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Different voices: Articulating feminist social work

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DIFFERENT VOICES: ARTICULATING FEMINIST SOCIAL WORK

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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GRADUATE STUDIES

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DIFFERENT VOICES: ARTICULATING FEMINIST SOCIAL WORK

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Karen Sandell

ABSTRACT

The second wave of the women's liberation movement has challenged traditional assumptions and understandings of women's experiences by promoting a "new scholarship" on women. This expanding interest in women has influenced the social work profession, but not to the extent one might expect in a field dominated by women both as professionals and clients.

Feminism, as an ideology, practice perspective, and ethical commitment, has become increasingly central to social work. Because feminism encompasses values that are sympathetic—if not identical—to social work, it has been suggested that social work practice might be enhanced by adopting a feminist perspective. The recent literature has few references to feminist social work practice, however, and our knowledge of what feminist social workers actually do in practice is very limited. Although feminist practice is gaining a specific set of characteristics, and an emerging body of literature suggests how feminist social workers behave, there has been negligible research done to determine how feminist practice is developed, experienced, and understood by those practitioners.

This exploratory qualitative study of seven self-identified feminist social workers looks at the values and beliefs underlying their approach.
to practice, how feminist values are integrated in practice, and the meaning attributed to practicing from a feminist perspective. Additionally, in order to determine the influence of theoretical orientation on the participants' approach to the social work process, the study looked at the influence of three feminist theoretical perspectives—liberal, radical, and socialist—on the social work process of problem identification, assessment, and formulation of treatment strategies and goals.

The findings suggest that the women in this study view their feminist identification as integral to, and synonymous with, their personal and professional identity. It was also found that this group of feminist social workers explicitly applies individual values and beliefs in practice. It was concluded that feminist theoretical orientation is suggestive, but not predictive, of an individual's approach to the social work process. The feminist social workers in this study, regardless of theoretical orientation, appear to have more similarities than differences in their values and beliefs, and in their approaches to practice.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Purpose of Study

Feminism and social work are united by mutual philosophical, ethical and value commitments which are inherently political and implicitly applied (Morell, 1987). Feminist social work is evolving--its practice and theory are being developed as feminist social workers struggle to integrate feminist perspectives into their work with clients and within their own work settings (Hudson, 1985). This qualitative study explores, through analysis of in-depth interviews, the nature of feminist social work by examining how social workers integrate feminist perspectives into practice.

Background of Study

In the last twenty-five years there has been a growing interest in the study of women, women's lives, and the consequences of gender definition (Ruth, 1990). The second wave of the women's liberation movement has challenged traditional assumptions and understandings of women's experience by promoting a "new scholarship" on
women (Miller, 1986). This "new scholarship" is differentiated from traditional studies on women because it focuses primarily on women's lives and women's development in the terms in which it is lived, rather than on forcing women into categories developed by men in an attempt to describe all of life (Miller, 1986).

This expanding interest in women has influenced the social work profession, but not to the extent that one might expect in a field dominated by women both as professionals and clients. While the social work literature began to reflect the influence of the women's movement in the early 1970's, this interest appeared to peak in the mid-1980's and has declined somewhat since that time. Interestingly, even though there was increased attention to women's issues during this period, several reviews of the social work literature found that the profession's main focus was on working with women in their traditional roles or examining inequities within the profession itself (Abramovitz, 1978; Johnson, 1976; Kravetz, 1976; Quam & Austin, 1984). Few articles have specifically addressed how feminist practice perspectives have been incorporated into clinical practice (Valentich, 1986; Wise, 1988).

In the past fifteen years, feminism as an ideology, a practice perspective, and an ethical commitment, has
become increasingly central to social work. No other profession seems as closely allied to feminism as social work (Jimenez & Rice, 1990).

Because feminism encompasses values that are sympathetic, if not identical, to social work (Jimenez & Rice, 1990), several authors have suggested that social work practice might be enhanced by adopting a feminist perspective (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Collins, 1986; Wetzel, 1986).

Wetzel (1986) has identified at least five similarities between feminism and social work. First, social work and feminism are concerned with facilitating the development and well-being of people through service. Second, social work and feminism place emphasis on the intrinsic worth and dignity of all people. Additionally, social work and feminism underscore both the intrinsic importance of active participation in society and the necessity for removing obstacles to self-realization. Fourth, social workers and feminists work toward the prevention and elimination of discrimination in society. Finally, social work and feminists recognize the reality of "common human needs" (pp. 166-167).

According to Wetzel (1986), the primary difference between social work ideology and feminism is that feminists insist on applying their philosophy, ethics, and
values, "while social workers have espoused these values as ideals, but have not treated them as core principles against which knowledge must be assessed" (p. 167). Wetzel further explains that there are some social workers who fear applying values to knowledge because it would mean that they would have to act on them, and possibly change the world. Feminists, on the other hand, "welcome change since social work could become a force in social and human development" (p. 167).

In an article defining feminist social work, Collins (1986) asserts that social work is fundamentally feminist in nature. She clarifies the mutual philosophical and value commitments which unite social work and feminism. First, there is commonality of ideology in the social worker's person-in-environment and the feminists's "the personal is political" perspectives. Both ideologies believe that transactions between people and their environments which support well-being, dignity, and self-determination for individuals are desirable. Second, both social work and feminism view interdisciplinary knowledge as necessary to establishing a practice focused on social functioning. Third, feminism and social work values assume that people achieve their humanity through effective social functioning, which includes the concepts of interdependence and interconnectedness. Finally, the
underlying values of social work and feminism do not regard people as individuals who are bounded by abstract rational laws, but rather as necessarily in symbiotic relationship with a nurturing group (pp. 214-216).

Collins argues that a feminist perspective must be integrated into social work practice. Without this perspective, the author fears that social work may continue to rely on "sexist knowledge, discriminatory behaviors, and the failure to see the relationship between sexual politics and women's oppression in the family, in personal relationships, and in the institutions of society" (1986, p. 217).

Morell (1987) suggests that the profession's division over its dual focus--individual and societal change--could be positively directed by applying feminist insight and methods. Social work's dual approach to personal and environmental change was identified early on as the unique feature of the profession. However, the integration of these two levels of concern has remained a difficult task. The current fragmentation of the field into "clinical" and "policy" tracks, "macro" and "micro" camps, reflects the continuing divisions between personal service provision and social action. While feminism has also had a dual focus on individual and social change, the feminist movement has managed to integrate these levels of concern
(Morell, pp. 144-145). Saleebey (1987) is similarly concerned that there is discord in the profession because social work cannot support the idea that "it works both sides of the psychosocial street—the individual and the environment" (p. 11). According to the author, the core difference between clinical social work practice and other clinical professions ought to be its ability to assist clients in understanding the "relevant political, economic, and social dimensions of their oppression, their condition" (p. 14). He believes that the existing person-environment frameworks in social work lack political, social, or moral content; and that social work must find an orientation to practice that enhances its ethic, and clarifies the person-environment relationship (p. 24). In articulating how social work could move in the right direction, Saleebey presents a number of radical concepts which are strikingly similar to ideological themes of feminism. Critical consciousness, liberation, problems being generically defined as ones of oppression, identification that the personal is political, praxis and empowerment, are radical concepts which have clear parallels in feminist perspectives. The central tenet of feminism, that "the personal is political", is the cornerstone for connecting the social and personal dimensions of life both in theory and in practice.
(Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Morell, 1987). Morell states that a "theory of oppression provides the 'ideological glue' that holds feminist cause and function together....The analysis leads to the politicization of individual practice models and resistance to oppressive bureaucratic processes through the creation of egalitarian processes both within and outside society's institutions" (1987, p. 149). Because feminism is political, it embraces both personal and social change and seeks individual liberation through collective activity (Morell, p. 149). This stands in contrast to those social work methods and agencies which are likely to maintain the status quo by failing to explicitly identify the ideologies and processes underlying practice. Since the majority of social work practice models are derived from male-centered theories and are products of male thinking which accept men as the norm, the use of practice models which invalidate women's perceptions and fail to acknowledge male power encourages women's accommodation to the status quo, thereby perpetuating sexual inequality (Berlin, cited in Morell, 1937, p. 150).

Morell believes social work could fulfill its obligation to bring about both individual and social change by adopting a feminist perspective. Because feminists view purpose and process as inseparable, the
integration of a feminist perspective into social work would require: (1) the use of feminist theory to reformulate practice models; and, (2) resistance to oppressive conditions within and outside social work agencies through collective activity. A politicized approach to practice does not mean that practice models will be automatically rejected, but that the various models would be critically analyzed from a feminist theoretical perspective and reformulated or rejected according to their utility. Morell notes that once social workers realize service provision is political, the feminist integration of purpose and process requires that oppressive conditions within and outside of social agencies be confronted and resisted through collective action (1987, pp. 149-153).

While there are cogent arguments for the integration of feminism and social work, feminist social work is in the process of formation. Its principles come from the broader women's movement and continue to evolve through further action, discussion and controversy. Its practice is gaining a specific set of characteristics, as feminists undertake the task of creating a feminist social work (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989, pp. 1-2).

Although models of feminist social work practice have been developed (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Nes &
Iadicola, 1989), they frequently have not been applied to or grounded in theoretical or practice models. Most frameworks are not empirically based, and little information is available on issues in implementation (Wetzel, 1986).

Hudson (1985) finds that when feminism has been integrated into social work, it has occurred in an incremental and uneven way. Because feminism places emphasis on the need to develop analysis from experience, social workers who have desired to adopt a feminist perspective have had to formulate concepts and definitions of practice through their direct involvement with clients and organizations. Unfortunately, these efforts have not been supported by existing theoretical perspectives. Hudson believes that the relationship between feminism and social work reflects the gap between theory and practice in social work, and results in the feminist perspective being viewed as marginal—reduced to "something which a few women in the office talk about" (p. 636). This marginality "protects social work as an institution from facing how certain of its practices serve to reinforce women's inequality" (p. 636). Feminism, as viewed by Linton, is "so broad, varied, and conflicting in its theoretical formulation that it escapes definition in specific terms" (1989, p. 25). She notes that attempts
over the past ten to fifteen years to capture and categorize the meaning and characteristics of feminism have contributed to a growing literature which continues to reflect feminism's diverse and elusive theoretical meaning. Rosewater (1984) points out that feminist theory development has taken a backward route due to the fact that experiential practice has preceded the application of theory to practice. This view is held by numerous authors who have explained that feminist theory is fundamentally experiential and is grounded in women's experience of the world (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Nes & Iadicola, 1982).

The subject of feminist theory is women's lives, and this focus brings an awareness that explanations of women's experience have never been sufficient because it has been described and explained primarily by men—not women themselves (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986). Feminist theory also brings to consciousness those aspects of women's experience as women that have escaped attention because they have not been part of, or congruent with, the predominant androcentric theoretical accounts of human life (Keohane, Rosaldo, & Gelpi, 1982, p. vii).

The essence of feminist theory and practice is further clarified by the concept of praxis—the active
relationship between theory and practice (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Donovan, 1990; Lee, 1987; Wetzel, 1986). Praxis refers to the "free, creative engagement in the world by the individual, who is changed by the experience and who thereby changes the world" (Donovan, 1990, p. 70). Praxis is a theory-practice dialectic through which we collectively gain new knowledge, create solutions and shape our reality by recognizing and confronting the tensions, polarities and paradoxes of life (Saleebey, 1987). One of the most fundamental ways in which feminists experience praxis is through consciousness raising:

Through this process, feminists confront the reality of women's condition by examining their experience and by taking this analysis as the starting point for individual and social change. By its nature, this method of inquiry challenges traditional notions of authority and objectivity and opens a dialectical questioning of existing power structures, of our own experience, and of theory itself. (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986, pp. 16-17)

Consciousness raising is an essential part of the evolving theory of social change which undergirds feminist practice. The concept of consciousness raising reflects the basic assumption underlying feminist practice, that "ideology, social structure and behavior are intricably (sic) woven" (Gilbert, cited in Rosewater, 1984, p. 258). Consciousness raising aims to lead to the creation of a "new set of values, assumptions, and expectations,"
embodied in a new set of structures and personal and social relationships" (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986, p. 16).

It is important to note that while there are several central feminist themes, there is also a shared assumption among feminists that there are multiple feminist perspectives and many different ways to be a feminist (Allen, 1988; Lerman & Porter, 1990). Feminist perspectives differ according to conceptions of human nature, analyses of women's subordination and oppression, and visions of change and women's liberation (Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1984). How these ideas are defined depends upon the scope of the feminist perspective in which they are grounded (Allen, 1988).

Nes and Iadicola (1989) identify the political and philosophical bases of three distinct feminist paradigms which, they suggest, can be used as models to define feminist social work. Liberal feminists emphasize individual human rights and view women's oppression in terms of discrimination and equal access to opportunities traditionally reserved for men. Radical feminists and socialist feminists critique the more gender-neutral traditions of liberal philosophies and call for the reconceptualization of reality from the standpoint of women. Radical feminists, however, attend to the
fundamental commonality in the experiences of all women and view women's oppression in the universal male control of female sexuality and reproduction. Socialist feminists, in contrast, emphasize diversity among women, in the fundamental way in which women are divided by race, class, and nationality (Allen, 1988; Nes & Iadicola, 1989). Feminist perspectives range from "liberal-reformist to radical-reconstructionist, but they share the underlying assumptions of women's subordination and the need for women's liberation" (Allen, 1988, p. 30).

Feminist therapists are trained in a variety of disciplines, theoretical orientations, and degrees of structure, and they work in a variety of settings; however, they are joined together by their feminist analyses and perspectives (Kahn & Yoder, 1989; Lerman & Porter, 1990). While there has been much attention on process as a focus for feminist theorists, there has not been as much attention given to the meaning of feminism as it is embodied in practice (Linton, 1989). Indeed, we are still struggling to understand what is meant by feminist social work or even feminism itself.

Statement of the Research Problem

A basic premise undergirding this study is one which
is supported by the literature, that is, social work can be informed and enhanced by adopting feminist perspectives. Although there are several authors who have begun to study and describe feminist social work practice (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Freeman, 1990; Nes & Iadicola, 1989), none has looked at how feminist social workers integrate their perspectives into practice. Additionally, no research has looked at the meaning of feminist social work to those who practice it. Because feminist theory is largely experiential, and feminist theory development is often preceded by experiential practice, this exploratory study comes from the perspective that it is the meaning we give to our experience which helps to define it.

There are a number of assumptions which give direction to the focus of inquiry in the current research study. First, the new scholarship on women reveals that women historically have been left out of the knowledge-building and meaning-giving processes defining human existence. While there has been movement to alter the androcentric assumptions undergirding our understanding of life, social work is still largely influenced by male theories and male models of development. Feminist perspectives in practice can expand our current conceptions of the issues affecting women. It
is argued that our knowledge of women's lives needs to be defined in the terms assigned by women; that is, by looking at women's lived experience we can begin to look beyond the categories developed by men. Second, this study assumes that the primary difference between "good" social work practice and feminist social work practice is that feminists explicitly apply their values in practice. While there is little understanding of how feminist social workers actually integrate their values into practice, it is believed that this can be discovered through a qualitative and phenomenological approach to research. Third, while feminist social work practice is often discussed as if it were a monolith, in actuality there are many different feminist theoretical perspectives which can inform practice. According to Nes and Iadicola, specific theoretical perspectives suggest particular approaches to feminist social work practice.

Implications of the Study

There are several implications for social work theory and practice which can be derived from this study. First, because feminist social work is in the early stages of development, we have very little knowledge about what feminist social workers think and do, and how they approach their practice. There are multiple feminist
perspectives which differ according to the feminist beliefs in which they are grounded. This study will be the first to explicitly explore the nature of feminist social work by looking at three different feminist viewpoints and exploring how these feminist perspectives are applied in practice.

Second, while social work has been divided over its dual focus--individual and social change--feminism has managed to integrate the two. Consciousness raising is the starting point for individual and social change, and concepts of social change undergird feminist practice. This study aims to discover how feminist social workers integrate their perspectives into practice.

Finally, while there is an emerging body of literature which suggests how feminist social workers behave, there has been negligible research done to determine how feminist practice is developed, experienced and understood by those practitioners. Tenets of feminist research indicate that it is not sufficient to describe what feminist social workers do, but that it is also necessary to understand the meaning of the experience of practicing from a feminist perspective. An important aspect of feminist scholarship has been to seek new ways to explore traditional and nontraditional questions. It can be argued that since feminist practice is largely
experiential, personal experience must be a very significant factor in any effort to define it. As Kimmel puts it, "truth is not separate from the person who speaks it" (1989, p. 135). This study will explore the meaning of the experience of practicing feminist social work so that our developing understanding of the phenomenon can be understood in the context of a lived experience.

This study offers the opportunity to discover and explore in-depth, a rich variety of perspectives, meanings, contexts, and definitions of feminist social work practice as defined by the real "experts"--those who are doing it.

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will include preliminary information on the ways in which feminist social workers approach their practice, and will address how their feminism is integrated into practice. This information is of significance because it adds to the meager but growing literature which concentrates on feminist analysis and the construction of a feminist social work.

