical feminist project. It was depicted in the mainstream media as naive, idealistic and silly. The FPC never became an officially recognized

political party. However, it did function for three years. Some members were opposed to or ambivalent about official status. For them, part of creating a radical feminist project was to redefine politics and power - which did not necessarily mean gaining recognized political party status. Other members supported following the traditional route in order to gain power in the system.

The patriarchal context of society was and is a major inhibitor to enacting a feminist project such as the FPC. This oppressive context creates the material conditions of women's lives. Because women earn substantially less than men in the labour market and feminists do not generally have connections with major corporations or financial institutions, funds for feminist projects are limited. The FPC experienced the lack of finances as debilitating. Much time was spent in meetings generating and juggling the few resources needed to meet the priorities of the party. Fund raising was a problem because those women supportive of the FPC had little disposable income and those people with access to funds were not inclined to support the FPC agenda.

Women are socialized in a patriarchal society and have internalized society's values. The process of questioning these values and developing alternative values is an integral and ongoing part of feminism. Consequently, because decolonization is an unfolding process, oppressive values and relations of power find their way into feminist practices. The lesbophobia exhibited by the Kvennalistinn and in the FPC, although internal to the

organizations, was an extension of the values of the larger oppressive society. This was also true of the lack of consciousness about race and class. Although these oppressive patterns originate with an external source, feminists and feminist groups have the responsibility to question and examine all relations of power and to take action individually and collectively for change.

In the case of the FPC, the process of consciousness-raising and questioning was a central aspect of the study groups which were established for this purpose. It was also integrated in all FPC activities where alternative forms were being created. Although power relations were being challenged in these settings and feminist concepts of power were being developed, this process was considering power in the context of women's oppression in a patriarchal society. There was no indication in the FPC of an awareness of the diverse ways that race, class, sexual identity, physical ability, age, etc. intersect and contribute to complex patterns of oppression. Had the FPC continued to exist, its members would have been faced with this challenge, as most Canadian feminist groups were in the 1980's ranging from the Toronto-based Women's Press to NAC (National Action Committee on the Status of Women). However, many FPC activists began the unfolding process through self-examination with respect to patriarchy. A logical extension of this process of stretching and changing is to extend the awareness and analysis gained to other areas of power relations, thus continuing the process of questioning, challenging, reflection and action as it relates to all forms of oppression. The FPC was a product of its environment;

both the women's movement and the larger patriarchal (as well as capitalist and white imperialist) society. If the FPC was to reemerge in 1993 with the same agenda of transformation, it would require an organizational form and process reflective of and responsive to the many struggles to end oppressive relations.

The related issues of leadership and structure emerged as problematic in the latter stages of the FPC. Questions of leadership were not explicitly discussed, although questions of structure were. Many members valued the academic analysis, political experience and ability to articulate a feminist perspective which a few members demonstrated and informally gave these women the leadership of the FPC. In the early stages, this informal arrangement seemed to serve the party well. Toward the end of the FPC, it became an issue as there was no framework or language available to work through the conflicts which emerged as new members took on leadership functions in the party and articulated positions at variance from the original leaders.

Efforts were made by the Creative Bureaucracy Committee to define an alternative structure. "We know we have to organize, but we want to organize by different modes; because where we are coming from is different, and where we are going, we are sure, is different too" (FPC Newsletter, July 1980). A grounding principle of organization for the FPC was described by one member as the intent to "live by responsibility, not control" (ibid). It is unfortunate that this committee was unable to complete its work.

In the absence of an explicit alternative structure, the FPC functioned in a loose, informal fashion. The idea of structure evoked for many women the image of bureaucracy and/or hierarchy. Those members whose priority was conventional politics felt that such a compromise which required some form of traditional structure was to be expected by the FPC (Zaborsky: 1987). Other members rejected all forms of formal organization because of the oppressive nature of traditional structures. The result was the evolution of an unnamed structure which limited the feminist vision of the FPC. The clear definition of a party structure, even if minimal, would have provided a framework, a more concrete sense of the party to those who were not closely involved. Sharing access to information and power was part of the feminist agenda expressed by the FPC. Defining a cooperative structure would have facilitated this objective in a clear fashion. The absence of an explicit structure created tensions and divisions. Moreover, those members who felt excluded in this informal arrangement had difficulty in articulating their unease as everyone assumed that the arrangement or process was "feminist".

