AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Managing a Non-Profit Organization: Directors' Views from the Top

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This research is based on in-depth interviews with 10 women directors of non-profit organizations in New York City. Each director identified as feminist, or worked for a feminist-identifying organization that existed to meet the needs of women in New York City. The intention of this study is to examine how women directors manage their organizations on a daily basis.

Four overarching themes emerged from the research that connected each of the 10 directors: leadership, power, communication, and conflict-resolution. Each director discussed how each topic influenced the climate of the non-profit that they worked in, and each offered interpretations of the role of each category in the overall success of the organization.

The most striking theme that emerged, however, was that women were evaluating existing methods for running an organization and redefining, rather than recreating, the models in use to adapt to a feminist environment. This was especially central to their use of power: rather than rejecting power that came with the position, they were instead finding ways to share power that strengthened the organization.

Future research should include more in-depth studies with not only the director of non-profit organizations, but also with the entire executive staff, program staff, support staff, and clientele served. Research should also expand to other organizations within the U.S. and internationally to truly understand the ways in which women interact with each other.
Managing a Non-Profit Organization: Directors' Views from the Top

by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1
   Brief history of the “waves” of feminism................................. 1
   Feminists at work in New York City..................................... 3

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................... 6

3. METHODOLOGY .............................................................. 27
   Participants ........................................................................ 28
   Procedure .......................................................................... 30
   Limitations ...................................................................... 31

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION ............................................. 32
TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEADERSHIP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age and leadership</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and political alignment</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and diversity</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership through program</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership as a management tool</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POWER</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public versus private power</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and centralized control</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power as a perk</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNICATION</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal style</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and hierarchy</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and communication</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFLICT-RESOLUTION</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal versus informal styles</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants and conflict resolution management</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution and the masculine</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts and organizational policy</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITING ON A FEMINIST FRONT</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. APPENDIX</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEDICATION

To the women in my life who always believe in me and inspire me on a daily basis: my mom, Amanda, Trina, Heather Smith Nunez, and Loreen Loonie; I thank you.
INTRODUCTION

Brief history of the “waves” of feminism

The history of United States feminism has been divided and categorized into what is known as “waves” dating back to the feminist events of Seneca Falls, known as the first wave of feminism (Bailey, 1997). The definition of the waves of feminism has been tied to chronological events as well as generational identification rather than personal philosophies (see Mann & Huffman, 2005; Bailey, 1997; Bulbeck, 1999). By this definition, the second wave can be categorized as related to the feminists of the 60’s and 70’s, while the third wave belongs to women (largely identified as the children of the second wave) to women born in the 70’s and 80’s (Kinser, 2004).

Most relevant to current feminists are the politics of the second and third waves of feminism. How the two waves are defined—including who belongs to which wave, has created various points of view as well as additional definitions to meet the ever-evolving face of feminism (see Kinser, 2004; Purvis, 2004; Rundle, 2004). Most scholars agree, however, that the third wave movement was created by women of color looking for a space where they could exist as feminists from a second wave movement that often excluded them (Mann & Huffman, 2005). As women of color felt marginalized by the largely mid to upper class white women taking part in the second wave, they began to create a space for their own critique, analysis, and discourse, creating new ways to look at feminism from a more diverse point of view along the way (Mann & Huffman, 59).
Shedding many of the exclusive characteristics that the second wave was fraught with, women began to capture feminism in a new light that gave voice to women of color who were always crucial to the second wave, but who were often ignored (Purvis, 2004). Thus, the third wave was born—a focus on “difference, deconstruction, and decentering” (Mann & Huffman, 57). The third wave has since grown beyond women of color to be more inclusive and gives a strong voice to all women—namely young women. Michelle Jensen (2000) argues that young women are drawn to this particular wave because, they too, have felt marginalized by their older counterparts—and as a result were often drawn to the new face of feminism. For Kinser (2004), this means “seek[ing] a way of being in the world, of being feminist in the world that allows more room for stretching and spreading my feminism. I seek to negotiate my own space in this modern, global, technology-driven, dauntingly pluralistic world”.

From the third wave have come many crucial writers dedicated to giving a face to third-wave, and often doing so in a personal narrative manner that is often a trademark of the third wave (Kinser, 2004). Authors such as Amy Richards and Jennifer Baumgardner’s *Manifesta* (2000), and Rebecca Walker’s anthology *To Be Real* (1995) delve into the personal to share and extend the new climate of feminism. Beyond theories and writing, however, women from both the second and third wave movement are often forced together into the work environment, both sets of women with various needs. Out of the third wave, many non-profit organizations, such as the Third Wave Foundation have cropped up to meet this ever-changing need.
Feminists at work in New York City

Women of all generations of feminism are shaping and molding New York City in various ways in multiple forms, regardless of what wave they are categorized in, through both non-profit and corporate settings. Many women are choosing to pursue careers in the non-profit field in particular because of the importance of doing something with “a social conscience” rather than pursuing something purely for financial gain (BizEd, 2005). Many universities are developing flexible non-profit slants to their curriculums so they can reach a population of students who are interested in traditional forms of business, but who are interested in applying that to non-profit settings.

As someone who is interested in working with women in a successful, dynamic way, and after a few negative personal experiences, I became fascinated with the ways in which women interact in a non-profit setting. I focused particularly on a feminist non-profit setting rather than the corporate setting because of my personal aspirations to lead a non-profit organization, as well as a genuine interest in how feminist ideals translate into hands-on feminist work in non-profit organizations. Largely, with situations in which women internalize the roles that are placed upon them (i.e. the bitch, the passive-aggressive, the gossip, etc.) there is a recipe for failure (Lewis & Orford, 2005). I was curious to see if feminist women made a conscious effort in leadership roles to address issues such as this, and, if they were, what they felt the main issues in managing a non-profit are.

While information abounds regarding women in executive positions in corporate settings (for example, see Feeney & Lewis, 2004; Giscombe & Mattis,
2003), little information exists for how gender intersects with executive positions in
the non-profit sector. Curious as to the management styles of women, more
specifically, women in non-profit organizations, I set out to gather information about
women in executive positions from this background in New York City. After
conducting research with directors of non-profits, four overarching themes or
elements emerged. Leadership, power, communication, and conflict-resolution were
key to each director in being a successful director. To satisfy the intent of each
organization either to provide services or provide funding, the manner in which these
four theme areas were handled was key to making the inner workings—and,
therefore, the mission success—of these organizations as effective as possible.

As I conducted the study and initially undertook writing, I realized that my
own understanding of the non-profit arena was very limited. I knew that I was
interested in working in this field, I recognized that I had basic vernacular around
general issues, but I truly didn’t understand how political organizations can be.
Interviewing ten women who were highly involved in this sector told me that there is
so much depth to what they do that this study would only scratch the surface of issues
that they face—such as board interaction and funding concerns, as well as the general
funding climate in New York, which continues to be dismal after September 11.

In subsequent months, I went on to work in a large New York City non-profit
as a Program Director, and only then did I truly understand the issues that face a staff
largely comprised of women. After working for nearly four years in this
organization, I went back and looked at the data collected in a new light. One of my
biggest revelations is that in order to truly understand an organization, the questions
need to be asked beyond the vision of the executive director. Often they are concerned with larger, “big picture” issues, while other members of the staff may have a better glimpse into the inner workings of the organization.

Combining both the research and my personal experiences, I have found that beyond the four key areas of concern to be addressed, there are three factors that I feel would enhance the environments of non-profits immensely: providing leadership opportunities to younger women, providing leadership opportunities to women of color of any age, and the sharing of internal resources. These three insights are key because quite simply when looking at the data about women in executive positions in my research, these factors do not exist. These three seemingly simple acts can revolutionize the way that non-profits function because they can foster a diverse environment that is supportive of multiple viewpoints, which in the multi-faceted climate that is New York, can only be a positive in reaching out to various communities to provide services to those in need. Historically, the majority of women’s non-profit organizations that have been organized and run by white women largely lack representation of women of color, even though diversity is an ideological commitment. Recent research demonstrates that with a new era of organizations, systems that are focused on diverse and multiple voices are more successful and reach more people (Scott, 2005). The purpose of this research is to get a better understanding of how women work together in non-profit organizations—and what factors influence the success of their organization overall. I wanted to see the inner workings of how directors translate their feminism into their everyday interactions with staff, and how systems were modified or created to support a feminist viewpoint.
I wanted to scratch the surface of what I feel will be a life-long personal endeavor—to use my feminism every day to influence and create spaces where women are given opportunity and voice as a regular part of their day.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist organizing

Women have historically organized around issues central to them such as home, family and work as well as social and political issues in their communities and around the world (Spain, 2003). The landscape of issues that women have come together around is vast and varied, and often was (and often still is today) shaped by geographic location (rural vs. urban), class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. For the purpose of this particular research, I am going to focus primarily on women organizing in the last 60 years in an urban United States setting.

Women worked both individually and collectively to make strides to garner rights as a marginalized population, with many bumps and miscommunications along the road. Organizing around causes after World War II often led to women marginalizing other women, intentionally or not—which left women of color, immigrant women, and women of varying sexual identities and orientations behind or alone to create their own means of organizing (Tompkins, 2003). Organizations that formed (and still exist, in some cases) with the premise of helping women often were not inclusive of *all* women, particularly women of color and lesbians. Initially, the National Organization for Women (NOW), where founder Betty Friedan infamously
referred to lesbians as “the lavender menace.” referred to lesbians as “the lavender menace.”1 struggled around their identity and who should be allowed to join (Jay, 1999). Women on the fringes of organizations dedicated largely to middle class white women started forming groups of their own that were tailored to their needs, such as Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin’s formation of Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), initially a secret society for lesbians that blossomed into a mainstream civil rights movement for lesbians (LGBT Religious Archives Network, 2005). Not only did they change the face of rights for the LGBT community, but they also expected equal treatment from their peers: Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin demanded membership to NOW under the couple’s membership rate (LGBT Religious Archives Network).

Radical feminists were also at the forefront of the women’s movement—in 1969 Redstockings was formed as a means to get women’s issues and rights acknowledged in the mainstream. Issues such as rape, sexual harrassment, and abortion were discussed in a public way that had not been seen before (Cullen-Dupont, 2000).