Finally, this study seeks to further the development of the new scholarship on women because it deliberately allows women to speak for themselves and to describe their experiences in their own voices. In a profession where the majority of workers and clients are women, this
represents a necessary and important contribution.
CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Man never thinks of himself without thinking of the Other; he views the world under the sign of duality which is not in the first place sexual in character. But being different from man, who sets himself up as the Same, it is naturally to the category of the Other that woman is consigned; the Other includes woman. (de Beauvoir, cited in Firestone, 1970, p. 7)

**Gaining Awareness**

Women have become aware that their understanding of life has been "underdeveloped and distorted because past explanations have been created by only one half of the human experience" (Miller, 1986, p. xi). Although women make up more than half the human population, "serious examination of women's world and its implications for all humanity is simply not perceived to be meaningful and important from a male perspective" (Ruth, 1990, p. 5).

According to Gornick and Moran, women have been more totally invisible in the history of human life than any other category of person (1971, p. xvi). Lerner (1986) calls the tension between women's actual historical experience and their exclusion from interpreting that experience the "dialectic of women's history". She notes
that while women are essential and central to creating society, they have been kept from knowing and interpreting history through their exclusion from the enterprise of creating symbol systems, philosophies, science, and law (p. 5). The way in which this dialectic has moved women forward in the historical process is defined by Lerner:

The contradiction between women's centrality and active role in creating society and their marginality in the meaning-giving process of interpretation and explanation has been a dynamic force, causing women to struggle against their condition. When, in that process of struggle, at certain historic moments, the contradictions in their relationship to society and to historical process are brought into the consciousness of women, they are then correctly perceived and named as deprivations that women share as a group. This coming into consciousness of women becomes the dialectical force moving them into action to change their condition and to enter a new relationship to male-dominated society. (1986, p. 5)

For centuries women have been studied, primarily by men working together in institutions and disciplines which were not open to women. Jessie Bernard notes that the scholarly disciplines have been infected with sexism, which she defines as:

the unconscious, taken-for-granted, assumed, unquestioned, unexamined, unchallenged acceptance of the belief that the world as it looks to men is the only world, that the way of dealing with it which men have created is the only way, that the values which men have evolved are the only ones...that what men think about what women are like is the only way to think about what women are like. (Cited in Gornick & Moran, 1971, p. xxv)
Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) believe the currently accepted conceptions of knowledge and truth have been shaped throughout history by the male-dominated culture. Men have used their own perceptions and visions to construct theory and to set values that have become the standard for both men and women. They concluded that it is the tendency in Western culture to divide human nature into dual but parallel streams--those attributes which are associated with the masculine are valued, studied, and articulated, while those associated with the feminine are devalued or not considered important (pp. 5-6).

Feminists argue that many of the traditional works on women are flawed because they look at women, rather than exploring with women their views and understanding of their own experience (Gilligan, 1982; Gotteleib, 1980; Gottlieb & Bombyk, 1987). Ruth (1990) also noted that ideas which women offer are frequently ignored or debunked unless they reinforce existing beliefs.

Gilligan (1982) believes the problem in fitting women into existing models of human development comes from their exclusion from the critical theory-building studies of psychological research. As a result, to the extent that women differ from the male standard, they appear to be deficient in their development. Gilligan calls for a
recognition that current androcentric models of human growth and development may not be representative of the human condition (pp. 170-171).

The use of the traditional scientific method in defining the "truths" about our existence has been questioned by women. Cummerton states that those who have uncritically adopted social science methodology and accepted the assumptions underlying these methods "have subjected thought to an 'invisible tyranny'" which, under patriarchy, "has wiped out women's questions so totally that even women have not been able to hear and formulate our own questions to meet our own experience" (1986, p. 80). She critiques the traditional, patriarchal research design as having an inherently sexist bias which "has influenced the way research problems are formulated, the way variables are conceptualized, and the questions that are considered for research" (p. 83).

Cummerton defines a feminist perspective in research as one "in which women's experiences, ideas, and needs are valued in their own right" (1986, p. 85). Because this perspective perceives women as having a different view of the way the world is, as well as a different way of making sense or meaning out of their experience, men are no longer held out as the norm for all of human behavior.

The new scholarship on women has served to raise
women's consciousness by challenging long-held assumptions about human nature. This awareness is the first step toward liberation. Saleebey notes that: "Intellectual and emotional awareness of the social, political, economic, and interpersonal sources of one's oppression prefaces mustering individual and collective resources toward self, group, or cultural revitalization....The problem of being, and doing is first and always a problem of knowing" (1987, p. 15).

The Impact of Feminism on Social Work

Social work practitioners are affected by the same issues of sex-role socialization and sex discrimination as clients. Therefore, they need to examine their own attitudes to assure their assumptions do not serve as barriers to empowering services to clients (Burden & Gottlieb, 1987; Glassman, 1992). Because social work is a profession where the majority of practitioners and clients are women, it would seem logical that an acute awareness of and sensitivity to the issues of women in society would predominate; however, this has not been the case (Norman & Mancuso, 1980). Historically, the impact of the emerging second wave of women's liberation and its implications for social work practice began to appear in the social work literature in the early 1970s.
Kravetz (1976), writing in the first special issue on women in Social Work, noted that the influence of sexism in the field of social work was not only apparent in the male dominance found in social work salaries, personnel deployment, education, and publication practices, but also in the theories and methods taught in social work courses. She challenged the notion that social science is "value-free" by observing that the traditional stereotypes, folklore and myths about women were presented as factual and were used to justify their subordinate status. She called for social workers to eliminate sexism in social work by identifying and assessing the effects of sexism on their own socialization and training (pp. 424-425).

Johnson (1976) looked at the social work literature to determine what influence the women's movement had on social work thought in the mid-1970s. From the conspicuous lack of writing in the professional literature she concluded, "Reassessment—or even assessment—of the significance of being female in American society is still the concern of only a small group of social work professionals" (p. 531). She saw the failure of the social work literature to pay attention to women's issues as a reflection of women's traditional status in society (p. 534).
Abramovitz (1978), in a comprehensive review of the social work literature from 1965 to 1978 found that an overwhelming majority of the articles focused on women's traditional roles:

The number of articles sensitive to women's issues has risen and women's traditional roles are less rigidly defined. The constraints of sex-role stereotyping on women's mental health and life chances are recognized. However, the continued organization of research and service programs around women in their most traditional family roles, the absence of nonexist theories and practice techniques, and the class bias in existing feminist and social work thinking point to areas in which future work is needed if feminism is to be integrated into social work thinking and practice. (p. 96)

Abramovitz concluded that the social work literature on women is problematic because it neither raises nor answers questions that create understandings of the underlying reasons for the condition of women in society.

Berlin and Kravetz (1981) pointed out that social workers have relied on feminist analyses for understanding "the numerous ways, both blatant and insidious, in which the dominant culture precludes equality for women" (p. 447). They further stated that the profession has an obligation to "design, evaluate, disseminate, and implement powerful responses to eliminating the oppression of women" (p. 449).

Collins suggested that for the profession to meet the mandate put forth by Berlin and Kravetz, social workers
need to "understand and incorporate feminist perspectives and theories—not solely as these pertain to the personal lives and problems of females as clients or as social workers—but as paradigmatic ways of understanding our patriarchal culture, its masculine ethos, and the inevitable conflict between it and what social workers and feminists want for humanity and society" (1986, p. 214).

Quam and Austin (1984), in a review of the coverage of women's issues in eight social work journals between 1970 and 1981, concluded that the "social work literature has not been as responsive to the issues of feminism as might have been expected" (p. 360). They found that in 1970, 4.0 percent of the total number of articles (223) were related to women's issues. By 1976, the percentage of articles about women rose to 11.1 percent, although in this year two of the journals published special issues on women. By 1981 the percentage of total articles on women had decreased to 6.3 percent. Although the content of the articles was not analyzed other than to determine if they related to women's issues, the authors did categorize the articles into six topic areas: (1) women as social workers and social work administrators; (2) history and biography; (3) women as social work faculty or students; (4) sexism in the profession; (5) effects of women's liberation and feminism; and, (6) women as clients. Two-thirds of the
articles related to women as clients. The remaining categories included a small number (3.5 percent and 8.1 percent respectively) related to the concerns of women as faculty and students, and to the concerns of women as social workers and social work administrators. A scant 5.6 percent of the articles focused on women in the profession historically. There was no mention of the percentage of articles related to the effects of women's liberation and feminism, which suggests that this number was even fewer than those in other categories.

Valentich (1986) found that there are a limited number of references to feminist social work practice in the recent social work literature, and our knowledge of what social workers who label themselves as feminists actually do in practice is very limited. Collins (1986) affirms this view as well. She noted that while the values, ethical commitments, purposes, and philosophical systems of feminism and social work converge and impart added meaning to each other, "little effort has been made to incorporate feminist perspectives and theories into social work's knowledge base" (p. 214).

Simon (1988) reported that, for a decade, NASW failed to take note of the expanding women's movement in its official proceedings and in its monthly newspaper, *NASW News*. "From January 1963 to March 1973, an era in which
massive amounts of media attention were paid to the women's movement, NASW did not make a single reference to the women's movement in the NASW News" (p. 61). In her review of the issues of NASW News, Social Work, and Social Casework from 1950-88, Simon found that the entire profession paid minimal official attention to feminism in its journals, organizational proceedings, lobbying efforts, agencies and schools before 1973 (p. 63). She suggests the slow response of the profession to the challenges put forth by liberal, radical, and socialist feminists may have been preceded by a "not-yet-visible feminist consciousness and organizing" which eventually led to an explosion of interest and "intellectual contagion" which spread throughout the profession after 1973 (p. 64). From 1973 to 1981 the profession began to incorporate feminist frameworks into the prevailing paradigms of the 1970s which evoked "predictable resistance and backlash" (p. 64). Despite the controversy surrounding the changes brought about by the women's movement, Simon found that feminism remained salient within the overall profession throughout the 1970s. However, the election of Ronald Reagan initiated a defensive period for social work and feminism, causing both to turn their energies to preserving the gains they had made to that point. Simon believes that feminist
social workers are moving out of their marginal positions and are starting to be recognized for their contributions to the contemporary women's movement, despite the resistance which still exists within the profession.

VanDenBergh and Cooper (1986) recognize that "although the majority of social work practitioners and recipients of service are women, feminist visions seem to have had a difficult time pervading the profession" (p. 3). They contend that outcomes of the impact of feminism on society seem to have touched the profession of social work only peripherally. The authors find it ironic that a profession theoretically committed to improving the quality of life for all people still has a prevalence of traditional and stereotypic views on women.

In summation, even though the literature documents a unique relationship between the values of feminism and social work, it is also clear that feminism remains marginal to the mainstream of current social work practice.

**Definitions of Feminism**

There is no one universally agreed upon definition of feminism. Feminism may be a way of viewing the world, a perspective, a political theory, a spiritual focus, or a kind of activism (Ruth, 1990; Valentich, 1986).
Some of the varying definitions of feminism can be found in Kramarae and Treichler's Feminist Dictionary (1985, pp. 158-160):

May be defined as a movement seeking the reorganization of the world upon a basis of sex-equality in all human relations; a movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the ground of sex, would abolish all sex privileges and sex burdens, and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of woman and man as the foundation of law and custom. (Billington-Greig, 1911)

Begins but cannot end with the discovery by an individual of her self-consciousness as a woman. It is not, finally, even the recognition of her reasons for anger, or the decision to change her life, to go back to school, to leave a marriage....Feminism means finally that we renounce our obedience to the fathers and recognize that the world they have described is not the whole world....Feminism implies that we recognize fully the inadequacy for us, the distortion of male-created ideologies, and that we proceed to think, and act, out of that recognition. (Rich, 1976)

Is a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, a way of asking questions and searching for answers, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women. (Hartstock, 1979)

Van Den Bergh and Cooper (1986) define feminism as a "transformational politics, a political perspective concerned with changing extant economic, social, and political structures" (p. 1). Because a central concern of feminism is ending domination and resisting oppression, it is seen as a world view which can lend perspective to any issue. The authors see feminism as a politics of
transformation which is relevant to more than a constituency of women:

It is a vision born of women, but it addresses the future of the planet with implications accruing for males as well as females, for all ethnic groups, for the impoverished, the disadvantaged, the handicapped, the aged, and so on. Feminism is a politics for the future of the world, not just for an isolated handful of the converted. (1986, p. 2)

Klein (1984) defines feminism as "a political ideology which argues that men and women should have equal roles in society and that women have been denied support within the home and access to the marketplace because of discrimination and inadequate social institutions" (p. 2).

Eisenstein (1983) uses this definition of feminism: "An analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it....Feminism is not a monolith; there are many different, even at times, contradictory, positions which may spring from good feminist motives" (p. xi-xvii).

Walters, Carter, Fapp, and Silverstein (1988) define feminism as:

A humanistic framework or world view concerned with the roles, rules, and functions that organize male-female interactions. Feminism seeks to include the experience of women in all formulations of human experience, and to eliminate the dominance of male assumptions. Feminism does not blame individual men for the patriarchal social system that exists, but seeks to understand and change the socialization process that keeps men and women thinking and acting
within a sexist, male-dominated framework. (p. 17)

This plethora of definitions demonstrates the diversity of feminist thinking, and suggests that idiosyncratic definitions of feminism provide insight into how individual practitioners view the world and the issues they face in practice.

**Ideological Themes of Feminism**

Certain ideological themes appear common to feminist practice regardless of the discipline of the practitioner (Lerman & Porter, 1990). Ideology is a frequently referenced but seldom defined concept in feminist writings. Strictly interpreted, it refers to the "ways in which ideas are used by powerful groups to control and mystify the less powerful" (Bouchier, 1983, p. 71). Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman's definition of ideology reflects the essence of the term as it is used in much of the feminist practice literature. That is, "Ideology is a pattern of beliefs and concepts (both factual and normative) which purport to explain complex social phenomena with a view to directing and simplifying socio-political choices facing individuals and groups" (1986, p. 8).

Ideology is at the core of feminist practice because practitioners make their ideologies explicit and
consciously examine their performance against their ideologies. Feminist ideology is grounded in women's experience of the world, but belief in the concept of praxis also suggests that the world is constantly changed by the actions of women (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986).

Valentich (1986) observes that there is no current consensus on what constitutes feminist practice, but she also describes the commonalities among differing ideological viewpoints. First, there is a focus on achieving equality for both men and women. Second, there is an emphasis on the value of women, and women's experiences are viewed as the basis for theory and action. Finally, feminists believe positive change is possible through the efforts of women, but view men as being able to contribute to the change process as well (1986, pp. 565-566).

Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman (1986) believe feminist social work can be differentiated from "good" social work by the centrality of its ideology, and they identify seven themes which constitute feminist ideology: (1) an end to patriarchy; (2) empowerment; (3) process; (4) the personal is political; (5) unity-diversity; (6) validation of the nonrational; and, (7) consciousness raising/praxis.

Van Den Bergh and Cooper (1986) identify feminist principles which are specifically relevant to social work
practice: (1) eliminating false dichotomies and artificial separations; (2) reconceptualizing power; (3) valuing process as equally important as product; (4) validating, renaming; and, (5) believing that the personal is political.

Hyde (1989) discusses five practice principles which comprise a model of feminist macro-practice: (1) the centrality of women's values, lives, and relationships; (2) consciousness raising, linking the personal and political; (3) the reconceptualization of power; (4) democratizing processes and structures; and, (5) fundamental cultural and structural change.

That ideology is reflected in the feminist social worker's approach to practice, as well as in the theoretical perspectives held by the practitioner is widely discussed in the literature, but to date there has been negligible research on how feminist ideology is integrated into social work practice and theory.

**Empirical Studies from the Literature**

In a comprehensive review of *Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts*, *Women's Studies Abstracts*, *Social Work Research and Abstracts*, and the computerized databases of *Sociofile*, *Psychlit*, and *ERIC*, only six relevant empirical studies relating to feminism and
applied social sciences could be found. It is clear that empirical research on feminism and feminist approaches to therapy and counseling is in its infancy in spite of growing interest in the literature (Enns & Hackett, 1990). This suggests that the relationship between feminism and social work practice is fertile ground for study and research.

While the existing literature suggests that feminism and social work ideology are consonant, Lincoln and Koeske (1987) found that MSW students in a major university are neither being exposed to feminist ideology in their course work nor discussing the special significance of becoming professional women. In a study which compared two samples of MSW students to known feminists (women's studies faculty) at the University of Pittsburgh in 1982 and 1983, the authors constructed and administered the Feminist Behavior Scale (FBS) to 241 students. The FBS is based on the assumption that when a woman becomes a feminist, resocialization takes place. The FBS was designed to measure as much of the transformation process as possible. While the FBS was found to have psychometric properties acceptable for the purposes of their research, the study did not look at the relationship between feminism, type of feminist identification and social work practice. Lincoln and Koeske found that the MSW students had low levels of
feminist identification and behavior, and that feminism was not a major focus of the social work curriculum at the University of Pittsburgh. While the authors do not discuss the generalizability of these findings beyond the samples studied, they do suggest that the findings are a cause for concern for educators who are committed to the incorporation of feminist perspectives into the social work curricula (pp. 50-57). Additionally, the issue of feminist identification and practice perspective is especially salient for social work because of the predominance of women in the field both as practitioners and clients.

Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman (1986) conducted a small exploratory pilot study of 36 self-identified feminist social work practitioners in an effort to identify, develop, and disseminate information about feminist social work practice. They found that feminist practitioners generally do the following:

(1) Approach all issues presented by social living and social relationships with a view to identifying their implications for women.