Defining Politics

In the March 1980 FPC Newsletter, the question was posed: "in what sense shall we become a political presence?". A report from one of the open FPC educational forums answered: "we have agreed that our party will be organized at the electoral and grassroots

levels ... we are at the point of determining what steps need to be taken" (FPC Newsletter, March 1980). Later on in the same newsletter another question asked: "should the Feminist Party concern itself with alternative systems instead of the existing electoral system?" (ibid). Eventually two positions coalesced; those who felt that electoral politics was the priority, and those who believed defining an alternative politics was most important.

Limited resources, both financial and human, made it necessary to select the path to be taken by the FPC. The question of men became the catalyst in polarizing members which then crystallized the split in priorities among members. In the case of the FPC, the two politics were unable to find a common vision. In Iceland, the Kvennalistinn was similarly preceded by ideological debates about feminist visions and priorities. However, in Iceland, the hegemony of the liberal feminist vision prevailed.

An understanding of the FPC history has left me with several questions. In what conditions are women from diverse political perspectives able to work together? In cases where diverse feminisms are present, which politic is likely to prevail? Does organizing in the traditional sphere of Canadian politics necessitate a liberal feminist approach? Will feminists other than liberal feminists always be on the margins?

My hope is that diverse feminisms will transcend their differences in order to productively

work together. In the case of the FPC, the broad-based alternative politic was an important point of entry for many women who did not see themselves as political or as very interested in conventional politics. Given the feminist vision of inclusion, this alternative avenue was important to ensure that diverse voices were heard and incorporated into the feminist agenda of a political party. At the same time, there are many barriers to promoting a transformative feminist vision of politics, given the context of society.¹ A liberal feminist party would have the greatest possibility of success, if success is defined in terms of attaining official party status and fielding candidates. Yet from a transformative feminist position, the project may not be seen as successful because of the necessary limitations and compromises needed to gain recognition in the established system.

I believe that the greatest opportunity for a transformative feminist politic is at the local or grassroots level. In the area of pressure group politics, women's groups have been active since the early 1970's working for social, economic and political reforms while providing services to women. These groups engage with the traditional system and have been effective in pressuring for changes for women on a wide range of issues including child care, reproductive choice, laws regarding sexual and physical assault, and affirmative action. Rooted as they are in feminist analyses, the lives of the women engaged directly in these struggles and those who benefit from the services and reforms are changed to some degree. This approach to political change is piecemeal, takes time,

and can be fragile, however, it reflects a change process which is connected to women's needs and experiences.

In the realm of formal political structures, women have had the greatest success in being elected and participating in positions of power at the level of municipal politics. This is largely due to the non-partisan recruitment system which recognizes and values community and volunteer work and to the fact that participation in municipal politics is more compatible with the lives of women as mothers, care-givers and service providers in the home, than either provincial or federal politics. At provincial and federal levels, there are greater barriers to success for feminists working for meaningful transformation.

Is Personal Transformation Political?

Of the nine women interviewed for this project, five women specifically stated that their involvement with the FPC was a transformative time and/or a turning point in their lives. Virtually all women spoke of the development of friendships and of feminist networks through their FPC involvement. Everyone affirmed that the FPC was a learning experience.

The personal transformations and experiences gained by women active in the FPC were

political. Most of the women interviewed had been active in FPC study groups - women-only spaces which blended consciousness-raising with the development of a critical feminist analysis. These women who experienced the FPC as transformative saw their position as women as political (women are oppressed), were moved to find ways of articulating this awareness and taking action. Each woman has continued to speak out and to take action in her own way. Most are in positions where they influence others.