Other organizations gaining notoriety were dedicated to women of color because their needs weren’t being addressed in established or forming organizations. National Coalition of 100 Black Women formed in the 1980’s in New York City to address the “cultural, economic, familial, health, political, and social issues of concern to African-American women” (Cullen-DuPont, 2000). The organization formed at a time in New York City where there were heightened “economic, racial, 

1 The "Lavender Menace" is a term used in 1969 by members of the National Organization for Women (NOW) to describe lesbians seeking membership to NOW—then seen as a public threat. Betty Friedan is given credit (although she may not want it).
and ideological turmoil" that was creating a gap between the various cultures in New York City as well as women of varying backgrounds (Eisenberg, 2004).

Organizations such as the Ms. Foundation for Women formed to fund programs to meet the needs of all women. Founded by Gloria Steinem in the 1970’s, the Ms. Foundation continues to help fund projects that are central to the lives of all women, including non-profits that are operated by and dedicated to women of color and lesbian women (Ms. Foundation for Women, 2005).

While women continue to organize today with a heightened awareness of "isms," perhaps most central to the feminist movement is finding ways to communicate and bridge gaps between women from varying backgrounds to have more successes rather than failures. During the feminist movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s there was a large disconnect between women of different races and cultures, and the movement is remembered in various ways. Creating spaces where all women are included is still an issue in organizations today—although many organizations would never openly admit it. Researcher Wini Breines, a white, middle-class woman involved in the feminist movement disagrees with the idea that feminist groups were racist: “we took antiracist positions and were conscious of race and class” (2002, 1097). While she may perceive it to be that way, women of color remember it in the form of being “rejected” from their activities of organizing around issues central to most women. This demonstrates the need for new, open forms of communication where women can come to the table and really get to the heart of issues and find ways to work towards a better future for women without creating the “other.”
Leadership

Defining women’s leadership

Muzette Hill (2003), a leadership scholar, puts it best:

Leadership is a choice, and I believe that each woman must form her own definition of leadership and choose to use her influence in a way that best serves that definition. Accomplishment is not leadership. Achievement is not leadership. Notoriety is not leadership. For me, leadership is using that accomplishment, achievement, or notoriety to expand opportunities for others. Leadership is educating those who might otherwise overlook the value of our differences so that they learn to appreciate them. Leadership is mentoring, and not just mentoring other women. I believe it’s just as important to mentor men as well so that they learn to be comfortable with women in leadership roles (101).

How do women become strong leaders? One way is to build upon what Hill says above—defining our own version of leadership and passing it on to other women. Scholar Ruth Mandel (2003) argues that women must first urge for and create a restructuring of the current leadership systems that are in place that “historically have denied leadership opportunities to women and other powerless groups” (69). She continues to say that women have the dreams in place but have yet to create a clear “blueprint” to truly allow an equal society to emerge. Unfortunately, many feminist organizations are very progressive in thought, however, their systems still embody traditional leadership styles: the all-American male ego-driven, bureaucratic hierarchical model (Lipman-Blumen, 1992).

Defining a new “blueprint” for change is not always an easy option. Typically, women in leadership roles have been approached by supervisors or colleagues who have internalized a masculine standpoint of “fix the women”; that is, how do we change how women think in order for them to fit in more with men’s thinking and structure (Meyerson & Ely, 2003)? Rather than letting women emerge in their own
right with their own assets, too often women are forced into a structure that does not foster healthy environments for them as leaders.

Creating women's leadership

So how do women break out from this mold? One idea is first to “create equal opportunity” for women by changing the policies and practices that have “blocked women’s achievement” rather than try to change the mindset of women leaders (Meyerson & Ely, 2003). This includes women being able to recognize their distinctive qualities that set them apart as leaders, which often vary greatly from those of men. Meyerson and Ely argue that there are indeed definitive differences between the way that women and men lead, and instead of eliminating those qualities, we should understand, celebrate, and foster them in the workplace (133). Furthermore, they argue that current models of leadership in many places are rooted in a “heterosexual, white, middle-class model” and that they are “erroneously based on particular versions of masculine and feminine as if these were universal” (135).

With this in mind, it is still incumbent upon women to help other women to become strong leaders. Women and men who currently hold leadership positions need to be proactive in cultivating young women as leaders, especially for women of color who are underrepresented in leadership positions (Hill, 2003). If women and men in these positions make it their responsibility to hire, mentor, and promote women into leadership positions, the inequalities that exist between men and women in the workplace will eventually fade (Rhode, 2003). However, Rhode cautions that this can backfire in a less friendly work environment, such as a corporate or political setting, where women are concerned about being labeled as a feminist or creating a
level of competition in the workplace, deterring them from opportunities and achieving personal goals (24).

Mandel (2003) cautions, however, that encouraging women who possess strong leadership skills to pursue leadership positions can be a challenge. Mentoring young women to become strong leaders becomes truly important for the continued and future success of non-profits—as Mandel puts it, “if few women today are opting for positions of top leadership, perhaps it is even because young women who have been schooled in a world of feminist consciousness are not enticed by joining what they perceive to be a type of life they want to shun—an alien, high pressured, brutally competitive lifestyle with unappealing rewards” (72).

The hard work that comes along with being a strong leader may no longer be appealing to women, particularly, as Barbara Kellerman (2003) argues, because they tend to prioritize differently than men. She states that

Leading is working. Leading is stressful. Leading is time consuming. Leading is limiting. Leading is isolating. Leading is tiring...in short, the difference may be that women are less willing than men to incur the costs of leadership, particularly if the benefits, such as money and power, are less valued (53).

Perhaps this is one reason that larger numbers of women are identifying more with positions in the public sector than in the private sector—public sector careers are not necessarily filled with money and/or power, but there is opportunity for professional and personal growth as a leader. Positions in the public sector also are more apt to allow for flex time and provide child care or other benefits, thereby making it easier for women to manage their home lives, as well as contribute to the workplace in a more efficient manner (Mandel, 2003).
Styles of leadership

After women find themselves in a leadership position, how do they lead? What styles are utilized by women to establish a presence as a strong leader? Choosing to be a certain type of leader is influenced by many factors, including personal belief systems and the context of the leadership position. The arguments regarding gender-specific differences in leadership styles are many and varied, with some scholars arguing that differences do indeed exist, if not individually, then characteristically (Coleman, 2003; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Kezar, 2000). Many argue that differences, in fact, do exist between women and men, but that women should adapt to a “masculine” approach in order to succeed as a leader because it is the only successful approach (van Engen, van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001).

With gender considered a valid influence on leadership styles, three dominant styles emerged from the review of the literature: the task-oriented style, defined by a leader being concerned more with organizational process, goals, and hierarchy; the interpersonally-oriented style, defined by maintaining relationships and by tending to overall welfare and morale (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001); and the pluralistic style, where conventional models of leadership are challenged in order to develop an organizational-specific model that takes into account gender, race, class, and orientation to facilitate communication that is beneficial to a diverse workforce (Kezar, 2000).

Task-oriented leadership is most often associated with what we know as “masculine” leadership, while interpersonally-oriented direction is typically
"feminine." Task-oriented leaders reflect "agentic" norms, associated with behaviors that are assertive, controlling, ambitious, dominant, and forceful; interpersonally-oriented leaders are assigned "communal" characteristics, that is, those that are affectionate, kind, sympathetic, sensitive, nurturing, and gentle (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 788).

What is most frustrating about these categories is that while women and men can certainly exhibit characteristics that align with the above-mentioned models, they most certainly can also reveal distinct qualities that are both agentic and communal. Rather than adapting to just one style of leadership, adopting qualities from both styles may create a more successful leader (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). The danger lies in mass internalization of styles that become solely masculine or feminine, forcing women and men to adopt a style so as to be seen as successful, rather than to do what is best personally and for the good of the organization.

Perhaps most compelling, and possibly most challenging, is the concept of pluralistic leadership. As more organizations recognize that traditional hierarchy is not an effective process to maximize their success, directors are looking for ways that best fit the needs of the staff and clientele. Pluralistic leadership takes into account the diverse workforce, as well as personal expertise in particular fields. Not only does this approach add to the value of the staff as a whole, but it also creates an atmosphere of personal growth and recognition for qualities that are sometimes ignored under more traditional leadership styles (Kezar, 2000). This model is particularly beneficial to employees who are not often at the forefront in leadership positions: women and minorities. By recognizing difference, multiple leadership
beliefs continue to exist, but with an air of open acknowledgement and negotiation. This is accomplished through a strong position that awareness of identity and power, recognizing multiple perspectives and leadership, and mediation are all necessary tenets for this model to thrive (10-11).

Typically with leadership roles comes power. Strong leaders not only need to think about how they lead a group, but also how they exert, or share, their power for the general well-being of employees and overall success of the organization.

Power

When an image of power is conjured up in a mainstream western societal context, what might pop into someone’s head is a white man in a business suit, one who is obviously rich, handsome, and in charge, captivating a large group with his savvy and know-how, often for his own benefit, reaped in financial gain. This is not to say that women are not powerful, but there are so many other words and images that come to mind that are on the list of what women are before we even get to power. Women have and continue to be a source of power in virtually all aspects and walks of life; however, they remain relatively invisible in most segments of society, both personal and public. In the work world, where men define and exude the prevalent image of self-serving power, women are either forced to adapt to the patriarchal definition or create new meanings of power that benefit the whole and more adequately reflect women’s own sense of power.

Defining power

Because of these social conditions, women have struggled with the definition of power, particularly in a feminist work environment because the most readily
available model for power is one where the person wielding it is often using it in a way that is self-serving and not always the best option for the entire staff. This misuse makes it necessary for women to form their own definition of power and change the way organizations operate for the good of all employees. The debate becomes heated not only when power is interpreted, molded and defined through a feminist lens, but also when theories of power, whether feminist theories or not, are put into practice. Often defining power in words is easier than putting it into motion.

For many feminists, power has become a dichotomy where two explanations reign—either “woman as subordinate” or “woman power” (hooks, 1984). Both are patriarchal models. By women accepting the terms of power as defined by the patriarchy, the concept of power remains the same—one in which women do not have a voice because their role is defined for them. hooks argues that women need to scratch beneath the surface of these preconceived definitions and create a working definition that is all-inclusive to women of different classes, races, ethnicities, and sexualities. Until then, the concept of power will remain unchanged (85).