(2) Are concerned with the ways in which patterns of institutionalized sexism create problems for all persons and for women in particular.

(3) Are committed to the development of specific actions and techniques to remove barriers, both material and ideological, to the fullest possible development of the abilities of individuals and groups.
(4) Tend to view social work practice as a "political" practice, that is, as a normatively based and directed effort to enable people to control the conditions of their lives by moving power distributions in a more egalitarian direction. (1986, pp. 26-27)

This study can be considered only tentative in its findings. Out of 150 survey instruments distributed, 36 were returned for a 24 percent response rate. The research questionnaire was lengthy and contained many open-ended questions. Just how the surveys were designed and analyzed is not explained by the authors in any detail. The positive benefit of the study was its provision of a rich variety of responses which broadly define the parameters in need of additional and more sophisticated research.

Linton (1989) attempted to capture and categorize the meaning and characteristics of feminism. Using a concept mapping process, 205 randomly selected, self-defined advocates of feminism were asked to "brainstorm feminism." Eighty-four respondents generated 710 ideas, 150 of which were randomly selected to constitute the conceptual domain. In the second step of the research, 34 different advocates of feminism were asked to sort the 150 ideas (presented on cards) into piles which made sense to them. The data was then analyzed using multidimensional scaling
and cluster analysis procedures. Participants were asked to rank each idea on a scale from 1 (least) to 5 (most) on its level of importance to feminism. The third step of the research, interpretation, represents the weakest part of the study. Ideally, participants would meet to negotiate agreement on naming the different clusters. In this study, the researcher was left to interpret the findings because the participants were not available to her. Therefore, rather than presenting information on the process and product of group participation, the author was limited to describing where responses were clustered and to make some assumptions about the meaning of the clusters. Linton found two ideas with values between 4.6 and 5, which she considered the two most important ideas in the study. The highest value was given to "recognizing the interconnectedness of the struggles of all oppressed persons--working to end all oppressions", and the second highest value was given to "control of own life" (pp. 27-28). A comparison of levels of importance given to the various clusters led the author to conclude that advocates of feminism appear to value action on specific issues more than thinking about them and, possibly, more than thinking about the meaning of those actions (p. 28). She suggests this might mean that feminists could be acting on a short-term, short-sighted basis in ways which may conflict
with their long-term, more globally stated beliefs (p. 28). This study is of interest to the present study because it tends to support the literature which finds that theory does not seem to be as integrated into practice as one would hope. Furthermore, it also raises questions about whether feminists, who claim to make their value base explicit in practice, actually do so in a way which considers the meaning and impact of those actions.

Kimmel (1989) studied 120 Fellows of the American Psychological Association in her effort to answer the question, "Can feminism be defined through its lived experience, and, if so, how does it evolve and in what ways does this belief have an impact on its holders' lives?" The participants were deliberately chosen for their recognized achievements and relevance to the discipline--their objective behavior related to the goals of feminism in psychology (p. 136). Of 51 responses, there were 40 complete data sets, from which 10 were randomly drawn and thematically analyzed using techniques adopted from a phenomenological method. Seven open-ended questions made up the probe of participants' experience of feminism. Each person was asked to describe what she/he meant by the term and to identify when they first described themselves as a feminist. They were asked a general question about the experience of feminism and were
also queried about a particular time of awareness, and whether it was a positive or a negative experience. The impact of this belief in the areas of employment, family and personal relationships, and spiritual experiences was solicited. They were asked when in their daily lives they were most and least aware of being a feminist. Finally, they were asked to assess whether or not and how the experience changed over time. The responses were analyzed to find themes, which were grouped in the order of most-to least-frequent (p. 137). Kimmel concludes that feminism "is a lived, conscious, changing experience that fluctuates from fringe to focal and back to fringe awareness" (p. 145). Feminism contains the elements feminist psychology should contain, namely, "concern with equality (of power), the need for change and activism, a valuing of women and their experience, and the social construction of gender" (p. 145). She addresses concerns about proper method and data for feminist psychology by stating, "I am convinced through my own experience, and that of others who have described theirs, that the personal is not only political or professional, but also scientific. That a valid source of truth about human beings and their existence is themselves as they tell it" (p. 144). This study is important because it is the first empirical study to look at feminism using a
phenomenological method, focusing primarily on experience as a starting point. Kimmel notes that she may be criticized for going outside of a logical positivist paradigm in her effort to find the "truth", but she argues that "women's experience is often more important and real than the outside construction of her" (p. 136). Given the long history of science excluding women's experience and perceptions, Kimmel makes a persuasive case for choosing to let the participants speak for themselves.

Freeman (1990) looked at the extent of the interaction of feminism with social work education. She randomly sampled 733 faculty members, both male and female, in all accredited graduate schools of social work. She hypothesized that: (1) feminist educators would rate problems among women as more severe than would nonfeminist educators; and, (2) differences in liberal, socialist, and radical feminists' ratings of the severity of problems would be evident. Both hypotheses were confirmed by the research. She found the mean score on the degree of feminist identification was in the weak-to-moderate range. Women respondents rated themselves significantly higher than did male respondents on the degree of their feminist identification. The majority of respondents most preferred the liberal feminist perspective as a definition of feminism, which is not surprising considering the
liberal reformist tradition from which social work developed (p. 85). An interesting finding is that there were more similarities than differences in liberal, socialist, and radical feminist social work educator's views of women's issues. Consequently, Freeman concludes that even though there is diversity in definitions of feminism, there also is a unifying bond in the agreement that women's oppression and subordination must end (p. 86). The weaknesses of the study are the lack of reference to validity and reliability measures, and the inability to generalize the implications of the research to populations beyond social work educators. However, this study is relevant because it appears to be the first to look at the linkages between feminist identification and ideological perspectives.

Enns and Hackett (1990) point out that the lack of attention paid to the philosophies underlying various feminist orientations has resulted in confusion about the constituents of feminist counseling and has generally limited the contributions of the empirical work on feminist counseling and therapy that does exist (p. 33). They point out the tendency of the literature to describe feminism as if it were a monolith rather noting the existence of various feminisms having certain features in common, but having definite differences as well. The
purpose of their study was to examine reactions of both feminist and nonfeminist women to two different feminist approaches, liberal and radical, and to contrast these reactions to ratings of a nonexist-humanistic approach to counseling. They hypothesized that feminist subjects would have more positive reactions than nonfeminist subjects to both the implicit and explicit liberal and radical feminist counselor, but would be more neutral or even negative with regard to the nonexist counselor. They expected feminist subjects to differentiate between the liberal and radical feminist counselors in favor of the radical feminist counselor. They also assumed that nonfeminist subjects would have the most negative reactions to the explicit radical feminist counselor, but that nonfeminist subjects might have fairly positive reactions to the liberal feminist counselor. The sample included 150 undergraduate women enrolled in sociology, psychology and communications. The results of the investigation found that all of the college women indicated a greater degree of willingness to see the feminist counselors than the nonexist counselor for career and sexual assault-harrassment concerns; no differences across counselors were observed for personal-interpersonal concerns. Contrary to expected findings, nonfeminist subjects did not rate either of the
feminist approaches more negatively than the nonexist approach, nor did nonfeminist or feminist subjects differentiate between either of the explicit feminist counselors. Finally, the explicitness of the counselor statement of values did not affect nonfeminist subjects' ratings of the feminist counselors but feminist subjects rated counselors higher overall when they made an explicit value statement. This research is relevant to the current study because it is the only empirical study which specifically defines and looks at attitudes toward liberal and radical feminist therapy. While the study has limitations in generalizability beyond the population studied, it does suggest that feminist counselors need not be concerned about generating negative client reactions by following the ethical guidelines of the profession in clearly and explicitly outlining their values and assumptions (p. 40).

In summary, the empirical literature points to the need for further research into the specific nature of feminist social work practice. Feminist social work is not a monolith with a unified and fixed structure; rather, it appears to be comprised of a variety of feminisms which need to be more clearly defined in order to be understood.
A Theoretical Model for Defining Feminist Social Work

Freeman (1990) and Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman (1986) have proposed that feminism is an appropriate theoretical framework for the study of women's experiences in society and for the development of intervention strategies to alter those experiences positively. VanDenBergh and Cooper (1986) state that "feminist visions for social work education and practice are much broader and more inclusive than they would be if they solely addressed "women's issues" (p. 25). They believe a feminist perspective brings a new dimension to professional practice and education that can facilitate social change in order to improve the quality of life.

Nes and Iadicola (1989) indicate that some social workers have become sensitized to the adverse impact of sexism and sexist oppression, and "have turned to feminism as a mode of analysis and as a means of action" (p. 12). They iterate that "all social work is practiced from some perspective," and "in most cases this perspective reflects the dominant ideology of the society" which continues to be largely androcentric and patriarchal (p. 20). The literature upholds their view that, to the extent social workers are unaware of how their own values and assumptions reflect the views of the larger society, they
will likely reflect and reinforce the status quo in their own practice (Jayaratne, 1978; Kolevzon & Maykranz, 1982).

Nes and Iadicola believe feminist social work practice is outside of the dominant perspective and in opposition to the dominant framework (1989, p. 20). In order to escape this marginal position and promote further definition of feminist social work practice, they see a need for feminist practitioners to make the assumptions underlying their perspectives explicit. To effect achievement of this goal, Nes and Iadicola have developed a model which describes three feminist frameworks and provides a guide for social work practitioners to develop individual versions of feminist social work practice. The authors use Hartstock's definition of feminism to undergird the development of their analysis (see above--Definitions of Feminism). While pointing out the lack of uniform agreement on theoretical orientation among self-defined feminists, they identify three major groups of feminists with differing ideological positions that have emerged within the women's movement: (1) the liberal or women's rights feminists, (2) the radical feminists, and (3) the socialist feminists (Freeman, 1990; Nes & Iadicola, 1989). The most significant aspects of each perspective are presented below.
Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminists, according to Eisenstein, make up the largest part of the visible women's movement and women's consciousness today (1981, p. 342). Liberal feminists consider men and women as having the same potentials for achievement, but believe that the sameness and equality of men and women have been hidden by social conditions which have hindered women's development. According to liberal feminists, inequality is a natural outcome of individual differences in human potential and motivation. From a liberal feminist outlook, patriarchy as a theory of male supremacy involving a structural analysis of power is not understood, although particular (individual) advantages of men over women are (Eisenstein, 1981, p. 344). The realm of power is defined in terms of the politics of the law. Although men and women are not yet equal before the law, liberal feminists believe changes in the law will create equal opportunity for both men and women.

Liberal feminists believe they can acquire "equality of opportunity" within capitalist patriarchal society; and while recognizing inequalities, they do not see the structural relations between capitalism and patriarchy as the problem. The division between the public and private realm of social activity is taken as natural or necessary.
While women want to be given equality of opportunity in the public world, they do not see their position in the private world as giving definition to their particular inequality to men (Eisenstein, 1981, p. 344).

Illegitimate gender inequality is defined as the denial of equal opportunity to women based on their sex. The major issue for liberal feminists is not oppression, but the denial of equal opportunity and the freedom of individuals to choose their life course. Liberal feminists believe the way for women to achieve equality, freedom to choose their life course, and opportunity to achieve equality within 'patriarchal' capitalist society is by becoming more competitive, assertive, individualistic, and self-directed. Liberal feminists do not believe male nature needs to change, rather, there must be change in male attitudes and actions which block opportunities for females (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 12).

Warren reinforces the emphasis on equality in her definition of liberal feminist:

One who advocates such reforms as legal equality between the sexes, equal pay for equal work, and equal employment opportunities, but who denies that complete equality requires radical alterations in basic social institutions e.g. the capitalist economic systems, biological family, monogamous marriage, biological motherhood...or in the presumption that most childrearing must be done by women. (Cited in Kramarae and Treichler, 1985, p. 231)
Liberal feminism receives the most support from women and the established power structure, but this may be due to its consonance with certain elements of the dominant ideology of our society. For Eisenstein, liberal feminism is a theory about asking for freedom for women while at the same time working from structures that allocate freedom unequally (1981, p. 353). Critics of liberal feminism say there can be no equal opportunity for women when there is basic inequality in the economic and sexual structuring of society.

**Radical Feminism**

Radical feminists believe there are basic differences in the nature of women and men which have been universal throughout history. According to Eisenstein:

The issue of (biological) essentialism that woman is different from man in that she is more spiritual, loving, caring and that these differences are located (in some significant sense) in her biological self is an important aspect of much radical feminism....radical feminism views female nature as superior and that if there is an androgynous view of human life in radical feminism it is that men should become like women, not women like men. (Cited in Nes and Tadicola, 1989, p. 14)

The core values of radical feminism are integrity or wholeness of personality beyond the gender distinctions of patriarchy; gynergy (power of being women as defined by
women); equality resulting from the elimination of patriarchy; decentralized, participatory, direct democracy; and sexual freedom (Nes and Iadicola, 1989, p. 14). Radical feminists view the social order as reflecting male nature and males' need to dominate and control. Patriarchy is defined as the institutionalized system of male dominance and control over women which serves as a psychological function in terms of ego gratification (Nes & Iadicola, p. 14). The oppression of women is believed to be rooted primarily in psychological, not economic, factors. Koedt further articulates this point:

We believe that the purpose of male chauvinism is primarily to obtain psychological ego satisfaction, and that only secondarily does this manifest itself in economic relationships. For this reason we do not believe that capitalism, or any economic system, is the cause of female oppression, nor do we believe that female oppression will disappear as a result of purely economic revolution. (Cited in Donovan, 1990, p. 144)

According to Millet (1990), sexual domination is perhaps the "most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power" (p. 496). Millet labels this society a patriarchy because virtually every avenue of power within the society—the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance—is entirely in male hands (p. 497). Patriarchy is seen as a universal feature of all social
systems, and all other systems of oppression. Radical feminists believe that as patriarchy and the male need to dominate is eliminated, all other forms of oppression lose their foundation (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 14).

Radical feminists view men as their oppressors, and encourage women to put their energies into a movement to combat them. Women are seen as being conditioned to have certain "maternal traits" such as caring for others, flexibility, non-competitiveness, and cooperation (Donovan, 1990, p. 142). Dunbar presumes that these are essentially human traits which must form the moral base for a new society:

By destroying the present society, and building a society based on feminist principles, men will be forced to live in the human community on terms very different from the present. For that to happen, feminism must be asserted by women, as the basis of revolutionary social change. (Cited in Donovan, p. 142)

Although radical feminists have different views regarding what constitutes a good society, the common theme is that patriarchy and all other forms of oppression and hierarchy will not exist under the new social order--women's values generally will become the basis of the social order. A good society is defined as "one in which women are not bound by their biology, in which childbearing and child rearing are performed by all persons inasmuch as self-determination is not limited by biology, in which
males and females have no systems of oppression limiting their development, and in which there is complete sexual freedom" (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 14). The way to achieve this good society is through non-violent feminist revolution to eliminate gender distinction and abolish sex-role typing. The intensity of radical feminism's commitment to change is reflected in Firestone's statement:

Sex class is so deep as to be invisible. Or it may appear as a superficial inequality, one that can be solved by merely a few reforms, or perhaps by the full integration of women into the labor force. But the reaction of the common man, woman, and child—"That? Why you can't change that! You must be out of your mind!"—is the closest to the truth. We are talking about something every bit as deep as that. This gut reaction—the assumption that, even when they don't know it, feminists are talking about changing a fundamental biological condition—is an honest one. That so profound a change cannot be easily fit into traditional categories of thought, e.g., "political," is not because these categories do not apply but because they are not big enough: radical feminism bursts through them. If there were another word more all-embracing than revolution we would use it. (Cited in Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1984, p. 136)

**Socialist Feminism**

Socialist feminism encompasses diverse perspectives, and differences are based on beliefs about where the roots of oppression lie for women (Nes & Iadicola, 1989). Ruth (1990) views socialist feminism as an amalgam of radical and Marxist feminism. Radical feminists locate the source
of women's oppression not in any particular economic system, but in the nature and implications of gender; while Marxist feminists hold that class oppression is the primary form of oppression in capitalist society, and other oppressions flow from this. Socialist feminists believe that class oppression and sex oppression are separate but interlocking spheres of oppression (Nes & Iadicola, p. 14).

Socialist feminists do not believe the differences between men and women are based on their natures, but instead are a product of the sex/gender system which is rooted in patriarchy. Rubin defines sex/gender systems as the "set of arrangements by which society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (cited in Hartmann, 1981, p. 16). Socialist feminists choose to label the present sex/gender system patriarchy, because the notion of hierarchy and male dominance are central to it (Hartmann, p. 17).

Socialist feminists define patriarchy both ideologically and materially. According to Hartmann "patriarchy is not simply hierarchical organization, but hierarchy in which particular people fill particular places" (Hartmann, 1981, p. 18). Even though patriarchy is hierarchical for both men and women, men at every level
in the hierarchy are able to control at least some women. Thus, men are united in their shared relationship of dominance over women, and are dependent on each other to maintain that domination (Hartmann, pp. 14-15).

The ability of men to control women's labor power provides the material base of patriarchy. Men are able to control women's labor power by excluding women from access to some essential productive resources and by restricting women's sexuality (Hartmann, 1981, p. 15). According to Hartmann, "both hierarchy and interdependence among men and the subordination of women are integral to the functioning of our society; that is, these relationships are systemic" (p. 19). Socialist feminists believe that as social systems change in terms of the nature of gender oppression (patriarchy), so do the differences in the nature of men and women (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 15).