Mary Trafford has worked for several years on lesbian and gay rights issues and with projects related to sexual violence. She also brings a feminist perspective to the disabled sports community. Marilyn MacDonald recently accepted a teaching position at Simon Fraser University. Until then she was working as a civil servant and contributing her energies to the eco-feminist movement and to the lesbian and gay community. Avril Hill is an educator in Toronto. She brings a feminist perspective to her work as an inner-city high school principal and has worked for years to eradicate sexist language in the classroom and in school texts. Diana Wedlock is retired from her professional career as a scientist. She continues to work in the shelter movement where she has volunteered for more than 15 years. Joan Blackwood has moved from being a "radical lesbian feminist with separatist pretensions" to being a "practical feminist". She brings her feminist perspective to her work as an adult educator in Toronto. Helen Lenskyj has been working as a feminist activist for years in sport. She currently contributes time to radical issues such as sexual violence as well as lesbian and gay issues. She presently teaches at OISE

at the University of Toronto. Frieda Forman is the director of the Women's Research Centre at OISE. Angela Miles brings a feminist perspective to her work as a professor of sociology at OISE. Moira Armour is a long time radical feminist activist, filmmaker and writer. She continues to be active in grassroots causes and is the coordinator of a model women's resource centre at a high school in Toronto.

These women apply their feminisms and their FPC experiences to inform and guide their lives. They work in a variety of fields where they are in positions to politicize future feminists. Thus, although the FPC lasted for only a few years time, the women involved in the FPC continued to utilize the skills and knowledge acquired in the FPC to work for feminist change elsewhere. The transformation of these women's lives was indeed political.

Feminist Political Parties

Feminist political parties continue to be of interest to women in several countries. In Iceland, the feminist party has held elected positions in parliament since 1983. As recently as 1991, a feminist party was formed in Yugoslavia called ZEST (Zenska Stranka - The Women's Party) (Cockburn: 1991). The rationale of ZEST was similar to that of the FPC and Kvennalistinn. Yugoslav feminists decided "to enter formal politics autonomously,

to take a part in deciding the future" (ibid, 157). They were frustrated with being on the margins and pressuring for change from outside, and sought to energize the grassroots women's movement. The established political parties responded to the presence of ZEST by putting forward more women candidates and speaking about women's issues. ZEST identified potential problems as inadequate funds, lots of work for already overcommitted feminists, and few women with experience as political candidates. Their intention was to start locally and to build slowly. Their situation and the response from the established system mirrors the experiences of feminists building political parties in Iceland and Canada.

Such alternatives need to be shared in order to inspire feminists to continue to build on the experiences and lessons of sister feminists. As of April 1993, a new feminist federal political party is being formed in Montreal called Women for People/Femmes pour le peuple. The Montreal feminists involved were motivated by a desire to bring a woman-centred vision to conventional electoral politics. They are "fed up" with the established parties and feel frustrated with the lack of choices being offered to the Canadian electorate. (Akman: 1993).

A core group is currently developing a platform to address economic, social and electoral reform issues. Some of the women involved have had experience with the peace and anti-poverty movements. Others have had no experience with either conventional or grassroots

political organizing. Men are welcome in the party and one man participates as a member of the core group. They have plans to field independent candidates from the Women for People party in the 1993 federal election and to build the party for the following election. It would appear that their concern is mainly with how to gain power in the traditional political sphere rather than with the feminist process per se. To date, they have not identified an ideological basis like the FPC did in their documents. Energy is instead being allocated to the development of specific platforms such as demilitarization, a guaranteed minimum standard of living for all Canadians and systems of accountability for elected representatives. The party members are predominantly anglophone and are keen to avoid "divisive" issues such as the constitution and language issues. (ibid). They are aware of the obstacles in their path and are planning to be strategic as a result. Some members had heard of the FPC but did not have any information about the party.

Former FPC members for the most part indicated that they would not likely get involved in a FPC if it reformed. The reasons given varied. One woman has all but withdrawn from organized feminist activity. Two women indicated that they would not be involved in a largely liberal feminist project such as the FPC because of the "danger of being shaped by a state-supported system" (FPC/Steele: 1992, H. Lenskyj) and because "becoming a political party is not an alternative, and because of uncertainty that anything can be done with the existing system" (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. MacDonald). Three women indicated that the need for an autonomous women's party is no longer urgent as the major

political parties have largely taken up women's issues. One woman added that she felt that "feminists are not evolved enough" (FPC/Steele: 1992, A. Hill) to take on the complex tasks mapped out by the FPC. Another woman observed that "women can make political changes without being in a political party" (FPC/Steele: 1992, M. Trafford). Three women stated that the FPC is dormant, not dead, and may re-emerge.