Amy Allen (1998) expands on hooks’ ideas and terms this division as “domination theory:” the typical male embodiment of power where self-interest is more important, versus “empowerment theory,” where power is used to benefit the whole rather than the self. Allen claims that women need to take the idea of power outside theorizing and place it in real life situations where it can be applied to all women. Further, Allen stresses solidarity and coalition building as a necessary step in creating strong feminist allegiances among women (33). Without this vital step, patriarchal conditions of power prevail within a feminist organization because a
conscientious decision has not been made by the organization to create an environment that is supportive of a system that is not subject to a patriarchal point of view.

Utilizing power

Even when power is defined, it is not smooth sailing for feminists within a working feminist environment. In these locations the ways power is used become a key struggle for women striving to maintain balance. How power is negotiated can be especially difficult in creating an environment where women can thrive and that is conducive to producing important feminist work, as well as fostering healthy relationships (Ashcraft, 2001). Recognizing the different types of power that can potentially exist in a feminist workplace is the first key step in creating a positive environment for women.

Possibly the most well-known understandings of power were proposed by Marilyn French as “power-over” and “power-to.” In Feminist Thought (1998) Rosemarie Tong interprets French’s “power-over” as a masculine attribute that men typically exude in their worldview—that success and power are only maintained through hierarchy and exerting control over others. Power-to, on the other hand, is a “feminized” version of power-over, in that perhaps people will not lose their desire to control others, but they can curb it in an attempt to redistribute power to others, forming more of a cooperative or collective setting. In fact, according to Tong French does not believe that masculine systems are necessarily evil, but she does believe that they must be understood as a system to connect people rather than disconnect (55).
Especially appealing to feminists in non-profit work environments, power-to is an opportunity for individual voices to be heard in a safe space. Some feminists believe that women cannot exist in a truly feminist organization without recognizing the role that power can play in making or breaking the work that is done—in fact, many would argue that the organization would not be deemed worthy of being called feminist if it did not make an effort to do so (Allen, 1998).

Allen (1998) also strives to expand French’s power-over and power-to definitions, and defines the ultimate collaborative work between feminists: power-with. Allen believes that the only way to further the work of feminists is to create “solidarity...a collectivity to act together for the shared or common purpose of overturning a system of domination” (35). By creating a definition of power from a power-with stance, the success of the collective group becomes the driving force, while individual egotistical needs are considered less important to the furtherance of the organization’s goals.

Given these feminist analyses of power, when and where do theory and practice intertwine? Where do we find a balance between what we think power should be and how it truly exists—and, most importantly, how does it apply to human interaction? Both the non-profit and corporate worlds are struggling with the concept. One movement within the private world that is perhaps a lesson learned from the public world is “power-shifting” (Gross, 1997; Ashcraft, 2001). Gross asserts that by sharing power within a teamwork model, the work will be accomplished better and faster than by individuals working alone and that, ultimately, everyone is working for the good of the collective with no single person being the sole proprietor of power.
This paradigm is being applied to the non-profit feminist work world typically in small, new organizations that are looking for a fresh approach to an often-stale hierarchy. With projects being addressed in a semi-collective manner, individuals typically have a greater sense of accomplishment and voice within the organization, one of the non-monetary means non-profit organizations use for rewarding their employees for power shared in a group or collective model (Rhode, 50). The difference: typically the private sector is looking for the financial payoff, while the public sphere is looking for ways to advance the message and productivity of the organization whether it brings money to the organization or not.

In a study conducted by Karen Ashcraft (2001), the term “organized dissonance” emerged as a way to define the cross-hatching of theory and practice in feminist organizations. Ashcraft scrutinized how feminist analyses of power are intertwined with the everyday activities involved in running an organization and how women’s organizations find ways to share power. Through an in-depth case study, she revealed the ways in which one organization consciously chose to create an “empowerment” structure where employees were encouraged to share power through open discussions and actions. While the study revealed that many issues got in the way of sharing power—such as human emotion and the desire for individual achievement and recognition, the organization as a whole benefited from attempting to address present power dynamics and turn those into positive learning experiences (1309).

In a recent survey about women and power conducted by Hewlett-Packard and the Simmons School of Management, details emerged that women are headed in
the right direction—that is, toward positions of leadership and power (BizEd, 2005). Researchers found that the majority of women in management positions enjoy power and actively seek it. Over 80% say they are comfortable with power and like what they can accomplish with it. Sixty-two percent say they enjoy the visibility that comes with it. Most interestingly, the survey showed that women are redefining power on a large scale.

The BizEd (2005) survey reported that “rather than measuring it in terms of how many people report to them or how well they compete successfully for assignments, power means harnessing the support of co-workers and [direct reports], empowering teams, and building networks of allies to change their organization” (11). In more visible ways, women are looking for ways to benefit their organization through the connection with others rather than over others.

Younger women also played a large role in power sharing: of the women under 35 surveyed, 92% want to use their power for socially minded organizational change. Diversity was also taken into consideration: 88% of women of color are determined to use power for social improvement, versus 80% of white women (BizEd, 2005).

However, once workplace power dynamics are established, communicating individually and as a team becomes critical in the ever-evolving process of becoming a thriving organization.

Communication

Little literature is available on how women communicate with women in positions of management or leadership—available literature typically fails to acknowledge gender
as an aspect of communication, and therefore does not address the ramifications that gender possibly presents. Upon further examination, it becomes clear that most of the studies available address how women and men communicate in the workplace, or how women can learn to modify behavior in the workplace (read: how women can behave in ways that make them fit into the patriarchal workplace model, for example, by being less emotion-based and more intellect-based).

Creating a communication style

Communication techniques and procedures can be equally important to the success of feminist organizations as establishing successful power dynamics and definitions of leadership. In non-profits, it is especially vital to create methods of communication that are not only productive to the environment but that fit the needs of the staff. Limits of time and resources usually prevent adequate focus addressing how to meet the needs of the organization with its communication style. Differences between co-workers can also prevent this task from happening—it is not an easy topic to harness. Often the challenge of creating clear and effective communication is hard to conquer when women of different ages, sexual and social orientations, and ethnicities come together to create a successful and meaningful work environment (Riger, 1994).

The executive director is typically responsible for setting the tone when it comes to healthy (and unhealthy) communication. Personal style, size of the staff, and access to technology are all challenges a director faces in the non-profit sector. Types of communication ranging from simple in-house communication via e-mail, phone, or memos to more formalized procedures, such as scheduled in-house meetings, or
external dialogue with potential or current funders, as well as board members, all affect the success of the organization. A savvy director not only is great at negotiating these waters personally but should also find ways to incorporate technological advances for the greater good of the entire staff.

Often the size of the staff can dictate when and what types of communication happen. When total staff size is small, interaction tends to be face-to-face, informal, and frequent. All staff is intermingled—from directors, to managers, to support staff, and sometimes even board members—making encounters more frequent, and sometimes more difficult. However, as numbers increase, often processes are formalized, taking the form of e-mails, memos, and voicemails, which can lead to a feeling of isolation for some individuals. With the written word left up to the interpretation of the person reading, more room is available for misinterpretation, leading to conflict (Riger, 1994).

When staff size increases, it also often becomes more diverse, especially in urban areas such as New York City. Cultural differences in communication styles have to be taken into consideration to foster a healthy environment. To facilitate this process, cultural training programs often can be helpful in opening up conversations around diversity and creating awareness (de Leon, 1995).

Communication and technology

In the last ten years, technological advances, specifically the Internet and e-mail, have vastly changed what communication looks like in non-profits. While many people benefit from e-mail and the Internet, some, usually smaller, organizations still do not have the resources to provide these services to their employees due to lack of
funding. For places that do provide these services, a whole new world has opened, with positive and negative consequences. Jill Muehrcke (1998) argues that innovations in technology create an opportunity for non-profit organizations to develop a new voice and language that empower and strengthen them. She writes of a language that will "celebrate learning, life, flexibility and growth rather than hierarchy and stasis; it ought to foster faith, openness and community instead of fear, control and competition," as are often found in their corporate counterparts (2).

However, mirroring corporate counterparts is not always detrimental to feminist non-profits. In a time when funding is scarce, directors need to be aggressive and prepared to work within a corporate setting to get additional money. Using a language that is exclusive to the non-profit world would not allow for this fundraising to happen (Alexander & Weiner, 1998).

Age and technology

Age is another factor that influences communication through technology in non-profit organizations. Many women directors of feminist non-profit organizations are baby boomers and were working successfully for many years before the advances in the Internet and e-mail. In addition, many directors are hired by a board of directors composed of older women who do not understand the needs of technology, so they do not select candidates with strong technology-based assets as directors. Some directors are resistant or opposed to learning ways to advance the organization through technology, often because they are unaware of how to use it themselves. In fact, if women directors do not seek help either internally or externally to educate themselves on technological advances, they could be seriously hurting their
organizations. Women in managerial positions who took part in mentorships to advance their technological knowledge showed a greater rate of success in their organization than those who did not (Carter, 2002).

As advanced as organizations strive to be in communication, inevitably conflicts will arise in various shapes and sizes. How conflict is addressed, particularly by the director, is key in finding resolution. Personality, political stance, or even simple misunderstandings can lead to conflict. Creating strong conflict-resolution procedures is not only healthy but also leads to the overall success of the organization.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict happens. It is human nature that when people work together, situations arise that are uncomfortable, difficult, and that even result in employees leaving the job without any sort of resolution (Schwebel, 1998). Often when discussing conflict in the arena of two or more women, the stereotypes and consequences reinforce stereotypes of women working together. While men are typically assigned the words “aggressive, hostile, and obstructive,” women are labeled with “catty, backstabbing, and sneaky” (Rutter & Hine, 2005; Lewis & Orford, 2005).

It is in the best interests of organizations to find a way to resolve issues that arise, rather than to leave them to sort themselves out. An increasing number of organizations are using internal and external mediation systems, including ongoing training opportunities to diminish incidences of long, dragged out fights between employees (Pearl, 2004). While instituting conflict resolution procedures is costly for
non-profits that are often struggling to make ends meet, the payoff can often out-
weigh the initial up-front expense.