Drawing from Engels, socialist feminists believe social organization is determined by the mode of production, which is seen as having a twofold character: "On the one side, the mode of production of the means of existence involves food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species" (Engels, 1984, p. 121). The workplace and the home are the respective sites of each of the two
modes (Nes & Iadicola, 1989). Although each mode is
distinct, when joined together they form a whole system
which serves as the foundation of society. "The specific
nature of these modes of production and reproduction
define the social system....one's position in the social
order is characterized by one's structural position in
relation to each of the modes of production and
reproduction: male worker, female worker, male capitalist,
and the like" (Nes and Iadicola, 1989, p. 15).

The modes of production and reproduction must fit
together in order for the social system to survive.
Hartmann acknowledges that while "there appears to be no
necessary connection between changes in the one aspect of
production and changes in the other....Common sense,
history, and our experience tell us...that change in one
ordinarily creates movement, tension, or contradiction in
the other" (1981, p. 17).

Changes in the patriarchy and class system are seen
as a result of struggles between those with differing
levels of power within each sphere, and as a result of
discord which may develop when the goals of the dominants
in each sphere conflict (Nes & Iadicola, 1989).

Sexual inequality is seen as being perpetuated by the
fact that the modes of production and reproduction form
the foundation of the social order (Al-Hibri, 1981;
Ferguson & Folbre, 1981; Hartmann, 1981; Vogel, 1981). The socialist feminist prescription for sex-role change is that men and women should recreate their human natures to reflect a society in which one individual's self-actualization through the fulfillment of physical and species needs does not occur at the expense of another. In this view, all forms of oppression would be eliminated and people could join together as equals and cooperate with one another in their quest for self-realization (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 16).

Variations of Feminist Social Work Practice

In order to determine the relationship between social work and feminist perspectives, Nes and Iadicola examine liberal, radical, and socialist feminist social work in terms of four social work components: (1) problem identification, (2) assessment, (3) treatment strategies, and (4) treatment goals. The typologies which flow out of their frameworks are presented below.

Liberal Feminist Social Work

Problem Identification

Liberal feminist social workers focus on four areas of problem identification:
1. Identification of individual deficits, particularly those having roots in sex-role socialization.

2. Identifying problems in opportunity structures, particularly those rooted in sexist and racist institutionalized practices.

3. Identification of the interplay between the individual's deficits and problems in opportunity structures.

4. Identification of the client's social and institutional support system.

Problems arising in these areas are defined in terms of how they impede a client's self-determination (Nes & Iadicola, 1986, p. 16).

Assessment

After problem identification, the social worker assesses each of the four areas to determine the degree and salience of each of the areas in terms of the client's specific problem as the problem is defined by the client.

Treatment Strategies

According to Galper (cited in Nes and Iadicola, 1989) the goal of service provision from this perspective is primarily to enable clients individually to pursue fulfillment of their life choices. Liberal feminists employ four social work treatment strategies to this end:
1. **Conventional therapies** such as individual psychotherapy, group therapy, and family therapy. Individual and group therapy serve to support the individual's choices, while family therapy serves to change sexist attitudes that limit the client's choices or ability to make choices.

2. **Casework and outreach work** to help the client apply personal skills and tap environmental resources.

3. **Client advocacy** to facilitate equal opportunity and access for women to paid employment, educational or vocational institutions.

4. **Client-centered support groups** that provide extra support and affirmation in the client's effort to change.

**Treatment Goals**

The central treatment goal is to provide the individual with freedom to make choices and to fulfill those choices.

**Radical Feminist Social Work**

**Problem Identification**

Radical feminists view patriarchy as the root of human problems (Nes & Iadicola, 1989). While radical feminists believe in the importance of individual choices, the structural context in which these choices are made must be clarified so the client is aware of the limitations imposed by the patriarchal structures and institutional arrangements of society.
Assessment

Assessment focuses on determining the degree to which patriarchy limits an individual's growth. There are three areas of focus in assessment from this perspective:

1. Sex-role socialization and its impact on the client's personality development and perception of self and others;

2. Social support networks of the individual and the extent to which these relationships reinforce and promote patriarchal relations; and,

3. The extent to which patriarchal institutional processes socialize and direct the individual to reproduce patriarchal relations (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 18).

Treatment Strategies

There are four basic forms of treatment in radical feminist social work:

1. **Consciousness raising** which seeks to communicate to women that they share common problems.

2. **Group therapy**, which is preferred over individual therapy because of its focus on a communal sharing of responsibility. Any therapy that resembles patriarchal social relations is viewed as therapeutically counterproductive.

3. **Support and self-help groups** serve to actualize the idea of women helping women.

4. **Politicization and mobilization** of women around women's issues and human problems as they are rooted in patriarchy.

Treatment Goals

Radical feminist social work has five primary goals, as defined by Nes and Iadicola:
1. To create individual and collective awareness that personal problems have their roots in patriarchy and that sex or gender oppression is the basis of all other forms of oppression.

2. To eliminate artificially created sex roles and to move toward sex-role transcendence.

3. To promote changes in primary and secondary relationships that are characterized by patriarchy. The notion of reclaiming control associated with this goal means that women will no longer relinquish control or allow others to take it.

4. To mobilize and politicize women to effect change in the larger social system.

5. To establish alternatives for women that are outside the parameters of patriarchy. Examples of this include alternative living arrangements, sexual practices, and friendships and the promotion of sisterhood.

**Socialist Feminist Social Work**

Problem Identification

Socialist feminist social workers look at how problems arise from the choices made by the client and from the limitations of choices available to clients, both of which are a product of their structural position in the society as defined principally in terms of the class and gender system (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 19). From this perspective, problem identification shows how personal crises have both subjective and objective components, and that problems are also a result of the contradictions within the modes of production and reproduction of
patriarchal, capitalist society.

Assessment

Assessment from this perspective is similar to radical feminist social work, but there is an added emphasis on the effects of class and other forms of oppression. The issues of alienation, personality, identity and self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and locus of control as they relate to class, patriarchy, and other systems of domination are of particular interest in assessment.

Treatment Strategies

There are three primary treatment strategies in this perspective, as defined by Nes and Iadicola:

1. **Consciousness-raising** to enable individuals to interpret the effect of classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression on social relationships and to understand how these systems of oppression limit growth and development.

2. **Support, self-help, and advocacy groups** which aim to help individuals meet their basic needs and change the systems of domination in society.

3. **Strategies of community organizing** to empower individuals and oppressed groups and to provide ways to meet needs outside the parameters of the systems of patriarchy and class.
Treatment Goals

The treatment goals for socialist feminist social work are almost the same as for radical feminist social work; however, these additional goals are delineated:

1. To raise consciousness and show the linkages among the different systems of domination in society.

2. Organizing, building coalitions, and empowering individuals and groups to enable them to make changes in themselves and in the conditions of their existence that have been limited by systems of domination.

3. To enable individuals to meet both their physical and species needs in a way that extends the parameters of the systems and thus to serve as agents of social change.

Critique of the Model

Nes and Iadicola present the only framework for identification of feminist social work practice. It has not been empirically tested, nor has there been a critique of the model in the social work literature to date.

Because of the admitted diversity among those who identify themselves as feminists, there likely will be no agreement that the model is an accurate representation of all of the variations of feminist ideology. Indeed, the authors acknowledge that the model is an ideal conceptualization which does not include variations of feminism outside of the three models presented. This may be a weakness. However, the models draw from and are
consistent with the writings of many of the eminent feminists articulating each perspective.

The present research study explores the beliefs, approaches and behaviors underlying feminist social work by using the theoretical perspectives identified by Nes and Iadicola as a framework for identifying variations in practice. It is expected that the beliefs and behaviors identified by practitioners will correspond to one or more of the theoretical viewpoints. The research data will potentially support, negate, or add new perspectives to the framework. Ultimately, the research is expected to give further definition to the nature of feminist social work practice and to point out areas where additional research is needed.

**Summary and Guiding Assumptions of the Study**

The impact of the second wave of feminism on social work theory and practice has been reviewed, and a rationale has been presented for the incorporation of feminist perspectives into social work. Feminism, as a female mode of analysis, is a particularly appropriate theoretical framework for social work practice, especially when considering that social work is and always has been a predominantly female profession serving a principally female clientele (Freeman, 1990; Wise, 1988).
Feminist theory is grounded in the premise that women's experiences emerge from the social, political, and economic structures of society. Feminist theory provides a way of viewing the world and "a lens through which women's position in society can be analyzed" (Freeman, 1990, p. 81). Feminist analysis of the status of women in society suggests there is consistent evidence that women are treated as inferior citizens. While there are differing feminist perspectives regarding both the causes of this oppression and strategies to effect social change, feminists from all perspectives are united by their commitment to ending women's oppression and subordination in this society (Freeman, 1990, pp. 85-86).

As a result of the new scholarship on women, many of the androcentric assumptions about women's ideas, values, and experiences have been exposed as maintaining women in a subordinate and disadvantaged position. Unfortunately, even though the profession of social work has been influenced by these new understandings, a review of the literature reveals that the impact of feminism on social work is not as great as one might assume given the preponderance of women both as practitioners and clients. Feminism remains marginal to the mainstream of social work practice in spite of the persuasive arguments that social work is fundamentally feminist in nature.
Fortunately, a growing number of feminist social workers are attempting to delineate and define feminist social work practice. While these efforts represent an important contribution to our knowledge on the subject, the studies addressed in the literature review clearly indicate a need for additional research in this area. The current research further explores the nature of feminist social work practice by looking at several of the key issues suggested in the literature review. Following from this, there are several assumptions undergirding the study from which broad questions needing further analysis emerge:

Assumption I:

It is assumed that how one defines feminism is related to the underlying theoretical and ideological perspectives held by an individual. These theoretical and ideological perspectives, in combination with an individual's definition of feminism, are assumed to give definition to feminist social work practice. The conceptual models developed by Nes and Iadicola will be used as reference points for practitioners to discuss their particular feminist theoretical perspectives. In order to accomplish the goal of understanding the relationship of feminist theory to practice, a number of
broad questions need to be answered, including: (1) How do individual feminist practitioners define feminism? (2) How do feminist social workers depict their feminist theoretical orientations? (3) How do the theoretical orientations of individual social workers affect their approaches to the social work process--problem identification, assessment, treatment strategies, and treatment goals? (4) How do these descriptions compare or contrast with the three theoretical frameworks proposed by Nes and Iadicola?

Assumption II:

Feminist social work practice is believed to be distinguishable from "good" social work practice by the centrality of its ideology. A major feature of feminist practice is that the values, beliefs, and assumptions underlying practice are both applied and made explicit. How feminist practitioners integrate their values into practice has not been specifically addressed in the literature and is therefore a focus of study in the current research. There are a number of questions which emerge from this assumption: (1) What do feminist social workers say about the importance of ideology in practice? (2) What are the ideological themes which influence individual feminist's approach to practice? (3) How do
feminist social workers integrate their beliefs, values, etc., into their practice?

Assumption III:

Because feminism is largely experiential, any attempt to understand feminist social work practice must consider the meaning of the experience from the practitioner's point of view. Personal experience must be a significant factor in the attempt to define feminist social work. Therefore, a question which merits further exploration is: What do feminist social workers say about the meaning of practicing from a feminist perspective?

The questions which emerge from the underlying assumptions provide broad parameters for the development of more specific research questions, which are incorporated into the Research Interview Guide presented in Chapter III.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Rationale for Use of Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative approach was selected for the study because of the capability of this method to generate in depth the meaning a given experience or phenomenon holds for individuals. Qualitative research is especially appropriate for studying the experience of feminism and the impact of feminist beliefs because it supports the feminist perspective that women's experiences, ideas and needs can be legitimately valued in their own right.

Qualitative research is especially congruent with a feminist research perspective because of the clear recognition that the process and product of the research are neither value-free nor objective (Cummerton, 1986). It was acknowledged from the outset that the current research study was influenced by the author's values and assumptions—the topic selected for the research is a reflection of my interests and biases. Additionally, I expected to both influence and be influenced by the participants and the process of the research study. This phenomenological and interactionist approach is viewed as
a valid aspect of feminist research according to Oakley:

A feminist methodology of social science requires that...the mythology of 'hygenic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than a dangerous bias--it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives. (Cited in Weiler, 1988, p. 62)

In both qualitative and feminist research, a dialectical relationship, or intersubjectivity, often develops between the researcher and the participants (Cummerton, 1986; Weiler, 1988). This intersubjectivity, according to Westkott, views women as "objects of knowledge not as passive recipients nor as active, conforming reflections of society;" rather, women are recognized as "subjects who have knowledge and who can act upon the world, even when their subjectivity is denied in male hegemonic ideology and language" (cited in Weiler, 1988, p. 62). In feminist research there is an emphasis on the everyday experiences of women, and "the need for the researcher to locate herself in terms of her own subjectivity is fundamental" to a feminist methodology (Weiler, p. 63). Westkott also explains that intersubjectivity permits the researcher to compare her work with her own experiences as a woman and a scientist. This work can be shared with the research participants, who, by adding their views to the research, might change it (cited in Cummerton, p. 86).
In qualitative and feminist research, the questions asked grow out of the researcher's concerns and experiences and are influenced by the concerns of the participants. The answers which are discovered may emerge "not only from the way the participants confirm and expand her experiences, but from the ways they oppose or remain silent about them. Thus, the intersubjectivity of meaning takes the form of a dialogue from which knowledge is an unpredictable emergent rather than a controlled outcome" (Westkott, cited in Cummerton, p. 86).

I chose to conduct a qualitative research study because the nature of feminist social work practice is, to a great extent, "uncharted territory" which can begin to be defined through exploration of how it is perceived and experienced by its practitioners.

**Theoretical Orientation**

There is support for the use of qualitative research in developing theory. With this in mind, Goldstein discussed what social workers should be concerned with:

Because social workers typically are involved in something as enigmatic and elusive as 'problems of living,' should they not be more concerned with subjective meanings than with objective facts....If we truly wish to understand the conditions and to know their real...significance, however, it is necessary to be open to the meaning of these conditions in the lives of those people....(1985, p. 355)
The best theory, according to Goldstein, is "an analogue of the circumstances we attempt to deal with" (1985, p. 355). He suggests the exploration of personal experience allows client and practitioner to develop theory in a collegial fashion as both pursue understanding and meaning. Extending this concept to the relationship between researcher and participant, it follows that as the participant discusses the meaning of the events in her life through "unchallenged narrative," a "guiding theory emerges with the researcher's openness to the participant's own story" (p. 355). This concept of theory emerging from the research is one which is applicable to this study. Because so little is currently known about the nature of feminist social work practice, how it is ultimately defined by the participants may or may not be congruent with the theoretical frameworks proposed here. However, the value of this approach is that we may be able to identify areas where there is a fit between theory and practice. We may also come to know which areas need further development because they do not follow the guiding theories.

Much of the literature on qualitative research has as a major focus the task of theory construction and verification. The distinguishing feature of the discussion of theory in qualitative research is its
emphasis on inductive strategies of theory development in contrast to theory generated by logical deduction from a priori assumptions (Patton, 1990, p. 66). Glaser and Strauss discuss the link between theory and method:

In contrasting grounded theory with logico-deductive theory and discussing and assessing their relative merits in ability to fit and work (predict, explain, and be relevant), we have taken the position that the adequacy of a theory for sociology today cannot be divorced from the process by which it is generated. Thus one canon for judging the usefulness of a theory is how it was generated—and we suggest that it is likely to be a better theory to the degree that it has been inductively developed from social research....Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research. Generating a theory involves a process of research. (Cited in Patton, pp. 66-67)

According to Patton, the theory-method linkage means how you study the world determines what you learn about the world: "Grounded theory depends on methods that take the researcher into the real world so that the results and findings are 'grounded' in the empirical world" (1990, p. 67). A purpose of the current research was to discover what feminist social work is from a "real-world," lived-experience perspective.

**Phenomenological Approach**

Phenomenology can be defined as the study of how people describe things and experience them through their
senses. Phenomenological inquiry focuses on the question: "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (Patton, 1990, p. 69). Edmund Husserl developed the concept of phenomenology in the course of inquiring into the philosophical questions: "What is real? What actually exists in the world? How is it possible to know what exists?" (J. H. Turner, 1986, p. 325). Husserl reasoned that we can only know about the world through experience, and the existence of a world beyond ourselves is mediated through the senses and can only be known through mental consciousness. While all of what we know of the world comes through our sensory experiences of phenomena, these experiences must be described, explained, and interpreted in order to be understood. Patton further clarifies this approach:

...descriptions of experience and interpretations are so intertwined that they often become one. Interpretation is essential to an understanding of experience and the experience includes the interpretation. Thus phenomenologists focus on how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world and, in so doing, develop a world view. There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means. The subjective experience incorporates the objective thing and a person's reality. (1990, p. 69)

The concept of lifeworld, as developed by Husserl, refers to the world that humans sense to exist, which is composed of the objects, peoples, places, ideas, and other
things that people see and perceive as setting the parameters for their existence, activities, and pursuits. This lifeworld is taken for granted, and it is further assumed that human activity is experienced collectively—that we all experience a common world (J. H. Turner, 1986, p. 325). These concepts are relevant to the current research. While there were efforts to confirm existing concepts and/or to generate new themes representing feminist social work practice, in actuality there were many different feminist practices based upon each participant's perceptions and attributions of meaning to the concepts.