Most former FPC activists had suggestions for women who chose to put energy into forming a feminist political party. Organizers should articulate clearly at the beginning of the party what the objectives are so that any differences could be clarified and dealt with. A support system should be in place early on including a clearly defined structure and adequate funding. The agenda should continue to have a transformative, women-centred focus and education and consciousness-raising should play a central part in the party. Recruitment and promotion should be a conscious process to ensure diversity. A solid foundation is possible if activists start locally and build slowly.

Feminist political parties emerge from frustration with the biases in the system which disadvantage women and the perceived need for an alternative. The development of a feminist party within Canada should start locally and grow in relation to support. An established network such as NAC could serve as an important framework from which a national feminist party could be launched. With more than 700 member groups from across Canada working at local, provincial and national levels, NAC would be a possible

network from which support could be mobilized for building a national feminist party. This would not be without its problems as NAC has recently been working to address issues of difference based on race and ethnicity and the need for structural changes. NAC however, takes the position that it is a non-partisan body which brings a feminist challenge to all political parties and does not align itself with any one political party. This has allowed for women from all political backgrounds to work together under the NAC umbrella.

As of 1993, feminists are expressing frustration with all of the established parties due to their deplorable record in not responding to concerns of women. It would be interesting if NAC decided after twenty years of operating as a lobby group to extend itself into partisan politics by supporting a group such as the FPC or actually transforming its organizational structure to take electoral power in the established system.

Breaking Down the Barriers

In order for women in general or a marginal political party such as the FPC or Women for People to gain elected support in Canada, changes to the electoral process need to occur.

Volume 6 of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform (Megyery: 1991) recommended several changes which would facilitate a more just democratic process better representing women and women's concerns. Many are not costly nor complicated to implement. However, such changes could threaten the power base of those who hold power. The report dealing with women in politics provided recommendations on making changes to the system of representation, addressing the financial obstacles to women's participation, changing party recruitment and nomination practices, and changing the conditions of national political life.

Changing the system of representation from the current first-past-the-post model to a system of proportional representation would facilitate a diverse and representative government. This system ensures a more direct relationship between voters and elected representatives. Research has also shown that systems of government with proportional representation have a larger percentage of women in elected positions. In addition, this system of representation allows for more interests to be represented through marginal parties such as environmental or feminist political parties. Proportional representation could contribute to a significant shift in how power is shared among political parties in the House of Commons.

Financial obstacles to women's participation could be addressed by limiting spending in nomination and leadership contests and requiring the full disclosure of campaign

expenses. Childcare and housekeeping should be viewed as legitimate expenses in nomination contests in general elections. Further changes to party recruitment and nomination practices to facilitate women's participation is important in making politics accessible. The development of talent banks of women in politics and the delivery of skill development and information sharing workshops for women at the regional and local levels are some of the suggestions offered by the authors of the report. Drawing on the FPC experience, these proposed workshops would be particularly useful from a feminist perspective if consciousness-raising was intergrated as a component of the design.

Changes to the conditions of national political life would make politics a more attractive career option for women. Recommendations include modifying the calendar for the House of Commons and using technology for voting from away to allow members to spend more time working in local constituencies, thus causing fewer disruptions in family life. Establishing a fixed tenure for parliament would allow for more predictability and less insecurity in members' lives.

The authors² noted that the proposed recommendations would make federal politics more accessible to women and other marginal groups. Increasing the number of women in politics alone will not necessarily contribute to transformative feminist change. Not all women are feminist and constraints in the system limit the possibilities to act for those with feminist values. All of the suggestions are linked and support progressive change.

Altering the system for candidate selection to a form of proportional representation, particularly if associated with the development of marginal political parties supported by interest groups, would result in exciting and dramatic changes in the Canadian political system. This system would provide an avenue for a feminist political party to gain electoral support and would result in a larger representation of women in government overall.

The Value of Feminist Process

Forms of feminist process continue to inform a large number of feminist groups, organizations, and networks. Women have been wounded through experiences in feminist groups, yet many groups continue to grapple with how to link theory and practice in their work for change. Feminist process is a process of unfolding. With new discoveries, new possibilities emerge, altering the journey.