Pro-active conflict resolution

Organizations with the means to invest in prevention methods are choosing a very proactive style in the form of ongoing training in two key areas: generational and cultural differences. Both generational and cultural differences are among the leading causes of conflict in the workplace (Harris, 2005). Harris notes that for the first time in history, four separate, diverse generations are working together, all with their own set of needs, values, and priorities. He stresses that managers need to take generational and cultural issues to the next level under the umbrella of “diversity training.” In a study conducted by Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale (1999), they discovered a direct correlation between increased diversity and increased conflict. By addressing differences head-on and providing a forum for discussion, the chances of serious conflict down the road are not nearly as likely as if they had not been addressed at all.

Part of the proactive stance is also to be prepared for conflict when it arises: many organizations are turning to either internal “peer” mediation or external mediators to help resolve conflicts through a series of steps (Cortland Forum, 1998). By taking a humanistic approach and thinking outside of individual stress levels, resolution can be attained by listening, controlling emotion, finding the source of the conflict, and communicating personal needs clearly in the situation.

In *Women Don’t Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*, Linda Babcock and Sarah Laschever (2003) note that voicing needs and wants is not always easy for
women. Women often have been socialized from a very young age to avoid difficult situations or to always concede to what the other party is interested in, rather than their own needs and feelings. In fact, the authors note that women frequently are more interested in protecting relationships than realizing their own agendas, a goal which men typically are aiming for. This happens especially when women are in the position of speaking up for something that they need—the conflict that can arise sometimes goes against every grain of their socialization.

Conflict resolution in a social context

Beyond an immediate response in the workplace, the authors are calling for a detailed look at how we socialize our girls to not fear risking personal relationships or not “pleasing others,” but rather to encourage healthy communication in relationships and not to be afraid to ask for what they need. The authors note that strife often can arise out of positions rather than interests, and if conflict that arises out of ineffective communication is examined closely, both parties frequently can depart satisfied (124).

What do women do when the conflict is with a supervisor or a boss? Often it can be solved by doing three key things: first, realizing that the person in power may be using “transference,” projecting an unrelated incident onto the employee; second, removing the behavior from the individual delivering it; and third, understanding that there is a reason for the behavior (Brushfield, 2005). After the employee establishes what she believes to be the cause of the conflict, she should forge ahead with a solution-oriented outlook.
Unfortunately, many suggestions to solve conflict on one’s own are effective in theory, but application can be a challenge. What seems realistic on paper, for example, is not often applicable or is manipulative and weak in general. Techniques such as using a soft voice, mirroring physical behaviors of a supervisor, or “getting over it” by imagining the other person as something ridiculous, or even quitting your job, are all amongst the recommendations that reinforce stereotypical (and often expected) female roles in stressful situations (Brushfield, 2005). More realistic and practical, perhaps, are techniques such as using social support mechanisms, including coworkers, to help analyze the situation, and not being afraid to ask for help if needed, whether that help comes from another supervisor or Human Resources personnel (Hood, 2004). Ultimately, the best techniques to use are going to be highly situational and environmental.

Concluding thoughts

As shown above, women have been organizing and will continue to do so for years to come around issues that are central to their lives and their community, either locally or globally. As with any organization, issues arise around leadership, power, communication, and conflict-resolution; however, these topics (and concerns) are of particular interest to women as they create and organize because of the over-powering pre-determined patriarchal systems that exist as models—which are typically readily accepted by a large portion of the population.

There is a research need to turn the primary focus on how women choose to organize and navigate non-profit organizations as a form of organizing to create new methods of traversing unknown waters and breaking free from outdated, patriarchal
forms of organizing. The purpose of this research is to shed some light on new, innovative systems and ideas that could be utilized by women in pursuit of an updated system.

METHODOLOGY

My analysis of management styles of feminist directors of non-profit organizations was anchored in a qualitative study done in 2001 that focused on individual directors’ perceptions of management within their organizations. I found participants by reaching out to organizations found on the Action Without Borders website (www.idealista.org). Action Without Borders is an internationally recognized non-profit organization dedicated to change by networking the non-profit community on a global scale. During my search, I specifically looked for organizations that identified as feminist, woman-centered, or had a feminist-identifying director. When I located an organization that I felt met the criteria, I called each director to talk about the research to confirm that they were candidates for the process and to set up a face-to-face meeting at their convenience in a location that was conducive to an interview. I collected data through semi-structured interviews conducted primarily on-site at the organization with the director in her office, with the exception of two, one of which was held via telephone, and the other in a mutually agreed-upon location, both because of transportation and time issues. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 2 and ½ hours.

I used a short questionnaire to gain insight into the director’s background, such as ethnicity, age, education, and previous sectors worked in. Directors also chose a pseudonym for the interview. The questionnaire was also used to determine the
demographics of the organization and its employees. Requested information included services provided by the organization, personal ethnicity/identification, as well as staff ethnicity, and positions held by employees. Out of the ten interviews conducted, one chose not to complete the questionnaire because of time constraints.

A more in-depth interview session followed the questionnaire in which I posed 20 questions to each director regarding the general roles and responsibilities faced in running a feminist non-profit organization. I asked questions such as why the organization was considered feminist, what a typical day looks like for them, hiring policies, expectations of staff, interactions with the board, internal and external demands on directors, as well as where they felt the future of the organization was headed.

I used multiple methods to triangulate data I collected to offer validity to my research and interpretations, as well as to present data from the perspective of the participants (Reinharz, 1992). In addition to the interviews and questionnaires, I performed a review of the available literature produced by each non-profit, as well as information available on the website to gain a more rounded snapshot of what each organization looked like. Reinharz (1992) notes the significance of utilizing content analysis in addition to the findings of the researched data; it allows for a natural, realistic portrayal of each organization, as the documents were not prepared for research, adding further depth to the triangulation process.

Participants

I was able to contact 27 non-profit feminist organizations through the use of Action Without Borders. I used the following parameters to identify potential
participants: 1) the organization’s literature and/or director identified as feminist; 2) the primary population that utilized the organization’s resources consisted primarily of women (over 75%); and 3) the organization was located within the five boroughs of New York City.

After finding a potential director, I called her to ask for an interview and to discuss the parameters of the organization. Did she identify as feminist? Did the organization identify as feminist? Out of the 27 organizations contacted, ten directors agreed to participate in the research. The organizations that declined to participate did so mainly because of time and financial restrictions, which were in direct relation to the tragedy at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, as many local organizations were dedicated to relief efforts or had recently lost funding, an organizational facet for which directors are primarily responsible.

The events on September 11 certainly shaped this study. In the weeks and months that followed the events in Lower Manhattan, my interviews continued at a time when people were reevaluating their lives in relation to a multitude of factors: including where and how they chose to work and live. Many of the directors interviewed post-9/11 discussed employees leaving organizations because of the attacks; an equal or higher number of directors noted that more people were reaching out to non-profits as a method of giving back to the community in a more meaningful way. Indeed my own perspective and evaluation of life was morphing and shifting—having recently relocated to New York only two months prior, I was experiencing second thoughts of staying, especially because at the time my neighborhood was under scrutiny due to the large Muslim population, my partner and his family
included. Eventually landing a job at a non-profit organization dedicated to youth initiatives, I felt renewed, like I was doing my part for change in a city under such turmoil.

The ten directors I interviewed all identified as feminist. Of the directors interviewed, two were women of color, two were lesbians, one was in her 20’s, two were in their 30’s, one was in her 40’s, five were in their 50’s, and one opted not to answer regarding age and ethnicity.

Of the directors’ organizations, five used the term “feminist” in the literature available either through publications or the organization’s website. The organizations were dedicated to various feminist causes, such as redefining women and religious rituals within the larger context of a particular male-dominated religion; girls’ programming and advocacy for self-efficacy; funding lesbian related projects and services; providing funding to young women activists; funding women and media related projects—particularly film; funding feminist projects and organizations; educating women on health-related topics (two organizations), including general well-being and HIV/AIDS prevention; providing women with self-defense and martial arts techniques to become more independent; and focusing on helping women with immediate housing and economic needs. (See Appendix).

Procedure

I took a constructivist grounded theory (Schwandt, 1998) approach with data collection and interpretation. By using open-ended questions loosely structured around feminism and management, I allowed themes to emerge from the data collected in the voice of each woman interviewed. This was especially important in
my research because I left the definition of feminism up to the personal view of each participant, only requiring that they self-identified as feminist. Grounded theory allowed me to use broad questions loosely based around the topic in order to allow key issues to unfold from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Aware that my own feminist beliefs could perhaps sway the interpretation of the data, I transcribed the interviews, and then coded the data three times, first through my own knowledge and understanding, again looking for only the broadest themes to emerge, and finally comparing my observations to the transcribed words of participants to ensure the accuracy of the process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Limitations

As a feminist researcher, I realize my position as a feminist will influence my perception of what I hear and see. Recognizing this, I understand that by using a feminist lens, my interpretation of what is said and heard may not be that of others—the directors interviewed likely have different understandings of their responses than I have. My study is limited by a small sample of 10 organizations in New York City. While there are a multitude of organizations in New York City serving the needs of women, I am also limited by few women of color present in the population interviewed. Ethnic diversity was indeed a priority for me in my initial search for organizations; however, the seven organizations I contacted that met the criteria for my study and had women of color in director positions elicited a negative or no response. Additionally, by choosing an urban area versus a rural area, historically and currently the relationship to feminism and non-profit work varies greatly. A small town in Nebraska would have very different needs than a large city such as New
York. My own transition into the non-profit world has undoubtedly shaped this thesis. My research into feminist non-profits in New York City led me to my current position as a program director in a nationally known women’s organization. Since taking the position nearly four years ago, I have certainly thought more in-depth about the challenges that face not only executive directors, but all staff at non-profit organizations.

My experiences, both positive and negative, have impacted the way that I have interpreted data—I’ve often had frustrating encounters with executive staff, and I have had to learn to balance my feminist ideals with political stances in an office setting just to survive. While looking at the results through this lens, the question has often presented itself in my mind: what if I would have asked the rest of the staff this question? Would they agree with the executive director? Possibly a topic for a dissertation or an in-depth case study, the time and scope of this particular research does not allow such profundity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership

Each director interpreted leadership in a unique way; however, the majority defined leadership in one of two ways—as something instrumental in fostering within program participants, or as something that they themselves defined and used to set the tone in the organization. Yet before women began to talk about what leadership meant to them within their organization, first, I wanted to know how each director felt about having a staff made up mostly or completely of women. This proved to be a tricky and a sometimes sensitive topic for the directors based on personal or
organizational political alignment, community need, or a deep and personal loyalty to their feminist beliefs. Overall, the directors felt strongly that it was important to have primarily women working for them in order to maintain or to propel women into leadership positions.