Point of View

Another parallel between qualitative and feminist research is the recognition that the involvement, perceptions, feelings, and values of the researcher are an integral part of the research process and create part of the context for other participants (Cummerton, 1986, p. 87). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) believe that all social science research is reflexive in nature—we are participant observers, becoming involved with the world under study and reflecting on the products of that participation. They suggest that rather than attempting to eliminate the effects of the researcher, we should set
about understanding them (pp. 16-17).

"Biased curiosity" drives my interest in this study (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987). While I did not have preconceived ideas about what feminist social work practice must be, I expected that many of the emergent themes would support the frameworks discussed in the literature review. Also, it was intriguing to consider that the findings might add to our currently limited understanding of feminist social work practice.

Qualitative Research Questions

A number of open-ended questions provided the general protocol for the interview. After obtaining basic demographic data, and discussing the focus and format of the interview, participants were asked to discuss the questions presented in Box 1 and Box 2.
Research Interview Guide

1. How do you define feminism?

2. Do you think that feminism and social work have anything in common?
   a. If NO:
      (1) In what ways do you think they differ?
      (2) How might you view a situation differently from a "good" social work practitioner?
   b. If YES:
      (1) What do they have in common?
      (2) How do you think feminist practice differs from "good" social work practice?

3. There are a number of ideological themes in feminism, such as ___. What are the values and beliefs which are most important to you as a feminist practitioner?

4. What is the importance of your values and beliefs in your practice?

Box 1: Research Interview Guide
Research Interview Guide Continued

5. Do you attempt to make your values and beliefs an explicit part of your approach to practice? Can you give case examples?

6. How do your feminist ideological and theoretical perspectives affect the way you approach the following practice areas.....
   a. How you identify the problem in practice. Case examples?
   b. How you assess clients. Case examples?
   c. Your thinking about treatment strategies. Case examples?
   d. Your selection of treatment goals. Case examples?

7. What barriers or obstacles have you encountered in your efforts to implement a feminist perspective in practice? Case examples?

8. Looking back on what you have told me about how your feminism influences your practice, would you talk about the meaning of your experience of practicing from a feminist perspective?

Box 2: Research Interview Guide Continued
Sampling

The units of analysis in this study were individual social work practitioners who identified themselves as approaching practice from a feminist perspective. Because the goal of the study was to illuminate the nature of feminist practice rather than to obtain generalizable results, purposeful sampling was used. This approach was the most appropriate because it lent itself to selecting "information-rich" cases for in-depth study (Patton, 1990).

In order to find information-rich key informants, a two-step, mixed sampling approach was employed. The first method used was the snowball approach. Many professionals in the social work community were asked to identify women whom they believed to be feminists. Decisions about who was to be contacted in this approach were based on at least one of the criteria below and included individuals who were:

1. Agency liaisons or field instructors for undergraduate and graduate level social work students;

2. Employees of agencies focusing on provision of services to women;

3. Participants in continuing education courses focusing on subjects related to women;

4. Active with NASW or CSWE committees relating to women's issues;
(5) Active with formal or informal feminist networks in the area;

(6) Involved in teaching courses relating to women's studies or women's issues;

(7) Identified as having a practice which included a focus on women's issues;

(8) Students or volunteers associated with social service providers.

As a few names began to be repeatedly identified by various sources, those individuals were listed as potential participants in the study.

The second step of the sampling technique utilized a screening tool constructed from the frameworks developed by Nes and Iadicola. This instrument was used to question the pool of potential respondents regarding their identification with one of the three theoretical perspectives. Participants were classified according to their responses to the screening tool so that the sample included representatives of each category of feminism.

While it was recognized that there was no "perfect" design for the study, it was necessary to justify why certain approaches were selected and to identify the potential limitations of these approaches. The snowball sampling approach was expected to generate a list of participants who would be knowledgeable about feminist social work practice and, therefore, good subjects for the interview. A possible limitation was that initial
informants might have identified people who were homogeneous in outlook, thereby omitting potential participants with more divergent perspectives. It was anticipated that this obstacle could be overcome by asking informants if they knew practitioners who represented more radical or non-mainstream approaches. This approach helped avoid the danger of sampling too narrowly, and provided the opportunity to obtain contrasting and comparative information (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

The opportunistic approach offered the possibility of taking advantage of unexpected opportunities which arose after the fieldwork began. The potential liability in this approach was that the research could lose focus. This risk was reduced by adhering to a basic interview schedule. Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest that the use of a guide, rather than a fixed schedule, gives the researcher latitude to "use a personally congenial way of asking and sequencing the questions and to segment them appropriately for different respondents" (p. 46).

From a pool of at least twelve potential candidates identified during the two-step sampling approach, at least six feminist practitioners were to be interviewed. The sample was designed to fill the framework of liberal, radical, and socialist feminist perspectives by including two subjects who fit each of the three categories.
Participants were selected because they represented "information-rich" cases by virtue of their experience and knowledge on the subject, and because they represented archetypal liberal, socialist, and radical feminist positions.

While the sample was not restricted to individuals currently in practice, efforts were made to select respondents with clinical experience. Subjects also had to meet either of the following criteria in order to be included in the study:

(1) Have a BSW and at least three years of practice experience, or;

(2) Have a MSW and at least two years of practice experience.

Because this was an exploratory study which endeavored to inductively define feminist social work practice, it was anticipated that a lot of information would be generated from a small sample. The opportunistic sampling approach allowed participants to be added at any point in the study if it were decided this would add to the richness of the investigation.
Frame work for Sample Selection

Nes and Iadicola developed a framework comparing liberal, radical, and socialist feminist perspectives on a number of issues including views toward: (1) human nature; (2) nature of the social order; (3) nature of inequality; (4) factors perpetuating sex inequality; (5) view of a good society; and, (6) prescription for sex-role changes. The framework was used to construct a screening tool which was used to identify women fitting within three categories of feminism.

Screening Tool

This tool (Box 3) was used to place participants in one of three theoretical orientations. Each category of feminism contained statements identifying feminists' views on the nature of inequality.

Pretest

A pretest was conducted with two women who met the criteria established for participants in the study. The screening tool and research interview guide were used in this pretest. Since there were no apparent difficulties with either instrument in these interviews, participants in the pretest were included in the final sample.
Screening Tool

Liberal Feminist:

Men and women have the same potentials for achievement, however, individual differences in human potential and motivation, as well as certain societal conditions, result in inequality. Equality between men and women can be achieved through legal reforms such as equal pay for equal work, and equal employment opportunities.

Radical Feminist:

The root of oppression is patriarchy - the male need to dominate and control. Patriarchy is a universal feature of all social systems as illustrated by the fact that virtually every avenue of power is controlled by males. The ability of men to sexually dominate women is the fundamental concept of power. Once patriarchy and the male need to dominate is eliminated, all other forms of oppression lose their foundation. Women must put their energies into a movement to combat their oppressors.

Socialist Feminist:

Inequality is rooted in the separate but interlocking spheres of class oppression and sex oppression. Sexual inequality is perpetuated by the fact that the modes of production and reproduction form the foundation of society. Men and women should work to eliminate all forms of oppression. Relationships should reflect mutual respect and should not contain elements of domination.

Box 3: Screening Tool for Sample Selection
Data Collection

The purpose of a qualitative interview is to allow a researcher to enter into the other person's perspective. There is a presumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (Patton, 1990, p. 278). The task for the interviewer is "to make it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into his or her world" (Patton, p. 279).

Because this was an exploratory study, it was important to assure coverage of basic topic areas, and to maintain flexibility to pursue other themes which might emerge during the interview. In order to accomplish this, a general interview guide approach was used. The interview guide was a prepared list of questions to be covered in the interviews. Using a guide throughout the data collection process helped to establish a comprehensive and systematic approach across numerous interviews. The guide set parameters for the inquiry which kept the interview focused, while also allowing me to pursue points of interest which came up during the interview (Patton, 1990, pp. 282-283).
Data Analysis

Several approaches to data collection were undertaken in this study. First, each interview was tapeed and full verbatim transcripts were made of each interview (Patton, 1990). Second, notes were made directly on the research interview guide during the interview process. The guide was designed so major themes and other important data could be noted during the interview. Third, field notes were made both during and after the interview to record important observations (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Once these materials were available, the analytic process included a careful reading of all documents to obtain a sense of the themes, patterns, and areas of convergence and divergence with the theoretical assumptions. After this broad overview was completed, each individual interview and accompanying notes were analyzed and notes were made on emerging concepts, recurring themes and relationships among these constructs. Because the focus was on identifying the nature and meaning of feminist social work practice, the data analysis included both individual case analysis and cross-case analysis using content analysis and grounded theory procedures (Budd, Thorp & Donohew, 1967; Krippendorff, 1980; Patton, 1990; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Weber, 1989).
After this process was completed for each interview, individual summary sheets were reviewed and compared to identify concepts which were common to all interviews. Then, emergent concepts were analyzed to determine the nature of existing relationships, how concepts confirmed or refuted constructs in the conceptual framework, and areas in need of further research.

**Phenomenological Analysis**

According to Patton (1990) phenomenological analysis involves several different steps. The first step, *Epoché*, is defined as the phase when the researcher "looks inside to become aware of personal bias and to eliminate personal involvement with the subject material" (Patton, p. 407). Making judgments about what is "real" must be suspended until sufficient evidence is gathered. This is an ongoing analytical process which "epitomizes the data-based, evidential, and empirical (versus empiricist) research orientation of phenomenology" (Patton, p. 408).

The second step is phenomenological reduction, during which the phenomenon under study is taken apart and dissected (Patton, 1990). As a result of this process, the data are organized into meaningful clusters for the purpose of identifying invariant clusters (Patton, p. 408). Following this is structural synthesis, which
attempts to determine the deeper meanings—the essence—of the phenomenon under study (Patton, p. 409).

**Ethical Issues**

A number of ethical issues were considered in designing and implementing this study, including:

*Promises and Reciprocity:*  
Participants were told the purpose and rationale of the study. There would be no benefit to them as a result of their participation, other than being given the opportunity to add their voice to the literature on feminist social work. Each woman was offered a copy of the final report.

*Risk Assessment:*  
It was not anticipated that the women would be at risk by participating in the interviews. Consent to interview was obtained directly from each woman and did not require agency auspices. Feedback was provided only to the participants.

*Confidentiality:*  
The women were not identified by name nor were their employing agencies identified in the final report. All of the women were informed that direct quotes and descriptive information about them would be used in the study. Each woman was given a copy of the final draft of the study for review and comment, so that it could be revised if any one felt her confidentiality had been compromised.

*Informed Consent:*  
Each woman signed a statement detailing the purpose of this study, the confidentiality provision, and the issue of data access and ownership. When the women agreed to be interviewed, permission to tape was requested. The informed consent statement included a provision to tape.

*Data Access and Ownership:*  
The taped interviews and transcripts are the property of the researcher. Use of all materials gathered in this study will be controlled by the researcher. The identities of the women who
participated in the study will remain confidential.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth. (Audre Lorde, 1984)

The Women

From the pool of potential participants identified in the sampling approach, a total of seventeen women of varying backgrounds and practice experiences were contacted about participating in the study. The disposition of each of these potential participants is presented in Box 4.

Of the total number, eight women were interviewed. The remaining nine women who were contacted did not participate for varying reasons. For instance, one woman who expressed an interest in being interviewed was not asked to participate even though she was one of the most
Disposition of Potential Participants

*Total Number of Feminist Social Workers Identified = 17*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women Interviewed for Research Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Total Included in Data Analysis = 7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Omitted from Data Analysis = 1)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted, Did Not Respond to Request</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted, Decided Not to Participate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrew After Initial Decision to Participate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 4: Disposition of Potential Participants
frequently-named feminists. This decision was made because she was in the midst of writing a book chapter on feminist practice and had engaged in an in-depth conversation with me on the subject, thereby possibly contaminating her responses. There were four women who did not respond to telephone messages explaining the general purpose of the study and requesting a contact if they were interested in participating. Two women who were interested in being interviewed did not feel they could find time to participate in the schedule set for completion of the interviews. Two of the women who initially agreed to be interviewed later withdrew, stating that preparing for the interview was more of a commitment than they were able to manage. Both women suggested others who might be willing candidates for the study.

The eight women who agreed to be interviewed were scheduled to be seen over an eight week period. Once they had agreed to be interviewed, a copy of the research interview guide and the screening tool was sent to them. They were given these instruments at least two weeks prior to the interview so they could give some thought to their positions on the issues. Each of the interviews was held at a time and place determined by the participants. Six of the interviews were held in the women's offices and two of the women were interviewed in their homes.
It is interesting to note that when these women were first contacted about being in the study and were informed they had been identified in the community as feminist social workers, most of them expressed surprise at being so identified. While all of the women who were interviewed agreed they were feminists and expressed an enthusiastic interest in participating, many of them initially offered the information that they had not been "active in the women's movement." This appeared to raise the issue of whether or not they would be considered "good enough" feminists. When this occurred, I explained the purpose of the study was to look at variations in feminist perspectives in practice to see what emerged. Therefore, if they believed they were feminists who integrated their feminism into their practice, that would be a sufficient predicate for conducting an interview.

While each of the women had her own views and definitions of feminist practice, as we shall see, all but one seemed to be unequivocal in believing they brought their feminist perspectives into their practices. The one exception to this was Jane. While she called herself a feminist, she also struggled with the question of whether or not she integrated her feminism into her practice. When this issue was raised in the initial telephone contact, both of us agreed to proceed with an interview to
further explore her feminism and its relationship to her practice. During the interview it became clear that she was still struggling with the issue of whether or not she was, in fact, a feminist. It was even clearer that little, if any, of her approach to practice embodied feminist perspectives. At the very beginning of the interview this exchange took place:

Interviewer: I want to ask first of all where you thought you fell on the screening instrument?

Jane: Well, I'm definitely in the liberal feminist, which then of course, led to lots of problems because liberal feminists are not quite so female-oriented as the other two. It's much more of the humanist kind of approach I spoke about in the beginning, so it was very difficult then to answer a lot of the questions.

Interviewer: So, did you limit yourself in that way then? The best thing would be to answer what you believe.

Jane: That's what I did, but then I started to think, 'Am I really a feminist?' That was the hard thing.

It appears that Jane, by her own reckoning, might be more appropriately viewed as having a humanistic approach to practice. She believes feminism is too narrow, too biased in favor of women—not balanced and objective. She said:

And in the second (question), 'Do you think feminism and social work have anything in common?' I said 'no', because I feel feminism is really concerned with being female, with women....I think it would be very wrong for me to try to work out my own, you know, come from a feminist bias in working with a man, I think that would be wrong. I think that social work practice needs to be balanced and objective, and you need to base it on sound theory....so I really try to base my practice on
sound theoretical principles and not on feminist theory at all.

Because Jane made clear statements characterizing feminism as being unrelated to her approach to practice, a decision was made to exclude her from the final data analysis procedure. Admittedly, it would have been interesting to compare and contrast her views with those of the other women, but it was felt this should be reserved for another study.

The results of the interviews with the remaining seven women provide the data for the qualitative analysis procedures in this study. Before proceeding with the analysis, however, a synopsis of the background of each woman is provided.

Lucy

Lucy identifies herself as a socialist feminist. This likely has to do with the fact that she comes from a "blue-collar background--one that was labeled poverty." She currently works in the area of domestic violence where she provides counseling to individuals and families. She has been in the field of social work either as a professional or volunteer since 1964, and has had experience working in a child welfare agency, an
association for children with learning disabilities, and in women's shelters. She is approaching fifty, is married and has a blended family which includes four children. Lucy has a Master's degree in Social Work and has extended her clinical skills by taking courses at a well-known training institute. Her interest in women's issues and feminism began to develop in the mid- to late-sixties after she left her position as a child welfare worker and volunteered to run a parenting group for mothers who were receiving services from the same agency. As she put it:

I was armed with my textbooks and went to work for child welfare, my focus was on doing something with children. In working with children I found that I really had to work with parents. And in working with parents, it was always the women who showed up. I got in touch with women's issues real quickly.

I worked from '64 to '68 when I had my first child, but I didn't just go home and have a child, although I didn't choose to work then either. I chose to do volunteer projects. So I went back to children services and said it was a lot easier telling people how to parent than it is doing it, and that I would like to do an experimental group, sitting down and talking with women about our common experiences as mother...talking with them instead of at them.

Lucy's interest in feminism and working with women's issues has a clear parallel in her own life's journey. As she was working to empower other women, she was struggling to empower herself:

...at the same time I was getting really restless about who I was and what was going on in the world, and was really pushing to do something to get back in school, becoming more assertive at home, to getting
more empowered in that process, and it made my ex-husband crazy. The more I pushed for more freedom, the crazier he got and we ended up in counseling and ended up getting divorced. At that time I met a woman who said she knew just the perfect job for me, and that was my first job with the first shelter program....So it seemed my active role in the movement, the battered women's movement and women's movement, (came) at that moment as I became single and took that position.