The root of feminist process is the principle of transforming and sharing power. The goal is to eradicate oppressive relations and to reconceptualize power as energy to create. Feminist process is grounded in women's experiences and the values of cooperation and caring. How feminist process develops depends upon the context, the character of the organization, the goals and issues, and relationships with main/malestream institutions.

Feminist process typically incorporates a respect for feelings and expectations about personal disclosure. This level of intimacy provides a context for deeper connections and community with other activists, but also increases the risk of vulnerability of feminist activists. Kathy Ferguson (1984) cautions that the boundary between public and private should not be entirely collapsed. "The two realms are unlike in that relations in the larger public arena cannot be based on the intimate knowledge that sustains the personal realm, but on a more distant knowledge based on respect and equality" (Ferguson: 1984, 201). She sees the necessity to restructure both areas so that in the private realm intimacy matches public community and autonomy parallels public freedom (ibid).

In feminist work for change, questions must be asked about where the feminist group is situated and where the boundaries exist - if they do - between the personal and the organization. Likely the boundary will shift as needs change. However, attention should be given to the fine balance between intimacy and community and autonomy and freedom. An awareness of this balance will serve as an indicator which should minimize painful exchanges and maintain the integrity of the objectives of participants and the organization.

Further research needs to be done with groups and organizations using feminist processes in order to understand the emergence of novel ways of feminist organizing and working. The feminist movement in Canada has been changed over the past decade and continues

to change due to the struggles in women's groups related to issues of racial and ethnic differences and racism. Virtually every feminist group has been touched by these issues with both painful and productive results. Information about the processes which groups undertake in addressing these issues of difference is not readily available, yet could be helpful to the women and groups who continue to struggle.

The case of Nellie's, a women's shelter in Toronto, has become public largely due to the notoriety of June Callwood, who was involved with the shelter from the founding in 1974 until she resigned in 1992. She was charged with racism by women of colour at Nellie's. This case is not unlike what has been and is occurring to differing degrees and in unique configurations in other shelters and Canadian women's groups. The issues are complex. At Nellie's the struggle "polarized around power, race, sexual preference, ideologies, personalities, written texts, spoken words, even body language - not all at once, but with the mounting force of implosion." (Freedman: 1993, 74). Elements of feminist process were also named as problematic. One such collective member stated that in her experience at Nellie's, consensus was "just another word for 'fuck off'" (ibid, 74). Another issue was the informal structure where some members had more unacknowledged power than others. Many women were "savaged" (ibid, 83) through this painful experience at Nellie's and the organization is slowly rebuilding with a greater awareness of the issues of difference and the associated need to address power relations.

The overall impact of these struggles on the feminist movement is not clear. Informally, activists are aware of these situations. However, research documenting the complex issues, the contexts of the struggles and the processes undertaken would break the silence and provide insights into how women have worked through issues of difference. The women's movement has grown and become much more diverse and complex since the initial surge of resource guides dealing with feminist process in the mid-1980's. Charting the most recent experiences of feminist processes in various contexts would provide useful indicators for those needing tools for feminist organizing in an increasingly complex environment.

"I Fight With Love and I Laugh With Rage"³

What is unique to feminist organizing is the validation of feelings and the intent to incorporate both emotion and intellect into theory and change strategies. As rage continues to be a central form of energy providing the impetus for change among feminists, so too is the power of love. "Embedded in the commitment to feminist revolution is the challenge to love. Love can be and is an important source of empowerment when we struggle to confront issues of sex, race, and class ... we need a mediating force that can sustain us so that we are not broken in the process" (hooks: 1989, 26). Love here does not refer to the distorted and romanticized images created by

the capitalist-patriarchy. Rather it speaks to the love of life and the love for women which is theoretically and at times practically embraced by feminists in the work for change. "When women and men understand that working to eradicate patriarchal domination is a struggle rooted in the longing to make a world where everyone can live fully and freely, then we know our work is a gesture of love" (ibid, 27).