Age and leadership

Often a barrier to women in leadership has a direct correlation with their age. While specific to this particular study most of the ageism was targeted towards younger women in leadership positions, there are also issues of age surrounding older women. In this particular research, it seems that younger women had to create their own organizations in order to explore executive level leadership options, while more of the established organizations had women over 40 in their executive positions.

Some directors recognized the need, others did not.

Isabella, director of an international youth program, recognized the importance of having young women in leadership positions, stating,

I am trying to promote young women. I really only want to hire women because I want them to work with women. Not to say that I want to discriminate against men, but I’m very sensitive to the type of people we hire for our different projects...so I guess in my staff selection...I have that in mind.

Claire, the 27-year-old director of a feminist foundation, agreed on the importance of hiring young women, especially in a non-profit community that typically hires older women, elaborating,

I think since we’re an organization [targeted towards younger feminists], obviously [we] hire young women to do, you know, the work that most older women do. And I think...it’s taken [older women] years to get to this level. So the idea is that we hire someone who you can see a lot of potential, with some solid experiences, but how many experiences can you have at twenty-two work-wise? You
know the real ability to want to learn, and strong political vision, strong politics [is important].

Claire’s organization was in a unique position—because they were dedicated to issues that affect young feminists, there was no internal battle or justification needed for hiring young women into leadership roles—something that was unique to her organization alone. While the front line staff was all women, the board was comprised of older women with more experience to help guide and mentor the employees if there were issues that came up.

Leadership and political alignment

In my own experiences at a large non-profit, leadership is not always about internal perceptions of the organization, but also about how the general public view them, as well as their main constituents, who often provide resources (namely money) to the organization. That perception can often be central to how successful the organization is financially. In turn, directors have very high expectations of how the staff should align themselves as well.

Challenge, a director of a well-known feminist foundation with an all-female leadership staff, acknowledges that while they don’t directly ask if potential employees are feminist, personal alignment with women’s issues is extremely important.

We don’t say that you must identify as feminist, but we do ask every applicant their opinions about women’s issues. We, of course, talk really clearly about reproductive rights. We are a pro-choice organization and we would expect, um, I guess what I would say is that nobody in the organization would be anti-choice. I think we look first at what... is the person bringing, you know, what would be the value added... then we look at what their politics are and if the politics will fit into the organization.
Because the visibility of the organization is so high, it is rare that directors get applicants who truly do not understand the scope of the work that they do in at least basic terms. One of the struggles that Challenge has goes beyond that: women view working for this organization as the cream of the crop as far as feminist foundations go, and therefore sometimes have an overzealous view of what a feminist organization looks like. Often, this leads to employees having a harder time realizing that perhaps it’s not their dream feminist position.

Maya Deren, the director of a women’s film non-profit, strongly believes that it is important to have an all-female staff, and noticed an important detail when hiring:

Our staff is all women, and that is something that comes up every now and then. More frequently I would say in the last five years. A question, and not in a critical way, but a question, you know, should we consider hiring a male? It’s very interesting to me whenever we put out job positions. Whenever it’s a manager position, we get inundated with resumes from men, whenever it’s a non-manager position, we don’t. I think half of them don’t know what they are applying for; it’s usually from the newspaper. But we always say in the newspaper ad that it’s a feminist organization. One of our board members who actually was on staff here for a long time recommended a man for a position recently and I was quite surprised...I have felt strongly that we should only hire women because I think that’s again where we want to put our resources. I can’t understand why we would ever hire a man. There are so many qualified women out there, I just don’t get it. I don’t even know if it is illegal or not, it probably is.

The “men-as-managers” and “women-as-support” dichotomy could stem from various places. Perhaps women are internalizing the perceptions of their own capabilities and not applying for positions that would pose a challenge. It could also relate to what the authors of Women Don’t Ask state: women are simply not speaking
up for themselves and taking on the challenge of demonstrating that they are up for the challenging positions.

That being said—Maya states exactly what Rhode (2003) had in mind—that by hiring, mentoring, and promoting women into strong positions that they are qualified for, the inequality of women and men leaders will be lessened. For her, an all-female staff was the only place that women could be fostered as strong leaders in positions that they are not typically seen in.

Leadership and diversity

New York City is known for its diversity. Non-profits in general largely exist to meet the needs of underserved populations in the five boroughs of New York. This takes shape in the form of women, immigrants, and people affected by poverty or illness, to name a few. In my personal experience as a program director, having a staff that is reflective of the community that the organization serves is absolutely essential in its success. Language, knowledge of community, and ethnicity can all be supports—or barriers—in carrying out the mission of programs.

Because all of these women are directors of non-profit organizations that largely address the needs of underserved populations, hiring a diverse staff from within the community was acknowledged as important to all of them. Rosie Pesca, the director of an organization committed to financing and developing reasonably priced housing for low-income families, understands that diversity is key in making this undertaking a success.

We like a diverse staff, we want a diverse staff, and we think diversity has an inherent value...and we want to make sure that ripples throughout the organization. We also think that it’s very important that we do as much hiring
as possible from the community in which most of our organization is based. So we try to hire locally.

Paula, the director of a self-defense organization with an all-female staff also agreed that diversity is a key element when hiring women: “We have a strong commitment to being multi-racial and to represent different ethnic backgrounds.” In addition, Paula saw the visible results of hiring women and lesbians into leadership roles, tying leadership directly in to their mission and to the identity of the organization overall.

We have a lot of lesbians in leadership. We don’t consider ourselves a lesbian organization, but um, sometimes people think that in all women’s organizations it means that it’s all lesbians. It’s an incredible learning experience for the kids, the girls and boys who come, they have all-female role models, and the boys’ fathers come in, bring their sons to take martial arts from women. And then the teen women assist in the classes and there are youth instructors so that the boys have many levels and generations of female authority and leadership. Still it makes it a very sort of, I mean, very, very, dynamic unusual place. And often I take it for granted and then I just walk into the environment and I see all these different mixes of people from our neighborhood coming in, and entrusting, again, their boys and girls to our program, and it’s very moving.

Paula recognized the powerful tool of diversity in leadership to educate the general public, as well as the program participants. This belief is grounded in the strong political roots of the organization and is used as a positive attribute. But beyond Paula’s commitment to diversity, there was a clear commitment to showing women of various ages in leadership roles. By providing leadership roles for teen women, as well as older women, she truly exemplified multiple types of diversity in her front-line staff. Her management staff, however, was primarily white.
Leadership through program

For many of the organizations, leadership was simply a quality that each director identified with and tried to pass along to the other women. For some, though, leadership was central in the programming offered to the clients or program participants. This concept takes empowerment to the next level: beyond seeing the importance of strong leadership internally, skills are now being passed on to women in the community, girls in the community, and other participants who would not normally receive such information.

Hill (2003) stresses the importance of this exact idea—not only mentoring young women, but also mentoring young women of color so that they can expand their leadership capabilities and become strong leaders. She stresses that this is key for both men and women, but particularly women who have become strong, visible leaders as well.

Dotti Janelle, director of a non-profit that is centered around Jewish women’s needs in the Jewish community believes that for her organization a need in the community allowed her to develop a program component simply and accurately titled “Women in Leadership.” As an organization that started with a grass-roots approach for Jewish women, there is a high demand for this sort of programming. Due to the growth of the organization, they have since hired an outside consultant to offer this workshop. “Our services...are hands-on in Women and Leadership...I think many of us would like to take [it] back on some level and do more hands-on stuff with this.” Dotti mentions a very important part of promoting leadership: while organizations
may be working internally on leadership, there is also a strong opportunity to offer
leadership skills to the women and girls served through program.

Anne Davis, director of a leadership program specifically designed for girls
and young women, connects leadership directly to what she believed made the
organization, and herself, feminist. She states,

I think the leadership development, with its emphasis on self-
development, you know, really places a strong priority on helping the
girls, um, develop who they are. And I think that's feminist for an
organization, and individually, to care about girls and their leadership
development.

By providing opportunities to girls especially, it is fostering an environment early on
of a new and different type of empowerment for girls—one in which they see
themselves as strong, capable, and possessing leadership qualities from the onset,
rather than needing to retrain themselves as leaders later on in life.

Leadership as a management tool

For many of the directors, leadership was a tool that had to continually be
cultivated and examined to continue to be a strong leader—and often was the key to
good management. While many of the directors talked about leadership as a
necessary attribute, not many actually defined what leadership meant to them.

For some, leadership was indeed a key element in managing the organization
and setting an example for staff. Isabella explained,

Key elements for management...leadership and being a role model! I
think you have to ask how you expect other people to act, and if you
set a precedent doing one thing then it's hard for you to lay any kind of
groundwork for anything other than that. So I think first is leadership
and being a role model.

For Claire, it was extremely important to reflect a leadership style that
transferred over into every aspect of work:
We’re supporting young women leaders...part-timers who come in, and we really give them substance projects...to the point where they’ll plan our programs, rather than other internships....we ourselves need to, you know, reflect those values internally.

Both Isabella and Claire were two of the youngest directors with the least amount of experience within a non-profit, so both were still developing their style when it came to leadership. They were much more likely in their stance to try to find solutions that satisfied the whole of the organization rather than to make someone unhappy with a decision that they had made because of the leadership position that they hold.

Challenge felt differently. After years of experience as a leader, she recognized that there were times when it was necessary to make a decision as a leader that wasn’t always easy to do. While she accepted that it was difficult, she also deemed it essential to the overall growth. She states:

It’s hard. Because there’s oftentimes much more information that you feel that if you could tell this information to other people they’d understand why you made the decision that you made, but you can’t. That’s a boundary you have to keep. So therefore being in leadership the way I am you often have to take a lot of heat. And then I think with that, what’s interesting about that is, it’s about the trust level that people feel in you overall. So that at any given time a person in this organization may feel I’ve done the wrong thing or made the wrong decision, but overall I would hope that there’s a pretty high...level of trust in me overall. And I think that’s what leadership is about, you know, that you don’t always understand or believe in everything that leadership does, but you’re in an organization and you...believe, overall you can believe in the leadership and their vision, and if you can’t then you probably don’t belong in the organization.