Her initial interest in working with battered women did not come from a clear identification of the parallels between herself and those women. It was more of an evolutionary process of becoming clearer about her own issues, which she could then use in her work with others. As she explained:

(I was) understanding more and more, and then really looking at where I was and what I wanted and what I didn't have and why it was so hard for me to get what I wanted...almost needing that movement to empower me. And so it went from having a husband to having a movement that gave me identity....That movement provided that for me, without a master's degree, without any real official training to do that, it was like being part of a grass roots movement where I really learned about empowerment.

Lucy was very enthusiastic about participating in the study and viewed the interview as "a chance for me to think through these issues with you." At the end of the interview, Lucy said she had shared the research questions with faculty at the training institute she attends and had recommended the questions be used to generate discussion there. Additionally, she planned to ask the director of
her agency if the questions could be used to generate discussion among the staff there.

**Tobi**

Tobi also identifies herself as a socialist feminist. She is particularly cognizant of class issues, as evidenced by the fact that at the end of the interview she stated the current study had a class bias because only those privileged enough to have access to higher education were being included. I acknowledged the validity of her observation and told her I would be sure to document her concern and not represent the research results as being generalizable beyond this sample.

Tobi is in her mid-thirties, has one child, and openly identifies herself as a lesbian. She has a palpable intensity and energy to her which is reflected both in her affect as well as the content of her responses. She initially expressed some reservation about "knowing enough" about feminism to take part in the study because she has not studied the literature. (This need to be intensely involved in the discovery of knowledge was a theme which emerged several times during her interview). While she did agree to be interviewed, she also remained somewhat hesitant, expressing the thought that perhaps
someone "better" could be found. Tobi was told she should decide whether or not she wanted to participate as I did not expect her to be a part of the study if she really did not want to be.

After we scheduled our interview date, she asked if I would provide cites for articles or books which she could read in advance. She was given copies of Not for Women Only and Feminist Visions for Social Work Practice.

During the interview it was clear that she had prepared ahead of time because she had made notes on the research interview guide, and she also made references to the content of one of the books she had been given.

In terms of educational background, Tobi has a Master's degree in Social Work, and professional training and experience as an elementary and special education teacher. Additionally, she has been employed as a tutor in a residential treatment program, group home child-care worker and supervisor, outpatient therapist, child welfare intake worker/child sexual abuse specialist, shelter manager, and program administrator. Her move into the field of domestic violence was an epiphany which foreshadowed her identification as a feminist. As she described it:

I started learning about domestic violence. I knew about the sex abuse part of domestic violence, but I didn't have an understanding about anything more than sexual abuse. So I really threw myself into that,
and I started reading and learning and talking to people and really trying to figure out what was going on—what was going on?—that these women were getting abused? And so, in trying to figure that out, it sort of clicked to me where I really started having a feminist perspective about things. Even though I knew systems were screwing these children, I never really saw the truth of it. I didn't really get it. I was too much in it and not removed enough to see the bigger picture of why things happen to women and children. So, through my work here, only in the past couple of years I would say, did I see the truth.

Tobi's reference to "seeing the truth" has to do with her recognition that the experience of dealing with over 400 sexual abuse investigations caused her to protect herself from the harsh realities of the victims' lives by emotional distancing. She described the affect it had on her:

It was a lot of kids to have seen. It was too emotional for me. I couldn't take it anymore. And that was with breaks. I would have such anxiety attacks about going back because I was so tough. To walk in that door in the morning, I would have such a shell on because it was so sad. I conditioned myself so much not to be affected by the sexual abuse stuff that I couldn't even stand the physical abuse stuff.

In her efforts to escape the pain of her work, she admittedly used drugs and alcohol, which had the affect of making her mind "unclear." However, over the past few years she has moved beyond this onto a path of planned personal growth which she described in this way:

...My brain wasn't really clear, but I haven't used drugs or drank in many, many years. So, (it is) since I've really been cleaning up my body and my mind and really trying to grow and stuff that my
feminism has developed. Before that I was too consumed, too selfish probably or however you act when you only want to escape pain, or not want to look at reality or not want to look at your life. Since then I've really matured and grown...and I try to make clear decisions and...do the right thing. It seemed to all happen at the same time that I got very spiritual and, well, I feel like I'm more spiritual than I've ever been, but just like starting to become spiritual. I always said I was a feminist, and with that attitude, talk about it and act about it more. And it seems to have all happened at the same time.

Tobi was only one of several women who talked about striving for personal growth and spirituality. The women in this study seem to be quite aware of themselves, and deliberate in their efforts to expand their "growing edges." This growth process seems inextricably intertwined with their feminism, as Tobi stated above, and it also appears to facilitate their seeing the "bigger picture."

An example of this is shown in the following exchange:

Interviewer: So, what was the 'truth' that you saw that turned on the lights for you about feminism?

Tobi: Oh, that men run this world. That white men in power with money run this world. And whatever they think, and whatever laws they want to make, and however they want to keep people oppressed, that's what happens in this world. I can't give you an analysis of it. There's war, and there always has to be poor people, and there always has to be working class people, and there always has to be struggling people to keep people in power, and there always has to be oppression. Now, I don't think that there always has to be oppression, but I think the people in power think the only way that this system works is if there is oppression and they can stay on top...
Tobi becomes impassioned when discussing the issue of oppression and she cited the Hill-Thomas hearings as "an example of oppression like I've never seen--racist oppression. I will never get over it. I was obsessed with it." Following a discussion concerning what to do about oppression she said, "I don't accept it. I do things about it." She believes a revolution needs to take place, but does not believe it will happen in her lifetime. Short of that, an ability to "work the system" helps her get what she thinks women and other oppressed people need. Because of her spirited personality, people are accustomed to seeing her get things done by using her skills of "working the system." She explained how she models this for her staff and the shelter residents:

Systems are so big...and they have no idea how to get into there. It took me years to figure out how to do it, but I know how to do it. So, I teach everybody how to do it. I didn't change any systems, but at least I learned how to work the system. Most people want to fight it, and they just get angry about it, but they don't learn to use what they have at their fingertips. You don't let people abuse you. If people in systems want to abuse you, you don't take it, because you don't have to take it. And that's what I try to model for people. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

Dorothy

Dorothy views herself as a radical feminist. Now in her mid-fifties, she has been in private practice for the
past three years. Over the past twenty years she has been employed as a mental health counselor, nursing home social worker, advocate and counselor for victims of violence, and group worker with men who batter. She obtained her Master's degree in Social Work in 1984. Most of her clients are women and many of her clients are lesbian or gay. Dorothy has identified herself as a feminist for more than twenty years, and this identification began to crystallize around the time Betty Friedan's book came out. When she read the book her response was, "It made me think I wasn't crazy. It kind of affirmed what I was thinking." She explained that she had been dissatisfied with her life and was "having difficulty with being female." She described herself as being part of "the generation Friedan was talking about, that one that grew up to conform to what it was to be a good woman in life, without seeking anything outside of that." She knew she "did not want to stay home and be a housewife" all her life, but she did not want to go out and "just take any job"--she wanted "something that was meaningful." So, she went to college to obtain her undergraduate degree at a time when there were not many "older" women doing so. She believes her moving away from the stereotypical female role was supported by the women's movement.

The dissatisfaction, the "feeling kind of different,"
was a presage to her connecting with the women's movement. She was not an active participant, rather, she experienced the message of the movement in an "individual" way. She said:

I wasn't connected to a broader consciousness raising type of situation. Before the feminist movement became more in the forefront, there had been other movements like the Civil Rights movement for blacks and the Vietnam War. I was very aware of (the) social and political implications of all that, and was sympathetic to all of it, and might have supported it in some indirect way, but nothing made sense to what needed to be changed until the women's movement really became vocal. I could say that's where I could feel I might have some energy to--not that I joined a lot of things--but that gave me energy and I could identify with the issues. So I guess that consciousness was there for me to look at the system, and see how that system has the effect on the individual.

This paying attention to the effect of systems on individuals permeates Dorothy's approach to practice. She chooses to work outside of hierarchical systems and in her own private practice because she recognizes how systems can perpetuate the patriarchal relationships of the larger society. Her own experience of working in the mental health system sharpened her awareness of the issues at both a professional and personal level:

Since I do mostly individual work and don't do work with systems, I see how the system has affected the individuals that I've worked with. Most of the people coming into the office in the mental health system are women. I feel a lot of them are trying to make it in a system that didn't make sense for them and didn't have any other options to look at. Talk about the patriarchal way it's set up with no choice,
no options! Having some dominant man in their life, not being able to cope with it, not seeing the options, and not believing they could do anything about it. I think it played on their emotional welfare. (I was) working in the system, being angry at the 'good old boy system', feeling discounted by not having anything to put in at times--not being valued. I think it's an interplay between my own experience and seeing what's going on in other people's (lives).

Joan

Joan identified herself as a radical feminist, however, she expressed concern with the part of the screening tool which stated "women must put their energies into a movement to combat their oppressors." She wanted to clarify that she thought the logical extension of that might be, "...what would end up happening if we really did that would be we would become like the men, we would become the aggressors and we would want to dominate, and the end of that felt too strong." She does not want it to go that far.

Joan is in her mid-thirties and is married to a Jewish man which exposed her, she said, to "the first culture I've come across where women seem to have some real power and are revered and respected--more than I see in any other." She contrasted her appreciation for the respect she sees for women in the Jewish culture to the male domination in her own traditional Italian family:
"(I'm) Italian and that's real strong the other way. The man is dominant. (In) all the pictures from my grandparents, the man is standing with his hand on the woman's shoulder. So, it's just like to keep her in her place--sitting."

Like each of the other participants, Joan has her Master's degree in Social Work. While she began her professional career working in a mental health center, she currently works in an agency which provides counseling and educational services to adolescents and their families. She also has a private practice where she specializes in working with women and treating survivors of sexual abuse.

Joan is the "newest" feminist in the group in that she began to identify herself as a feminist only within the past two years. Regarding this she said:

I think for the past year and a half I've really felt it more strongly. I think it has to do with my (comfort), with my own femininity, and my own increased awareness of the need for women to be helped to believe in themselves, and to develop themselves to the fullest as human beings. The need is so great, and they are so unhappy because they are unfulfilled. I've felt like I'm one of the little soldiers out there--working and helping women to feel their equality and their power--not on an aggressive level where I'm going to go out and protest and march and challenge this law and that, but on a level where I work with...their values and the belief system, and work with it that way.

Joan's struggle to get to her current level of comfort with her feminist identification is reflected in the
following exchange in which we discussed how feminism seems to be clearly integrated into some women's identity while, for others, it seems to be something they have not thought through and therefore cannot clearly articulate, even though they identify themselves as feminists:

Interviewer: I've had a couple of women (who) are feminists, and I've asked them to be in the study, and they decided they couldn't be because they thought it was too much for them to go through the process of thinking about this right now, with everything else that is going on in their life, which I can appreciate. But I don't know how to account for that other than to think for some people it's just there and very strong and a part of what they do, but for others they feel that it is, but maybe it's not at a conscious level, so to go through that process of thinking about it might be too much.

Joan: Yeah, I'm trying to think what place a person would be at that they would feel more comfortable with it. I know for me, at a point in my life I was afraid of the women's movement and the amount of power I felt the women's movement was saying we should have—that seemed real scary to me. Like we didn't have the right, and almost, 'My God! If I had all that power they are talking about, what would I do with it? What would I become?' I felt such a lack of power, I felt it would be like (being) in an alien body if I had it all—like I'd lose myself. But, for me what's helping is I'm developing my power, and as I get more, I find I like it and it's not scary and, in fact, it helps me feel safer and more in charge and less vulnerable. So, I'm enjoying it, which I didn't think I would.

With Joan, as with several of the other women, the ability to integrate her feminist perspectives in practice seems to parallel her own journey of growth and identity development, as reflected in the following exchange:

Joan: ...I think it's working with women and seeing
their sense of inadequacy and where they get their fulfillment and how unsatisfied they are with their lives. It continues to show me the need for someone to help them discover they aren't the inadequate beings they think they are. That they have enough inside of them, they just have to water the seeds and let them grow.

Interviewer: Every seed needs a nurturing environment at some level. But it sounds like it is a parallel process where you are coming into your own identity and as you are doing that you are bringing that into your practice.

Joan: Yeah, it's funny because as I worked on my ego, if you can call it (that), I approached it as an asexual thing. You are trying to feel better not because you are a woman or a man, you just want to feel better. But I am also at the point where I want to feel comfortable with the feminine side. I've been afraid of that too, because if being feminine meant being powerless, I didn't want to be feminine. But I'm seeing there can be power in femininity too, and so I'm embracing that.

Dee

In the search for participants for the study, Dee's name came up more frequently than any other. However, in our initial conversation she expressed surprise that she was identified as a feminist. During the interview she further discussed her reaction to being the most frequently-identified feminist social worker:

That puzzles me because I don't market myself as a feminist therapist--I don't say 'feminist therapist'. My particular angle is gay and lesbian. We are a gay and lesbian practice. Those are the individuals we particularly market to. Interesting. I guess I've been doing it a while--that's probably one reason why. I've been in private practice.
Dee has a Master's degree in Social Work and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology. Additionally, she has six years of advanced training from a well-known training institute, where she has also conducted numerous training workshops. Dee identifies herself as a liberal feminist, laughingly stating she felt this was the most appropriate choice since she has a "capitalistic" practice. Because Dee made several references to class issues when expressing her views, I expressed surprise that she identified herself as a liberal rather than a socialist feminist. To this she replied:

I felt that making a selection was almost arbitrary. In the past year or so, I've been doing more paying attention to privilege and class with my clients, with myself, in my world, groups I'm involved in. What is interesting for me is that I never would have labeled that socialist--as an adjective to describe that way of thinking. To me that is feminism.

Her growing awareness of the issues of privilege and empowerment is reflected in her feminist analysis and view of the world, as she described below:

I try to bring a feminist analysis to a lot of what I do. It's a way of looking at the world, it's a way of examining my world as well. To look at decisions I make. You know, am I being an oppressor here with this decision? To be willing to look at that, and not just the oppressors are 'out there', but I can be an oppressor as well. And it does apply to men and women both. I think there are ways men have been socialized that are very oppressive to men as well. So, it's not like I used to think. I used to think more in terms of patriarchy and all that. I see it a bit more in terms of socialization now. I could have been born a man as well as a woman.
Although she has been a feminist for many years, Dee still struggles to clarify her values in life and work, as she indicated when speaking of a recent decision she had to make:

To me, part of being a feminist, and probably part of my learning style... (is) I feel I struggle a lot and I am conscious of that struggle. This is a small diversion but it expresses some of my own struggle as a feminist, as a lesbian-affirmative person. I just had someone apply to have me supervise an internship—and I ran into my own biases. I haven't struggled with something so much for quite a while, and I'm actively struggling. I'm eliciting support from my feminist friends because I recognize I have a prejudice and a bias here. And I think for me, part of being a feminist is that I'm willing to own that. To own my shortcomings when I disappoint myself. It's a certain honesty.

Like many of the other women, Dee embraced feminism as part of her personal growth process. She recounted her initial connection with feminism and how her identity as a lesbian-affirmative therapist is intertwined with her feminism:

I think there was a time when I was more angry, where I had that early passion of discovering something, almost like a new-found religion. That's really what discovering feminism was for me—like finding a new family, a new set of people. I had something... that I very much connected with passionately.

I know I'm very involved as a lesbian-affirmative therapist, and that to me is part of my feminism coming out. You know, my beliefs about professional heterosexism. It's hard for me sometimes to separate my values as a lesbian-affirmative therapist from that of a feminist. I think they are pretty
interwoven.

Georgia

Georgia identifies herself as a liberal feminist. She received her Master's degree in Social Work in 1972. She has worked as a foster care home-finder and case manager for foster children in a child welfare agency, and as a therapist on an in-patient adult psychiatric ward. It was in the psychiatric hospital setting where the most important thing she felt she learned was, "...the difference between them and us was a very thin line." She currently has her own private practice and states she was "born a family therapist." She also teaches, and gives workshops and seminars on family treatment. Georgia is in her mid-forties, is married and the mother of two adolescent children. She was startled to learn she had been identified as a prominent feminist social worker. Georgia explained why she reacted this way:

...I think because I didn't participate in a lot of the activities that defined what the movement was about, I never really defined myself that way. But later began to see more and more what it was as I was doing it rather than talking about it. So, yeah, I guess I am surprised because a lot of times, and I guess this is unfortunate in terms of stereotypes, a lot of times when people talk about feminists, what you think about and what you visualize is the radical feminists. I don't see myself that way at all. I see myself much more as egalitarian and recognizing the inequities—but there's inequities for everybody. So, I guess I wouldn't have defined myself that way,
and it really startles me when people say that.

Even though she was surprised to be viewed by others as a feminist social worker, she does see herself as practicing from a feminist perspective. She stated she does not like to be labeled and added that she views herself as an "advocate--and that includes everybody."

Given her reluctance to use labels, it is not surprising that Georgia finds it hard to separate her social work identity from her feminist identity, as she described below:

I...don't separate out my social work heritage. I feel that it's my profession of origin so it's like part of my roots and I don't define it separately from who I am and what I do. So to think about it as social work and feminism when those aren't the labels I put on myself....It's like somebody saying 'Well, who are you? Describe yourself.' This is me!