The FPC addressed the issue of love in their commitment to social and political transformation from a place of integration, connection, and caring. Many factors contributed to the dismantling and fragmentation of this vision. However, aspects survived and were incorporated in the short-lived FPC experience. Equally, this feminist vision survives in the work done by former FPC activists in a variety of realms - shelters for abused women, rape crisis centres, lesbian politics, educational institutions, organized sports, etc.

The FPC experience has been instructive to feminists organizing politically within and outside of mainstream structures and institutions. It illustrates the limitations and risks inherent in bringing a transformative feminist vision to a hierarchical/oppressive system. It also demonstrates how a transformative feminist vision is creatively realized through the lives of former party activists.

The FPC is a part of the history of the Canadian women's movement and has contributed

to the development of an alternative feminist project. The FPC did not emerge fully developed in 1979 and was still in process at the time of its demise in 1982. The experience of the FPC lives on through the work of former FPC activists and in this way is still contributing to the creation of feminist visions in Canada.

We have begun to come out of the shadows; we have begun to break with routines and oppressive customs and to discard taboos; we have commenced to carry with pride the task of thawing hearts and changing consciousness. Women, let's not let the danger of the journey and the vastness of the territory scare us - let's look forward and open a path in these woods. Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks. (Anzaldúa: 1983, v).

ENDNOTES

1. The context of which I speak is the current right-wing backlash.
2. The authors of Women in Canadian Politics, Volume 6 of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing edited by Kathy Megyery, are Janine Brodie, Sylvia Bashevkin, Lisa Young, Lynda Erickson, Gertrude Robinson and Armande Saint-Jean.
3. "I fight with love and I laugh with rage, gotta live light enough to see the humour and long enough to see some change" are lyrics written by Ani Difranco, "Pick Yer Nose" in Puddle Dive. Buffalo: Righteous Records, 1993.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - FPC RESEARCH PROJECT

Steele, 1992

1. Please tell me about your involvement with the FPC. When did you get involved and why? What was the nature of your involvement?
2. What were the objectives of the FPC?
What actions were taken to realize these objectives?
What would you say was accomplished by the FPC?
3. Why did the FPC emerge when it did?
Why was energy put into a political party rather than some other form of political organizing?
4. How were decisions made in the FPC to determine priorities, to develop positions on issues to identify spokeswomen, etc?
How did you participate in the decision making process?
5. The FPC expressed a feminist platform for change.
How would you define this feminism?
To what extent were feminist values integrated into the functioning of the party?
Please explain.
6. Statistics indicate that the FPC had 700 members in 1981.
How were members recruited?
What was the composition of the membership (age, sex, race, class, education, region, sexual orientation, etc.)?
Why was there not a larger membership base?
7. To what extent were FPC positions reflective of the membership?
What issues emerged which demonstrated difference?
To what extent were differences divisive?
8. Why do you think the FPC ceased functioning?

9. Dorothy Zaborsky and Pat Hughes have both written about the split that occurred because of the "man question", that is whether or not men should be included in the FPC. To what extent was autonomous women's space an issue?
10. What other issues contributed to the split?
What did the FPC not do well? From this vantage point, do you have any ideas about how these issues could be dealt with differently?
11. Reflecting on your experience with the FPC, and what you have lived and learned since, what do you see as necessary in feminist work for change today?
12. What did you gain from your experience with the FPC?
How did you bring your FPC experience into your life, into your work for change?
13. How do you see yourself as a feminist - then and today?

APPENDIX B

FORMER FPC MEMBERS INTERVIEWED - FPC RESEARCH PROJECT

Steele 1992

- * Angela Miles, Toronto - March 17, 1992.
- * Avril Hill, Toronto - April 9, 1992.
- * Diana Wedlock, Toronto - March 16, 1992.
- * Frieda Forman, Toronto - April 10, 1992.
- * Helen Lenskyj, Toronto - March 16, 1992.
- * Joan Blackwood, Toronto - April 11, 1992.
- * Marilyn MacDonald, Ottawa - March 31, 1992.
- * Mary Trafford, Ottawa - April 1, 1992.
- * Moira Armour, Toronto - March 12, 1992.

In addition, John Cleveland's 1984 interview with Terry Flower, Ganges, B.C., on file with the CWMA (Canadian Women's Movement Archives) was utilized for this research project.

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