For Challenge, leadership was also about how the organization reflected back to the outside world, as well as how she presented herself in external leadership positions, such as in board positions that she holds and other interactions with the public and media. In a very public role that was probably the most political of all of
the directors interviewed, she was very concerned about how she looked in the larger outside world. In particular, there was a lot of weight on her shoulders to be a strong leader in the feminist realm. Failing in this position would perhaps lead to the all-too-common sentiment "women cannot lead."

Power

Most directors admitted that power, or at least their perceived power, came with the territory of being a director. How each director exerted and used power was very different. Each director interpreted power in a very different context as it related to their position.

Public vs. private power

Dotti Janelle felt a strong social obligation to make the organization powerful through personal convictions implemented in everyday practices and interactions in the larger world. She didn't view power as an individual quality; rather, she looked at it as a necessary value that the organization should possess to be successful. This was interpreted through diversity of who they hired, and who the clients of the organization were. By strongly rooting themselves in a feminist belief, their practice of equal representation across race, gender, sexual and class orientation made them a "strong and powerful organization." Through this process, her organization was a rare glimpse into a truly diverse way of operating.

The other directors saw power as a much more personal obligation to staff. Claire was concerned with the overall power dynamic that was created in the work environment. While she admitted that she was conscientious of the fact that a leadership role often brought with it power, she felt it was important "to make sure
that the other staff doesn’t feel like there is some sort of power dynamic and that it is something that we’ll face up to...it’s important that we all recognize [it could happen]. That it could exist.” Claire’s organization was in the process of developing a co-directorship to avoid personality clashes and power dynamics that have the potential to cause conflict, as well as to diversify the voices making decisions as an organization.

Claire’s view on power could be related to a true feeling of wanting a communal workplace, or it could perhaps buy into the idea that women should not use power, or that power is a negative attribute to possess. The idea of true power sharing and a communal setting in most organizations interviewed did lead to a feeling of worth in the employees but also usually created such a long and drawn out processes that little got done in an effective manner. Also, when the director has such a laid back perspective on issues, often employees do not respect that director to get things done. In my experience as a program director, this could be ascribed to socialization—most of us have not been socialized to operate in a truly communal environment where deadlines are flexible and communication is a central forum for conducting business.

As feminist organizations recognize and cultivate a style that is advantageous to the overall success of the organization through use of power, Allen’s (1998) empowerment theory could truly come into play: where the voice of the whole is more important than that of the self; and where women are part of the conscientious decision to make power-sharing a successful (rather than detrimental) part of the workplace. As women develop this highly inclusive style and make a conscious
effort for structural change, less emphasis (and reward) will be put on self-promotion and more effort will be put into developing a true, not just theoretical, way of expressing one’s self for the good of the whole. While this theory is very idealistic, Allen’s ideas could easily become praxis by choosing components that best fit the needs of the organization.

Power and centralized control

Most directors agreed that power could be used as a positive attribute leading to a more successful organization, but with centralized control from the director. By holding the reigns of the power either tightly or loosely, the point was still conveyed that they indeed were the ones in charge. Challenge felt that power comes with the territory:

I’m in a position where I do have authority over a number of people. But that’s not the kind of power I try to exercise. I try to exercise power that’s more relational. And I try to motivate people to do what I think they should do. And to do their jobs in the way that I think they need to be done.

Challenge used power in a way to get employees to come to her conclusion of how things should be done through extensive feedback and support, and managing the needs of her direct reports that would “trickle down” to the entire staff. Yet, she acknowledged that if the person did not come to the same conclusion as she did:

The buck stops with me. If someone wants to try something [new], I’m very open to that. But I’m also [willing] to say “we’ve tried that before, which is not to say that we can’t do it again, but it’s my job to bring that institutional history to you, and what we’re gonna do now so that we don’t make the same mistakes two or three times over. I understand that you don’t agree, but I don’t agree with it, and we’re going to go forward with what I say.

Gabriella agreed with this as a director, she has the ultimate say, although she is willing to listen to other points-of-view in a different light. She utilized power-
sharing to take away from the fact that she was the director, stating “I don’t want to be looked at as the director. I think that people will start to resent you.” While these sentiments may not have been expressed to her staff or have been the healthiest approach to her position, she is a big advocate for sharing power:

[I] help people problem solve and to develop their own set of information. You have to balance that with sharing the information that we have, because when you are in authority and you’ve been at a place a long time, you hold a certain power just by that longevity, and a certain history, and information. And so you’ve got to figure out how to get different people information because that really helps you share your power.

Gabriella went on to state that while she was a big advocate of power-sharing, that if necessary, she would make final decisions as they relate to the whole of the organization as needed. This quality definitely came out in the directors that had more experience working in the non-profit field; there was less concern for people liking them personally than there was for making a decision for the good of all, even if people did not think it was the right thing to do. Younger directors tended to be more concerned with making everyone happy. From my personal experience as a young program director, I initially was concerned as well with making people happy, and very concerned with people liking me. I quickly found out that I had to adopt an attitude of balance—creating a space where employees felt comfortable to voice their opinions and concerns, but also I had to learn not to be afraid to make decisions. As much as I yearned for the Utopia of collective decision-making, the larger issue of individuals being socialized to look to “the boss” loomed at me in every direction—employees expected me to have the answers.
Power as a perk

Many of the women were quite open about enjoying power—something that not many women in general openly admit to doing for fear of the impact it would have as a “masculine” attribute. However, if power is redefined and used in a way that is for positive use rather than negative, it can indeed be a benefit to being in a executive position. Some women had not consciously taken redefinition of power into consideration, rather, they utilized it in a way that perhaps was not the best fit for the organization.

Some directors felt like power was a perk of the position. Challenge proclaimed “I love the power that comes with the position” in response to her favorite thing about her position. Lydran Caulders echoed her sentiment, by exclaiming, “I’m the boss!” Interestingly enough, Lydran shared reveling in her power as a recent discovery, after years of low self-esteem in various positions in the non-profit sector.

After [the board] asked me to take over as director, every night I was waking up at 3 in the morning thinking ‘I can’t do this! Oh my God this is so huge, what if [the organization] doesn’t make it?’ And I had a mentor who said to me ‘You know, the biggest thing you can do is that you can make decisions without delay, whether they’re right or wrong you’re willing to make a decision, and you have common sense.’ You can do this. And she turned out to be right. That pretty much is why I can do it.

Out of the ten directors interviewed, only one director felt the desire for more power. She felt that she had “freedom and autonomy to create things the way she wanted them created” internally, but lacked power externally when it came to larger interacations with the community she served.

Recognizing the power of one’s position and desiring power is not necessarily a negative attribute. How one uses power is key, and most directors were, at
minimum, aware of how power could be used to contribute to a healthy work environment.

What is most significant, however, is that women do not shy away from possessing and enacting upon their own personal power. In a patriarchal society where power can elicit some very negative, masculine images, and where many women have themselves had negative experiences with power, women have a unique ability to turn that around in the work that they do. Non-profit directors are largely contributing to this through redefining and shaping a new frontier.

Communication

Communication in the ten organizations varied greatly, largely due to the personal style of the director. Factors that influenced communication included elements such as age, experience, and length of time with their current organization. One thing that each director had in common: they all had expressed that this is one of the most difficult topics to address in the non-profit world.

Personal style

When asked about communication style, directors' responses varied from personal styles to detailed organizational protocol for communication. Two directors stood out in particular for their preferences, one preferring the written word as much as possible, and the other preferring nothing written—just oral conveyance of information.

Maya Deren, comfortable with communication through the written word, attributes her communication style to that of her mentor from a previous job:

My style, which is very funny because I learned it from...a woman who was very extraordinary, I don't even know if that is the right word. She got more
done in a day than I’ve ever seen anybody do...she never talked to me. Never. I mean it was weird. It was a big joke. She wrote notes to me, every day I would walk in there and there would be a pile of work—the work she worked on going home from work, at home, in the morning, she was earlier than I was, a stack of work, there would be a stack of notes, like there would be letters to write, and a little note please call this person, but you know what? It was so efficient because I had a piece of paper to remind me to do everything, and I was there to give her back a slip that said done. I took that with me. And now it’s e-mail. And even though we’re in this office, I’m right next door to somebody, I’m e-mailing them all the time. Writing is one of my styles.

People who come to work here that don’t appreciate e-mail, who don’t like e-mail as a way of communication, can have a very hard time.

Anne Davis prefers oral communication rather than written. She feels that it leaves less room for personal interpretation and miscommunication for those working for her:

I’m a verbal communicator as opposed to a written communicator. Mostly I don’t like the time it takes to do it [writing], but I also like knowing that what I mean to say has been received accurately, you know, like okay this is how we need to do this now, does this all make sense? I like the check-in part of oral communication...it opens up an opportunity to say you know, I’m not really sure what you want here, as opposed to someone who is going to go ahead and make mistakes and not do it right. I probably tend to be a bit of an over-communicator than an under-communicator.

However, most of the directors were able to find some sort of balance between written and oral communication by having an “open-door policy” that made them available to staff, whether the staff member felt comfortable utilizing the policy via e-mail or by dropping by. Putting an “open door” policy into practice, however, can have some pitfalls.

Challenge stated,

I have a pretty open door policy, you know, so almost anyone, I think I might say almost anyone in the organization would feel that if they wanted to talk to me they would either just walk in the door or they would say to S., my assistant, ‘I need a little time with [Challenge].’
Unfortunately, Challenge was difficult to access. On the day of the interview, I waited on a large floor filled with offices, and finally was met by a woman who identified herself as one of Challenge’s two assistants. I was escorted up two flights of stairs, through two more support staff, and finally through a closed door to a large office where Challenge was seated behind a rather daunting desk.

My own experiences with a former director at my current position had been very similar—while in large group meeting formats she announced that she was available to any of us, this clearly was not the case. When she needed to communicate anything to me that related to my program, she would march past me to my supervisor’s desk, and direct her to tell me what she needed, even though my desk was two feet away and she could see me sitting there. It wasn’t until I actually proved the success (largely financial) of my program that she addressed me directly and professionally.