Barb

Barb defines herself as a socialist feminist. She received her Master's degree in Social Work in 1970. She was trained primarily as a community organizer, although she also took casework courses because she found herself gravitating to individual work. Like several of the women, Barb completed a clinical training program at a well-known training institute. She maintains her professional growth and development by attending
workshops, using consultants, participating in study groups, and continuing with her own therapy. She has worked as an administrator, supervisor, planner, and out-patient counselor in a human services agency. Currently, she has her own private practice and also does some agency consultation on a part-time basis. Even though she defines herself as a feminist and advertises her services in a feminist newsletter, she does not label her practice as a feminist practice. When questioned about this she responded:

...it never occurred to me, and I think part of the thing that's a little different for me is I noticed that my clients (who) were in their early forties, were at the time when feminism was really big in their colleges. What I was most concerned about was more freedom of speech. Because I graduated from college in '66 before the feminist movement, I didn't read the literature.

What I noticed a lot was poverty, because I worked for the welfare department. And racism, because I worked in a black community. And feminism really came along after my time, so that my first awareness was about racism and poverty, working in the mid-sixties....And so I don't feel I identify with that group of people growing up at that particular time, and my experience has been a little different. I suppose my years of activism were more around welfare rights, more around racism, more around poverty. I guess I think first about poverty before I would about feminism, which is really the socialist part of me.

Although Barb basically agreed with the definition of socialist feminist used in the screening tool, she added that she sees herself as a socialist and a feminist. More
specifically, she believes in the "distribution of wealth." She is not sure that classism and sexism are "so tightly intertwined" as she interpreted them to be in the screening tool, but she does think the issues of sexism and distribution of wealth are important elements in this perspective.

In her practice Barb pays particular attention to the issues of poverty, race, class, and the overburdening of women in society. She credits her level of understanding and sensitivity to oppression to her graduate education where she studied community organization:

I don't know whether it's because I'm a social worker, or whether that's because I'm a child of the sixties, whatever that means, but certainly the social work education I had--being in community organization--probably makes me a little different than maybe other people because we were very much in tune to those influences. That's why I chose community organization--because I became very aware of those influences, and really did want to do grass roots organizing before I got into figuring that my best talents were more in individual work.

**Summary**

The seven women who participated in this study come from diverse backgrounds and have differing approaches to practice. There are, however, some commonalities among them. For example, each seems particularly sensitive to the affects of sex-role socialization on women in this society. Most of them also express awareness of and concern for the effects of socialization and sex-role
expectations on men, although this may occur at a different level and may, as some said, require a different analysis. There appears to be an inclusive appreciation of issues of oppression, as well as consideration of the different ways in which women and men experience these oppressions, without an accompanying bias toward either gender. Most of the women are mindful of and concerned with wider cultural influences beyond the effects of gender oppression. Some are especially concerned with issues of poverty, privilege and class. Several are further concerned with issues of race and sexual orientation. None solely considers women in the context of gender oppression.

Of particular interest is the fact that each woman spoke of her own personal development and identification with feminism as a process that is intertwined with or paralleling what she does in practice. While the women have varying histories and lengths of identification as feminists, each referenced her own personal journey and its influence on her approach to practice.

Two of the women have been feminists for over twenty years, while the "newest" feminist has been bringing her feminist perspectives into practice for the past year or two. Each came to feminism in a different way, but, for most of them, the embracing of feminism came at a time in
their lives when they were searching for identity or meaning.

Many of the women spoke of their continuing struggle to elucidate and integrate their feminist values in practice. They are on journeys of voluntary personal growth in which they are seeking new levels of personal and professional awareness and understanding. The feminist identification discussed by each woman appears to have been influenced by this journey, and the feminist perspectives held by each woman appear to have influenced the journey as well. Thus, feminist identification appears to be an evolutionary growth process—changing over time as each woman confronts her "growing edge" in her own time and fashion.

**Defining Feminism**

The first assumption in the study was that the definition of feminism is related to the underlying theoretical and ideological perspectives held by an individual. It was anticipated that the combined influences of theoretical perspectives and definition of feminism would determine the nature of an individual's approach to social work practice. In order to provide a basis for further analysis, each woman's definition of feminism is presented.
Lucy states she has a "solid" identification with feminism because she "has the advantage of being older...more mature." Lucy views feminism as "...a certain way of thinking, and I think of that as like a collaborative, cooperative caring that I referred to...as the heart, the tending to the human in things." She clarified that she has had several experiences working for strong, influential women where she felt they worked as a "team...like one was the heart and one was the head...and we played off of each other that way and (had) that kind of energy." She often finds herself assuming the "heart" function, which involves paying attention to the human side of organizational or practice issues. As an example, Lucy spoke of being opposed to her agency's adopting a male system of management, and she specified what her issues were in this regard:

Every time I go to a management meeting, and we're being given the opportunity to do something because we're the management team, I'm always speaking, 'What about the part-time staff? What about trying to make it fair, trying to empower those people who are being brought in?' Like the battered women that are being brought in and working part-time, so they can keep moving through the same way I have...and being willing to move out and do other things so that more people can come in and benefit from that empowerment process...

Tobi defines feminism in this way: "I see patriarchy for what it is. I understand power and control, that's how things keep going around here, in the country and the
world. I have a value in women and women's issues, that's a priority for me. I don't think that's a priority in the world at all. And I see an end to oppression--all oppressions. I see how to end that." Tobi sees revolution as the way to end patriarchy and oppression:

Everybody needs to see the patriarchy for what it is. And when people open up their eyes and see what's really happening to them, they won't want to tolerate it anymore. People have to feel good about themselves, enough to say they're not going to take it anymore. I think that starts with children...and teaching them to make choices, (so) they can feel good about themselves, and (learn) how to communicate. I think when that happens when you're young, you do things differently when you're older, hopefully--if you don't let things get to you.

One of her greatest personal challenges comes in raising her young son in an empowering and balanced way. She shared this conversation she had with her son on the topic of feminism:

...When I was talking about feminism he said, 'What's feminism, or what's a feminist?'...and I think, 'Oh, God!' he's six years old, what in the hell am I going to say!' So I say, 'A feminist is somebody that thinks that there is really no basic difference between men and women—that men and women can do whatever they want.' He says, 'Well, who doesn't know that? Is there something wrong with their brain that they don't know that?' And I said, 'Yeah, there is something wrong with their brain that they don't know that.' Because he doesn't get that....Most people he knows that work are women. He would never think someone would stay home and not work. Of course he would think they would work and be anything they would want to be.

Dorothy does not have just one definition of feminism
because she feels feminism encompasses different things, including:

...to have a woman have her own identity, developed for her own self, and her own potentials, and her own beliefs, that isn't contingent or identity through other people—a man, or children, or society. She has her own autonomy, has her life that way she wants it to be... (to) have the freedom to do that. I mean I don't think she does always, but I think that's what I would say feminism is... the nonstereotypical role, and the commitment to try and be that and to work toward having the opportunities to do that. To try to do something in your system to help that.

Dorothy believes women can be feminists in different ways.

When asked if her definition of feminism required taking action, she responded:

... overtly for those who want to be a little more active and radical, or just trying to live it and be it and try to confront it as you do it. Just kind of doing it and in my own way... looking at the inequalities and trying to address that.

Joan articulated her definition of feminism in this way:

I define it as an ideology about women being very rich, powerful, achieving individuals (and) as a movement, to help women discover their personal abilities, their personal power. That's how I'm viewing it. So, I guess two things. One is the movement to help a person develop their abilities, but also having the belief system that women have many qualities and are very worthwhile and as able as men. We are equals in a number of ways. I'm not convinced we are physically, but I am convinced we are cognitively and emotionally. I just feel it's important for me and for people to nurture that in one another, to help that to flourish.

When I think about feminism, too, I think about kind of a movement, a commitment to helping women to discover their ability, their full selves—a movement to help a woman to discover her full self. Discover
and then feel comfortable with, and then experience and go out and be her full self.

When asked if she defined the "movement" as being at an individual or group level or broader than that, she responded:

I think it's broader than that for others. Other people will lobby for certain laws and fight with discrimination cases. I feel my role is to help women relook at the way they are viewing themselves and to feel more at peace with who they are, and also not so victimized by other people. To help them feel their power and not be victims.

Several of the women belong to feminist study groups, and they enjoy being challenged to examine and defend their values and beliefs. Dee, who is currently going through a doctoral program where many of her professors and peers are feminists, has found that she has been "stretched as a feminist a lot." Her recent thinking about her own class issues and prejudices has been incorporated into her definition of feminism:

For me feminism is a way of...looking at the world where I take into consideration issues and privilege--male privilege. You don't see much female privilege in the world. It's a way of looking at the world, through lenses like where I look at power and power differentials. To me it doesn't just apply to women. I'm in a separatist organization. I'm not a separatist....that's not how I look at things. Men matter. I'm not going to eliminate half the world. Feminism enables me to particularly look at women's lives in terms of privilege and empowerment...to help give clients a bigger base of understanding of what is going on in their lives, rather than a diagnosis.
Georgia admitted she was not sure she had ever defined feminism for herself before this interview. While acknowledging the way she views feminism may be more descriptive than definitive, she said:

(It) is an ability to stand in an 'I position', to be empowered in your own place, and be able to be flexible with that power....To be able to clearly define who I am and what I stand for and what something means to me without being rigid about it. So that there's a flexibility and a mobility that allows for negotiation without being disempowered. That I can relinquish, I can negotiate, I can compromise and not feel that I'm being done unto or being used. That I am doing that with recognition and responsibility and accountability to myself. So that I don't feel like I'm losing something. Or if I do feel like I'm losing something, it's because I'm choosing to give it at that point, not because it's being demanded of me or taken away from me.

Barb's sensitivity to class issues, poverty, and the overburdening of women is reflected in her definition of feminism:

...being aware of what happens to women in our culture, and in other cultures. I try to be aware of when clients bring things to me--and most of the clients I see are women--which I think is true with all people's practice. I try to be aware of where women have been in terms of their lives. I do a lot with history. I try to understand where they've been in their families, what the role of women has been in their families. I'm certainly conscious of poor people because I've worked in poor areas, so I know the combination of both of those things....I think just how it is for women, being in a specific culture, being in our culture. What specifically happens to women that doesn't happen to men. (What) happens to poor women that doesn't happen to middle-class women.
Analysis of Definition of Feminism

In an attempt to conceptualize the data to arrive at a more precise understanding of how feminism is defined, the description given by each woman was broken down into a number of categories and subcategories (Box 5). Two major categories and six subcategories appear to encompass the phenomenon identified as feminism. The first category, Focus of Concern, has two subcategories which include:

A. Unit of Attention: This subcategory refers to the primary unit of focus in the definition of feminism. In this subcategory there is a range from a narrow focus on the individual to a broader consideration of individuals/groups in a system/cultural context.

B. Gender Sensitivity: This subcategory refers to the gender-specific focus included in the definition of feminism. In this subcategory there is a range from an exclusive focus on women to an inclusive focus on all people.

The second category, Point of View, is broader than the first and is comprised of four subcategories:

A. Scope: This subcategory refers to the extent to which the definition of feminism encompasses a broad perspective, i.e., a way of thinking or way of viewing the world. The range here is from seldom to often.

B. Delimitation: This subcategory refers to the extent to which feminism is defined as being restricted in its application. The range here is from seldom to often.
C. *Nature of Oppression:* This subcategory refers to the extent to which several factors relating to oppression are considered in defining feminism:

1). *Origins of Oppression:* The range here is from *seldom to often.*

2). *Effects of Oppression:* The range here is from *seldom to often.*

3). *Ending/Combatting Oppression:* The range here is from *seldom to often.*

D. *Politicsization:* This refers to the extent to which the definition of feminism incorporates the concept of the personal is political. The range here is from *seldom to often.*

By utilizing the identified categories and subcategories, an analysis of the definition of feminism as provided by the seven women can be made. First, all of the women speak of feminism as a perspective which encompasses a broad way of looking at the world. Second, all of the women define feminism in a way which suggests it is an integral part of their approach to practice as opposed to a perspective they might employ under certain circumstances. Third, while all of the women speak of placing a priority value on women and women's issues, there is also a sense of inclusiveness which extends to men and their particular issues. Fourth, although individuals may be a primary focus in practice, none of the practitioners views the individual in isolation. There is an implicit consideration of context in which the factors of family, systems, and society-at-large, are
Conceptual Definition of Feminism

Focus of Concern:

A. Unit of Attention
B. Gender Sensitivity

Point of View:

A. Scope
B. Delimitation
C. Nature of Oppression
   1. Origins of Oppression
   2. Effects of Oppression
   3. Ending/Combatting Oppression
D. Politicization

Box 5: Conceptual Definition of Feminism
considered. Fifth, slightly less than half of the respondents (three out of seven) considered the origins of oppression in the definition of feminism. Sixth, even though most of the women did not explicitly label their identification of the effects of oppression as such, frequent references to the need for women to become empowered, autonomous, etc., suggest that this is a major concern to most of the women in the study. Seventh, only one woman gave attention to the issue of ending oppression on a systemic basis in her definition of feminism. More frequent references were made to personal strategies to combat the individual effects of oppression. This may be related to individual theoretical orientation or it may be linked to the eighth consideration, politicization. Only three women address the issue of the personal as political in their definition of feminism. Although it is premature to draw any conclusions at this point, the lack of emphasis on the political aspects of feminism seems consistent with comments several of the women initially made about their lack of involvement in the women's movement.

In summary, while there are common themes in the definition of feminism identified in this study, there is also a diverse range of possible responses within each subcategory. This suggests that how feminism is
operationalized in practice can be determined by examining where the individual views of practitioners fall within the range established for each subcategory. Finally, it is not possible to discern the theoretical orientation of the participants simply by looking at their definitions of feminism—there are more common and overlapping features than differences in the components of feminism identified here.
Feminist Perspectives and the Social Work Process

We can see that the nature of feminist practice cannot be discerned by looking at a practitioner's definition of feminism. While this information can add to our understanding about feminist social work practice, more complete knowledge will come from an exploration of the theoretical and ideological assumptions underlying an individual's approach to practice. In this regard, Nes and Iadicola's framework for assessing the relationship between social work practice and feminist theoretical orientation was considered in the formulation of several research questions. Also, the screening tool which was used to identify women fitting into the liberal, radical, and socialist feminist orientations was developed from the comparative perspectives discussed by Nes and Iadicola.

Once each women identified her specific feminist perspective, the question to be answered was, "How do the theoretical orientations of individual social workers affect their approaches to problem identification, assessment, treatment strategies, and treatment goals?" This broad question was broken down into four questions which were presented to each respondent:

1. How do your feminist beliefs affect the way you identify the problem in practice?

2. How do your feminist beliefs affect your assessment of clients?
3. How does your identification with feminism affect your thinking about treatment strategies for clients?

4. How do your feminist values affect your selection of treatment goals?

**Liberal Feminists**

Dee and Georgia were most comfortable putting themselves in the liberal feminist category. Their responses to each of the four questions follow.

**Liberal Feminism and Problem Identification**

Dee said her feminist perspectives influence problem identification in the following way:

I listen a lot to the way particular women describe themselves. The 'shoulds' and the introjects and the limitations they express when they are talking about whatever is going on. It's by listening to the way women talk about themselves, how it's easier to criticize themselves. I guess that's an example. It's just in the language. The credit they will give themselves for ideas. Some women will have great ideas and they just treat them like throw-aways because they don't know they have great ideas.

Georgia explained how her feminist perspectives influence problem identification:

I have my clients define the problem. I don't identify their problem for them. I try to get them to define a problem they can, in fact, solve. I think that's empowering. If they are sent by the court, or they are sent by the school, or they are brought in, they come in because they are feeling totally empowered, or they are feeling totally out of control. Part of what I work with and look at is, 'What are the things you are in control of?' Part of it is looking at the problem in a different way (and)
challenging their perception of their reality. To get to a point of something they can work on—not something they feel they can't work on.

Because she is a family therapist, Georgia tends to look at the entire social work process from a systems perspective, as she described in this passage:

I don't see it just as a problem. I see it within a whole context. I see it in terms of who defines it as a problem, how is it a problem for you, how is it a problem in the family, does anybody else in the family have that problem, and how did they deal with it? So, you are looking at a whole array of things. It's not just one thing, it all kind of rolls together.

When Georgia was asked if the approach she described was feminist, good social work, or both, she replied:

I think it's probably both. The part that I would call feminist would be not just paying attention to roles in the family, but how were women taught to act....And I would call that feminist because of the kind of socialization and gender roles that we have that you need to do differently with women than you do with men.

Somehow men grow up with that sense of entitlement in a very different way, and don't question themselves that way. They know how to play hardball, to use that analogy. Women don't learn to play hardball. You throw underhand and you play softball. So, I think it's paying attention to those things along the way that would be more of a feminist perspective, that may pay more attention than perhaps what good social work would teach us to do.

Liberal Feminism and Assessment

Dee had this to say about how her feminism affects assessment of clients:
When I do an assessment of clients...I pull out a lot of filters to help me understand them. I'll pull out the diagnostic filter because I have to diagnose people. That's a way of understanding people. I'll pull out my Gestalt 'cycle of awareness and resistance' as a way of understanding more psychologically what's going on with people. And I pull out their position in the world and how they view themselves. I think that could be a social work value there because I think we do look at supports people have. As a feminist, I particularly look at mentoring supports on the job and real access to promotion. The feminist analysis with the client does involve their access to resources, their beliefs in what they can achieve in the world, their training about how far they can go, (and) who are the oppressors in their lives. Some of that is internal, you know. We take in negative messages. But to help pull them out, 'Now that's what your parents believed, or that's what your father believed...'