Other directors had a similar policy but were much more accessible, usually due to working in a smaller organization with less policy surrounding the director.

Dotti Janelle stated,

My door is rarely closed. I feel I have an open door policy here. People walk by, and if they have something, if they have a question, or if they have a concern, or if they need something, they can bop in. If they need to see me they can, you know, leave me a message, or if I am on the phone or if my door is closed because I am meeting with somebody else, they can send me a pop-up message on the computer or they can e-mail me.

Directors were responsible for setting the tone around communication, and usually the bigger the organization, the larger the communication policy at each workplace.

While most directors felt that communication was working smoothly at each
organization, it seemed that there were some traditional bureaucratic policies in place that would inhibit communication. Many of the organizations had thought about every other aspect of the organization through a feminist lens, but communication sometimes fell through the cracks as not being seen as something to change or modify. As Muehrcke (1998) states, it is a new frontier for women to develop a way of communicating that is more about growth than it is about hierarchy.

Communication and hierarchy

As indicated above, larger organizations had much stricter policies in place for communication with the directors. Often associate managers filtered communication for the director and only approached her if it was a necessity. Each of the larger organizations had a specific structure for communication that worked for the director, most often in a hierarchical format. These structures ranged from weekly meetings to charts and forums for communication.

In Challenge’s organization, only meetings with well-mapped out agendas made the cut for her time.

We use well ‘agendad’ meetings, so we never go in to a meeting that doesn’t have a good agenda, and where the purpose of the meeting is clear. So we try to communicate really well the purpose of when we get together to work together...we communicate a lot on the e-mail...and we use teams and clusters. We call them clusters in the organization, for sort of the venues of communication if you will. Like the clusters are the big groups, the program clusters, the finance clusters, the president’s cluster, blah blah blah. And then within those clusters, particularly in program and development, there are smaller teams. So we use a lot of teams to communicate.

Because her organization was so large, this system seemed necessary, and it was obvious that a lot of thought had gone into the best approach. However, it seemed that it left little room for interfacing with people in the office if something came up
that needed to be addressed immediately. There were so many complicated systems in place that personal interaction around issues might seem foreign.

In smaller organizations, the atmosphere was more “chatty” than the larger organizations, and much more laid back. Most organizations held weekly meetings with the entire staff that were loosely structured, allowing the staff to have as much floor time with the director as desired.

Isabella used a balance of structure and open communication tailored to the needs of the person she was working with on an individual level.

I think [my] communication style...I use a lot of times, it’s called ‘project management,’ which is like a chart that lists the date and task that's assigned, and the type of task, and um, what the expectations are and who is responsible and the due dates, keeps very clear lines of communication on what’s expected...that’s not really my style. My style is more to give someone a project and let them run with it and let them be as creative and let them go to town with it...but a lot of people can’t work on learning under those conditions and who need a lot of guidance and a lot of hand holding...so there’s some people who I do...the project management piece with...and other people who take a project and maybe we’ll meet on it...only when they have questions.”

What seems to work with most organizations is the ability to be flexible around communication as necessary—which is important for both small and large non-profits. Small organizations face the task of creating balance between structure and informalities, and larger non-profits face the issue of not overdoing the hierarchy—essentially by directors being accessible.

Technology and communication

Technology has become incredibly central to the success of organizations. Everything from a basic webpage to an internal communication system, such as email and networks for files, have become a nearly impossible item to live without. From
my experience with non-profits in New York City, many organizations are cutting costs by relocating to office space to a simplified “headquarters” while most of the direct programming is done at various sites, such as schools or community centers, around the city. In order to maintain a clear system of communication, technology is imperative so that not only does the staff at the headquarters feel informed, but the staff that is on-site outside of the headquarters feel as if they are part of the team.

In addition, many funders now look to not only finding information on the websites of organizations, but many are also interested in electronic submission of proposals for funding. By not being on top of new developments technologically, organizations may be missing out on opportunities.

All of the organizations had a web page and were using e-mail on a regular basis, with director “buy-in” as the defining rule of thumb. Technological advances, especially in the more established organizations, were met with both resistance and acceptance. Gabriella, a founding member of a 25-year-old organization that provides funding to organizations and groups dedicated to lesbian-centered issues, admitted that without e-mail and the website, her life would be more difficult, but “if you really want to talk to somebody, walk into their office and talk to them for ten minutes. I mean, I don’t want that to disappear, or people will be so busy that somebody can’t say, oh, can I check with you on this, or so to keep that balance.”

Others, such as Rosie Pesca, expressed how technology had improved the lives of the women they serve, as well as provided the staff with a source of pride for the organization:

It’s overwhelmingly a positive. It’s like one of these things—now I can’t imagine life without it. Overwhelmingly a positive. Um, it’s great to have a
website, you know, we often tell our own staff to log in on our website. Because we actually um, with a woman on our staff... we update it ourselves. And so it's really nice to be able to continually put things up there and kind of send around an e-mail to the staff saying hey, check out the website. You know, you'll see some new things up there. And then they get... they know that whatever's up there is sort of out in cyberspace. So I think it's been great. Absolutely great.

As the climate of non-profits becomes more and more competitive, technology becomes central for feminist organizations in vying for funding and resources. By not tapping into technology, there is the potential to miss out on networking opportunities, funding streams, and trainings that are sometimes available exclusively online. Also, as the pool of non-profits grow, more and more clients or program participants rely on gathering information from websites such as the Action Without Borders website to collect information.

The danger of relying too much on technology as a source of spreading the word to communities, is that many low-income households and public schools still do not have access to technology, which limits their access to information. This can easily be balanced by still relying on other communication techniques from a grassroots level.

Overall, balance internal communication systems—the use of meetings, emails, and oral communication, as well as the ways in which the outside world views you—is essential in the way that feminists are shaping the world of non-profits, as well as making themselves stronger in their ability to get the resources they need. While examining the ways in which we communicate, there is a constant need to look at ways to make stronger the systems we have in place. Often, communication (or miscommunication) is the direct line to conflict in organizations.
Conflict Resolution

With all of the organizations or the director identifying as feminist, most organizations had a hyper-sensitivity for working closely with women and finding an appropriate forum to address conflicts as they came up. At minimum, directors would acknowledge the need to implement processes, but a few maintained that the time and resources were not available; they would rely on their “best judgement” to solve problems, which was not always the most effective way to do so.

Formal vs. informal conflict resolution

Most organizations did give thought to process, varying from the informal, director-driven method; to exceedingly formal plans to deal with conflict. Claire felt this was one place in the organization where the process had to be formalized, even though with other policies, the organization maintained an informal, “consensus” feel:

If someone has a problem with a staff member then they go through the [designated] channels, and it’s worked successfully [where we have] designated everyone to someone on the executive committee to go to if they are feeling that there is some sort of problem, and what will happen is...we’ll all meet and talk about the issues, and then bring everyone together, you know, all of the involved parties. If necessary we bring in a board member...not really to say anything, just to support the conversation for us to get the issues out and try to work through [the situation].

Paula also used the approach of bringing in a board member if necessary to help solve problems. First, they would try to “talk it out” and if that didn’t work, or if someone had a problem with her she would “let the staff member pick the board member that she was most comfortable with, and we will bring them in to help us hash out our differences.”

While this approach may work for some organizations, most general staff members, especially of larger organizations, do not have much access to the board
members on a personal level to allow for this to happen, and for many organizations, conflict resolution is not a wise use of the board’s time. Instead, numerous non-profits opted to utilize consultants to solve problems, if they were deemed too large to handle by the executive staff.

Consultants and conflict-resolution management

Dotti Janelle found consultants to be useful. If the approach of internal “duking it out” didn’t work, they would call in a consultant specializing in conflict-resolution, which had more benefits than pertained just to the immediate issue:

When we’ve had big issues we’ve called in outside people. [Consultants] have been major gifts to the organization, [because] one woman came in and actually, some issues were raised that we didn’t even know that we had. It was a good thing to hear them and be able to address them head on. She did make us all aware, and we talked about how we would approach [conflict] as an office.

Isabella also found this approach to be useful because of the neutrality offered: “with another person coming in... it works better. [With] a truly neutral person, there is no personal interest in keeping one person happy, and keeping the partnership going even if it really shouldn’t be going.” Admittedly, this is not the most financially beneficial approach for the organization, so she instead implemented a different kind of process:

The barrier is financial. Even if the consultant is brought in for a day, I am sure it is several hundred dollars. So, what we’re doing now as a way to avoid these conflict resolution type situations, is when we hire a new person, we don’t start their contract until 3 months, and we’re hiring them on a probation period at which time either party could say this isn’t for me.

Rosie Pesca agreed this was the best policy for her organization, as well. After exploring many solutions to conflict resolution that eventually led to many “staff departures,” the easiest and most cost-effective solution was implementing “thorough
evaluations, performance reviews, and a three month probationary period at which point there is another formal review.” Rosie went a step further by being very clear with employees that raises were merit based, and not simply given for time with the organization. If this wasn’t a motivator and employees were still underperforming or not being a team player and causing conflict, Rosie had no trouble letting employees go with a simple “you are screwing up, [you] are outta here.”

Conflict resolution and the masculine

Other directors also followed suit with the “my way or the highway” approach, but without first exploring other avenues for change within the employee with the conflict. In fact, Maya Deren had a very inflexible approach. She had perhaps mistakenly called it mediation, but clearly saw room for personal growth:

Direct. I’m very, very direct. I have a bad temper. I mean I have a really bad temper. I’ve worked very hard at controlling it, but at the same time I think it’s positive. I mean, if I’m upset with somebody, they know that I’m upset. I don’t hold back. I don’t play games. I guess it’s kind of a mediation technique. I get involved, I don’t stay out of it. It’s a one-way street, even though I don’t like conflict. I wish I could figure out a way to give [my staff] more of an opportunity to say what they need to say in a safe environment.

Lydran Caulders also used this approach but in a more accessible way for her direct reports. She relied on employees’ word that they would get something done, and if not, she would “bring down the hammer.” She went on to say:

I can’t stand tension. I meet it head on. If you say that you are going to get something done, do it. If someone makes a commitment and doesn’t follow through, that’s as bad as lying to me. You know? You say you’re going to do it and you don’t do it, I need to know why, and I need it done.

While both directors utilized very direct methods in communicating that they were not happy with employees’ work or behavior, they also exuded the feeling of not being approachable, even though both professed to employ an “open door” policy.
Both women went on to explain later in the interviews that they had a high turnover rate in employees. One can deduce that this stems from the anger and intimidation factor an employee might face when trying to address legitimate concerns. If you fear that you will lose your job or the issue you bring up will be seen as worthless, you are less likely to broach the subject with your boss.

Overwhelmingly, directors using this approach had adopted very masculine approaches to solving conflict—often causing the conflicts themselves. In centralizing the decision making process to the limits of their own capabilities, they were utilizing the power of their position in a negative way as a means to an end—which clearly was not beneficial to the women that worked for them. The had adopted the “power-over” approach that French (1985) discussed—rather than looking for ways to ease the conflict through open conversation and other resources available, these directors were looking for the quick-fix: often off the cuff and out of anger.

Conflict and organizational policy

The larger the organization, the larger and more involved the process seemed to be for resolving problems internally between staff members. Many organizations preferred to implement very rigorous, strict policies around conflict resolution, but they took into consideration nearly every factor while developing the policies. In fact, the largest of the ten organizations that had the financial means to do so paid a strategic planner as a proactive pre-conflict way to help configure a model that worked best for the non-profit. Challenge had perhaps the most successful model that
put the most thought into conflict resolution, and it seemed to be paying off in the
larger context of a feminist organization:

We all have trouble getting our needs met. We really need to be seen for who
we are, we need to be listened to, we need to be able to contribute. The
boundaries get really fuzzy. As an organization we try very hard to see who
people are, to be able to foster their professional and personal development, to
be able to understand when they are having a bad day because something is
really upsetting to them. But we also are a workplace. We're not just about a

group of women coming together. We are accountable to our donors, we’re
accountable to our grantees, we have to keep holding ourselves accountable to
high levels and standards of accountability.

By realizing that everyday life and personality can contribute to the
effectiveness and the ineffectiveness of an organization, Challenge’s organization
utilized strategic planners to develop a system for conflict-resolution that involved
every possible aspect of her workforce’s identity, diversity, and history:

We spent the last two years with a [strategic planner] to help start an
Organizational Development Committee, known as OCD. It’s working
through a very long process, and it took those people who were having the
most issues, and it gave them a forum for talking about issues with each other
and talking about what was happening as an organization. So before we had
this committee...it was much more common that people would talk
throughout the organization about a problem, which presented a very negative
vibe going through the whole organization. [We decided] to have a really
positive vibe going through the organization. With OCD I think that people
feel that there is a place [for discussion] now.

While working with the planner, an emphasis was placed on balancing race,
ethnicity, class backgrounds, positions in the organization, as well as people from all
departments within the organization. “We introduced it in a way that almost
everybody in the organization either volunteered or got volunteered. I then picked
nine people, and then it rotates. It has proven to be a really good thing for the
organization,” Challenge said.
Regardless of the high financial cost upfront, the OCD model most likely will have the highest payoff in the end—and it is proactive rather than reactionary to conflict. It creates a forum for everyone to have a chance to be heard, and rotates to maintain a "freshness" of perspectives. The other benefit is the inclusion of all departments—most times there is segregation between departments. This model allows for perspectives from individuals who don’t normally intersect with other staff in this manner—such as the finance staff, the program staff, and even the executive staff.

The final wisdom shared in conflict-resolution: when in doubt, call on external peers for their insight and direction. Paula found it extremely useful to talk to her “personal web of friends” who were also directors of organizations to utilize their insight to help find a solution. “If I haven’t gone through it, surely someone from my network has, and it will shed light on something in a way that I hadn’t thought of.”

This is a key statement in the way that women work together—by not only breaking down the stereotypes of women working together, but also through developing means for women to communicate, a new way of looking at conflict-resolution begins to emerge. By giving space for women to be heard, and by being proactive and accepting that conflict is a natural part of humans interacting, working out conflict in organizations can become much less daunting. It is also important for directors, or anyone, to admit that sometimes they don’t know all of the answers—and seeking outside help is always an option. Feminists are as susceptible as anyone to falling into the feminist trappings that have always prevented us from success.
Uniting on a feminist front

While each organization clearly faced many of the same challenges and successes, how each of the themes translated into the workplace certainly varied based on each woman’s particular worldview. For example, many of the younger directors tended to be more flexible in allowing women to define what feminism meant individually, while directors with more experience and typically tied to the second wave of feminism have a much more narrow scope of the qualifiers necessary to operate in a feminist organization. This was partially due to the clear definition of the organization’s mission, but also to the director’s personal viewpoint.

Most striking however were the women of color and lesbians interviewed. Often two populations that have been historically segregated from mainstream feminism, there was no real difference in positions regarding feminism from white and/or heterosexual women interviewed in the same position. This could possibly be linked to the indoctrination of conventional feminism necessary to obtain their positions as a director. This is not to say that women of color and lesbians are not operating in organizations in large ways to provide impact on the feminist movement—they may choose not to define the organization in typical ways and are most likely operating on the fringes or in a more creative way.

CONCLUSION

Initially, I set out to find out more about how women work with women, and how, more importantly, women translate their personal feminist beliefs into their everyday workplace. My intention was to discover how directors of non-profit organizations managed their work environments for the women that worked for them.
While I did get a glimpse into the inner workings of these non-profit organizations and how women managed the workplace, I also found overwhelming complexities of day-to-day issues that arose out of these work environments. The job description of women directors is often so much more than managing just the mission at hand—every staff came with a whole new set of issues, and having a strong personal sense of self was the only key to being successful—whether or not others found issue with this.

Defining a feminist organization or someone as a feminist is a highly personal and situational endeavor. What it means to me, as a researcher, could mean something completely different to an organization operating out of the South Bronx in an impoverished neighborhood. Each organization, while either self-identifying as feminist, or self-identifying as feminist in a feminist organization, varied greatly. Factors such as age, sexual-orientation, ethnicity, race, and population served all varied greatly. However, each organization was reaching out to women, girls, or various underserved populations in a way that could only be defined as feminist. As a feminist, that is the beauty of defining what feminism means individually and as a whole as it relates to one’s situation—and finding power in that revelation.

The results of this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of non-profits, and it certainly cannot translate to an international feminist population in the way that it would to other agencies in the United States. The ten women interviewed in this study revealed key concepts that affect the non-profit arena and are central to the success of women’s feminist organizations.
What is perhaps most fascinating about the data, is not how women created new systems to work in a feminist organization, but how they modified existing systems to work in creative, feminist ways. Central to this research is how many of the directors redefined power relations with their staff in order to better the whole organization. Rather than shying away from power that is a naturally perceived benefit of a leadership position, many of the women embraced it, and found ways to make others in their organization feel as if they were part of it, rather than using it against staff. It also became an earned benefit of hard work put in.

The directors are looking at key patriarchal systems that extend beyond power and are taking the time to figure out progressive ways in which they can modify them to make them work better in a feminist context. Most importantly, many of them were flexible enough to recognize when something was not working, and would seek out a new system of change to facilitate a better work environment.

This leads me to conclude that women are indeed shaping the future of non-profit organizations by redefining these systems to work in a way that benefits women directly, rather than utilizing systems that have been used for decades in an oppressive manner.

How women define leadership and communication in particular for themselves and others within the organization is key in establishing a work environment as a director. Rather than embodying a masculine identity, women created styles that were highly personal, and many styles came with years of figuring out what worked and what did not work. Many directors—both young and older—
were still negotiating the leadership waters, and providing leadership opportunities to
others for personal growth.

Conflict-resolution, an issue that is not exclusive to non-profits, was also a
central theme. Women in particular are plagued with reputations as not being able to
resolve issues with other women; so many organizations faced the task of developing
methods that worked for them—and many chose to take a proactive stance and think
of solutions before a conflict became apparent or overwhelming to foster an
environment of growth and community.

My suggestion from a research stand-point, and as a person committed to non-
profit organizations and their successes for women, is that the systems of change
continue, and are consistently re-examined and re-evaluated to ensure that they are
working in the best way possible to benefit non-profits and the women who work in
them. I particularly am drawn to the concept of changing current systems rather than
creating new—the resources are so limited as stated many times in this research that
redefinition actually seems like a feasible concept, while new systems seem
overwhelming and unrealistic.

While the ten directors interviewed in this research all faced varying successes
and challenges in the arena of non-profits in New York City, each organizations was
doing what they could to create a strong organization dedicated to a feminist cause,
whether openly defined or not. Certainly there are larger—though not necessarily
more important—issues that directors grapple with. Continuing to meet the funding
needs of an ever-changing population, interacting with the board of directors, and
keeping a diverse staff committed and interested all are central to the success of the
organization. Without dedicated women who are passionate about feminist causes, there would be no feminist organizations.

If I were starting over, knowing what I know now, my focus would shift from interviewing executive directors to include other members of the staff and board, such as program directors, other members of the executive staff, as well as support staff from the administrative and finance teams. This would allow for a better understanding of the needs of organizations and how they can be more productive. I would also seek out more diverse organizations that exist outside the realms of liberal feminism to include more grassroots organizations. At the time this research was conducted, I had recently left Oregon State and moved to New York City, and I was looking for any entry into a non-profit organization with an immature viewpoint on non-profits—I was out to change the world. After four years of working with a non-profit, I have a better understanding of the political aspects of not only the organization that I work for but other organizations in the City as well. The depth of the work that one does goes well beyond what the job description calls for. Often your job—serving the underserved—is a side effect of what happens on a daily basis—vying for funding, for board attention, to keep programs running. Usually non-profit employees are so overworked, underpaid, and burned out that it is hard to stay focused on mission—which sometimes is not clearly defined. Also, non-profits have a distinct shortage when it comes to resources—occasions to release creativity and share resources, with each other let alone the director, are few and far between. Because of this lack of contact with their employees, directors are sorely losing out on the experience and know-how found throughout the organization, not just within
the executive team and board. By conducting further research into the interactions internally at non-profits, this could perhaps be used as a tool to continue to strengthen feminist non-profit organizations.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Spain, Daphne. 2001. *How Women Saved the City.* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.


# APPENDIX

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