While Georgia uses a systems perspective in her ongoing assessment of families, she also pays particular attention to the role expectations women and men have for themselves and each other. She explained:

Many times what I will do is ask people, 'If you were a man, how do you think this would affect you, and how do you think you would negotiate it?' And I do it the other way around. 'If you were a woman how do you think it would affect you, and how do you think you would negotiate it different?' It also heightens people's consciousness, thinking about it from a different perspective. 'And coming from your family, if you were a woman, how would you attend to this? So what is it you are placing on your wife or your mate that you're expecting that's not happening?'

Liberal Feminism and Treatment Strategies and Goals

Dee explained the treatment strategies she uses in her work:
In general, I think individual therapy is good to help get people ready for groups because that's where they really grow and shine. I think often getting into political activity or into groups with other women, whether (or not) they are peer led. It's not just having a leader, there are some really good women's self-directed support groups out there. Anyway, as far as treatment, I'll sometimes do just very short-term treatment because they don't need to be here. They need to be involved in political activities. They need to be involved in women's AA. I don't think therapy solves all the problems.

A lot of the women who are coming to my door I don't see because I can't, or whatever. But sometimes I'll refer them to more appropriate things. I'm often giving out information about other ways people can get something to feel good about themselves. I'm not thinking that therapy is the only thing that's going to help somebody. I'm guessing that reflects my feminist analysis of what promotes change.

Dee sees groups as being particularly beneficial to most women and many men because they can practice new skills with peers in a nonhierarchical relationship. She thinks men sometimes need groups for the same reasons women do. She added, "The men I know who see themselves as victims, they are the men I wish could be in women's groups. You know, they need to feel better about themselves." She believes people's problems can often be ameliorated by getting them to the point where they "feel less scared in the world and (are) feeling like they have some power." For most of her clients, Dee has the goals of increasing assertiveness and building social support networks. She had these thoughts about assertiveness training:
For most of my clients a treatment goal is increasing their assertiveness skills. I imagine that a lot of social workers would say that who aren't feminists. It's a goal with most of my clients, not all. Some people need to be less demanding with what they want. I tell them that. Assertiveness is a social skill. It's not like decreasing depression or removing anxiety. It's a social skill that I try to teach people.

Dee explained why she views increasing social support networks as an important treatment goal:

There is a number of women I have been trying to get involved in a lesbian support group because these women lack community. Something I'll have as a goal for treatment is increasing their supports, their sense of community, so they are not isolated—because that isolation can make you feel crazy.

Dee also has a strong belief that people need to be involved in something on a regular basis, and this may not necessarily include individual therapy. She further clarified her thinking on this point:

That's a goal of treatment, to get them regularly involved in something. I don't think I necessarily need to find out what it is for them. I may make recommendations. I own that I'm making a referral recommendation, 'This is just Dee who wishes this for you, whether it's as your therapist or whatever, but it's a wish I would have for you.' I don't know if that's from being a feminist, but I know that I don't believe therapy solves all the worries of the client. I'm a referral source a lot.

Georgia uses a number of different treatment strategies in her work, including referrals to women's groups and empowerment through informed consent. Informed choice is an important factor in empowering women and is something
she incorporates in her practice "all along the way."
Georgia often sees women compromising their own wants and
needs in order to accommodate others and, as a
consequence, women have difficulty taking responsibility
for making decisions and getting their needs met without
it feeling "risky" to them. She gave this example of how
she assists clients in exploring choices so they can make
informed decisions:

When people talk about what they want, what I will
ask them is, 'Are you really sure you want to change?
Let's talk about what this change means. Talk about
what you are risking because you may be risking your
marriage. You may not be able to stay in it the way
you want, the way you've been. It may not be there
the way you want. Are you really sure this is what
you want to do? Think about it. What's it going to
be like for you out there alone?"

She views this process as particularly valuable for women
because it helps them to develop their own identity. She
added:

(It is) being involved in a way they feel is
productive. Starting to identify themselves as
separate and apart from their husband, or mate, or
children. Helping them to learn to define things
positively in relation to what they see as positive,
not what other people have told them is positive.
But in a realm that is important for them, not that
has been externally imposed. I think that's one of
the hardest things for women--so many times they are
defined by so many other areas that they don't know
how to define what's important to them.

Finally, Georgia had this to say about how her feminism
influences her selection of treatment goals: "I don't set
their goals, they set their goals. I will give them input into what I see is going on, what my suggestions are, but they know best about what it is they need to do. They're hiring me to help them get there."

**Radical Feminists**

Dorothy and Joan defined themselves as radical feminists. The impact of their theoretical perspectives in practice is further explored in this section.

**Radical Feminism and Problem Identification**

Dorothy believes men and women think differently. She feels these differences determine how problems are defined and how the work is approached. She described how these variances are evidenced in her work in domestic violence:

We see things differently when we are doing our group therapy. I think we do come in with different perspectives about what's going on. Even talking professionally, men and women see things differently as we are talking about the clinical issues. I think the perspective of a male therapist (who is) listening to some of these men...and some of the partners of these men are having a lot of problems of their own, and are somewhat violent sometimes themselves. So it's not this perfect picture of this man being abusive to this passive wife all the time.

I think they lose sight of the inequality of power. I don't mean blaming the victim, but they kind of miss that whole power of men being in relationship with the woman. They see the women as being
aggressive and angry, and violent too. Well, I still haven't given up that that's the only way they are trying to get the power back...

Joan uses a multi-theoretical approach to problem identification, one aspect of which is her radical feminist perspective. She explained:

My social work training as well as my feminism and also some of the Gestalt training, help me stay clear on looking for how the problems are affected that are presented in the system as a whole. What are the different dynamics and parts that are resulting in this problem happening? I try not to blame individuals. I look at what goes on between the people that is the problem—the way the interaction occurs.

She admits to having a sensitivity to the struggles of the women who come in for help, as she clarified in this passage:

When a woman walks into my office I am much more highly sensitized to being supportive to her. I find so often that the women feel so inadequate and so full of blame and shame that, as the problems they are giving to me unfold, I really need to help their ego feel strong. But I do that more because I feel more sensitized to women being the underdogs.

Joan presented this case example to show how her feminism affects the way the problem gets identified in practice:

(A) woman...had gone to (a) priest with her husband for marital counseling. As she would present her problems with incest, martial problems and feelings, and concerns about her children, what I was aware of was how uncomfortable she was with her womanliness. Her appearance was almost asexual, she blamed herself for everything. The priest (who) had worked with (them) for the past year had really cemented that she was the sick one in the family, and she really
believed that—she's the crazy one here. And I guess with my feminist perspective I feel like here is what I'm fighting to change in the flesh. This is the kind of way a person values themselves that I want to help them look at....I really worked to help her feel empowered and valued.

Radical Feminism and Assessment

Dorothy believes her feminism directly influences the assessment process, and she shared a case vignette demonstrating the difference between feminist and nonfeminist assessment:

(I was) working in a mental health center, (and) the psychiatrist I was working with I really respected. I was working with a woman who had a history of being in a physically abusive marriage. She was out and divorced, but she was very depressed and not doing a lot and very dependent. And she started in a new relationship where the guy was being a little abusive, and I was trying to get her to look at the pattern of her getting into this kind of (relationship)—her neediness to find someone to take care of her no matter what they were doing to her. So I definitely saw it as this feminist situation. And when I would talk to the psychiatrist and describe some of her history, he called her a masochist. I just went wild! No! I don't think she wants to be hurt. I don't think like that. I think she hasn't been able to see that she has a different potential.

Joan said her view of women has changed since she incorporated her feminism in practice. This is how her assessment process has been influenced:

I don't any longer view women as 'normal' just because they are fitting into stereotypical roles. A woman can be normal and work in a factory....I feel I am more accepting of women in a number of roles....I don't feel like I have this societal agenda I have to put on the woman when she comes in.
With my male clients I try to assist them in seeing the female perspective and the issues the woman has to deal with. I think I take it to a deeper level. Instead of just talking about it cognitively, really having them look at how they've related to women historically and how their values came to be. And having them look at, do they really have to be the protector they think they have to be? Do they really have to be the one in charge of the family? Is that really necessary?

She provided this example of how her work with a male client included her feminist perspectives:

I'm working with a man right now. He doesn't know what to do with this relationship with this woman. It's so equal. It's the only one he's had in his life where she attends to him and he attends to her. It's such a difference in the balance of power he doesn't know how to operate. She wants to marry him, but he's scared because it's almost like he's in a foreign country—'Am I going to be able to handle this, and what's going to happen to me?' Plus it's opening up some pain...where he's realizing how empty he's felt in his life because he has never felt this kind of fulfillment either. He's kind of mourning all of the things he didn't get from the past. But I feel like I make more of a point with him to help him understand the relationship between him and women, and he's real interested in that.

Radical Feminism and Treatment Strategies and Goals

Dorothy does not practice from a particular theoretical framework. She related that she finds herself "getting narrower and narrower in my treatment approaches—'I'm doing a lot of inner child stuff.'" She was challenged by the question of how her feminism impacts her selection of treatment strategies and goals, stating she finds it "hard...to see the feminist part...when I look at
the psychological needs and growth of the particular person". She said this about her selection of treatment strategies and goals:

There are some people who have a very theoretical framework to treatment. They say we do this, this, and this, and come out--hopefully--where they think they should be. I don't have any of that. I definitely keep in touch with them. 'Where are you? What do you want to be doing here? This is your time, what is it you want to gain?' I don't try to have that power of a theory that I bring. I do some treatment stuff that comes out of some theory, but that's to work with what they say they want to be doing. I don't have any magical formulas. I try to have them be part of setting their goals.

Joan has a three-pronged approach in developing her treatment strategies. First, she tries to help her clients with their "intrapsychic system". She said, "I try to help them feel comfortable with their selves as a whole person, as a women, as a mother, etc.--with her varying roles." Second, she tries to help clients with issues of power and control, particularly within their family systems. Her efforts in this regard are centered on helping women gain some validity, power, and role clarity so that they can "survive" in the family system. Last, she focuses on helping her clients learn to "survive out there in the world."

Joan articulates that the women she sees are all "variations on the same theme." She identified the primary problem:
They come in with presenting issues....But when you go around all that, underneath is you have women (who) don't value themselves. They are in relationships where they feel victimized, where they don't feel equal, where they feel put upon by men and their jobs. It's the same in my women's group--you take away the presenting problem, and you've got the same person. It's just variations and degrees of the issues.

Joan's selection of treatment goals usually includes helping clients become empowered. She described what this entails:

My wanting to help women feel empowered is almost always a goal. With girls, it's developing their self-esteem, improving their coping skills, improving how they manage with life. But mostly what I'm working on with people is in their relationships with other people. I feel I'm pretty much aware of the prejudices they are going to run into about women, and we try to problem solve and plan for that so they can get ready for it, so it doesn't throw them for a loop.

Joan gave an example of how clients often react when they begin to understand how they have been oppressed:

...Their head and heart connect and then they start to react to how they feel, once they start to feel the inadequacy and feel how unfair things have been. Like one woman is standing back and saying 'How did I let this happen? Was I asleep? What was going on? How did I miss this?' She's so much stronger now that she just can't understand how this happened to her. So with her, she's shocked.

The rest have been in my women's group for a long time. And at first they didn't know it about themselves either. It was a process that they grew to know. And now they are seeing it generalized among so many women.
Although Joan runs groups for her clients, she does not normally put women into them until she feels they have developed enough of a "sense of self" so that they are not overwhelmed by the process.

_Socialist Feminists_

Lucy, Tobi and Barb identified themselves as socialist feminists. They shared their perspectives on how they approach the social work process.

_Socialist Feminism and Problem Identification_

Lucy pays a lot of attention to process and nonverbal communication in practice. She shared that her feminism affects problem identification in this way:

Because I attend to the nonverbal and I pay attention to my intuition, that gives me a lot of data without the client opening their mouth. Like women that are coming from battered situations, it doesn't take long to guess that they had gone into that traditional values system—and you know how that's affecting the problem. Or the fact that they've been in this relationship—how that's affected their self-esteem or thinking. For instance, I have a master's degree level nurse that's coming here. (She) teaches and does research. She is in such a lethal situation she could be killed at any moment. And it didn't take me long to figure out that her acculturation as a caretaker both at home and as a nurse is helping to put her in danger.
Tobi gave this example of how she identifies the problem from a feminist perspective:

...you have to look at who that woman is and how battered she is and give them time--don't rush them. I have learned most of what I've learned from my staff. I absolutely don't think I know everything. If a woman comes in beat up, she needs to rest. Don't even have a woman go out and look for housing. That's so stupid if she doesn't have money. Wait until she gets a check or she's working. Just waiting, having patience, letting her do things in her own time. So that's seeing who the woman really is. My staff are really good at it. I get impatient, so they have to say, 'Tobi don't be so impatient.'

Barb believes her feminist perspectives are only one aspect of what she brings to the social work process. She had this to say about feminism and problem identification:

I think there are a lot of influences on how you define the problem. I study a lot of Jungian stuff, so that's one thing that influences what I do. There's a lot of emphasis on history and background, and abuse and incest. I work with a lot of people who are on twelve-step programs. There's also my own spiritual practice. I would say there are a lot of things that kind of come together. Feminism is one of them.

Socialist Feminism and Assessment

Lucy views the assessment process as "cyclical instead of linear. I look at all the layers." She gave this example of how her feminism influences assessment:

I'm thinking of one client who said there was violence going on in her home. Her son was beginning to act on the violence. So, she called me on the phone and said, 'Your last name is ___. I don't know if I can come in to talk to you because your last name is an Egyptian name. I hate Egyptians.' So, I
said I wasn't Egyptian, my husband was, and she'd have to make the decision for herself. We kept talking and she liked how I was responding to her. We were connecting and she wanted to make an appointment to come in.

She was an Orthodox Jewish woman who had been involved in a lot of the Jewish services and hadn't had her needs attended. So, Ok, this is why she reacted to (my) name. What does this mean? So, learning about her culture, her family of origin--getting more of that history. And finding out she lost her father when she was two, (and her) mother had immigrated, and there was poverty--so she was a working mother very early and (was) very domineering with (her) children.

This client hadn't had to make many decisions for herself early in life--that became part of her handicap. Here she was, this adult woman who was listening to so many voices she couldn't sort out what she needed to do for herself and her child.

Tobi's feminist perspectives influence her assessment of battered women living in the shelter in this way:

We always look at what the woman is doing. We always want to make sure she is doing something, that she's working toward something. Whatever we can do to keep people in process is a major thing we do....We look at each woman as (an) individual....We look at who the person is and how they are working to help themselves.

In discussing her assessment of clients, Barb identified some of the ways feminism has influenced her process:

I certainly watch for women being over-medicated and under-listened to if they have been in (treatment) before. I'm real aware of talking not only about the internal but the external factors in their lives as well as to find out about all the things that have gone on in their lives. Always checking for incest and sexual abuse, and making sure if that has been part of their history, I know about that. I guess I look for certain things in women, and I do look if
they have had other treatment...if they have somehow been treated in a sexist way. Addictions, I always check for that. And women are more likely to have eating disorders--those kinds of things that happen to women more than men. Those things usually come out. You don't have to search for those.

Socialist Feminism and Treatment Strategies and Goals

In Lucy's work, the treatment goals "come out of the assessment--the goals wouldn't be imposed by me." Her goal is to have therapy be an empowering experience for the client--so, the client is involved at every stage of the process. Lucy, like Georgia, often shares with her clients that she is learning from them--that they are teachers as well as learners. She will sometimes physically change places with them to help them feel empowered. She shared how she uses this in practice:

...I even change positions, sometimes I sit at their feet and I talk about learning from them. That (woman) I was talking about, she brought me a book which took a recovery program and put it into Jewish language. She brought that book to me, and now that she's learning...she's teaching me about her culture. I can use that with other Jewish clients because this is a new culture to me. I always emphasize that I'm learning from her.

Tobi indicated in the following statement how feminism influences her choice of treatment strategies and goals:

I would do what was reasonable for them and not because the counselor thought it should be the goal. Having women agree with the goals is important. Then you can go back and say, 'Well, this is what you said you wanted...' So, you do it jointly with the woman.
If women have an interest in becoming politically involved, Tobi will support that and find opportunities for them to be active. She gave this example of how battered women took action to protest general assistance cuts:

(They) wrote to the governor. I think it's very important to do that. You should have seen them! They took so much care and they rewrote them perfectly over. People who didn't even graduate from high school said how they felt, and wrote legibly. People think these people are so illiterate and they could never get a job and never express themselves. And they did it beautifully. Letter after letter. People letters! It was wonderful!

Tobi uses a number of different strategies in the shelters, including educational and self-help groups. Whenever possible, women are brought in to do whatever repair work needs to be done so shelter residents can see women performing in nontraditional roles.

Barb went into detail about how her feminism affects her selection of treatment strategies and goals:

I try to be more egalitarian, understanding that the therapy situation is not egalitarian. You can't pretend that you are equal in this relationship. You're not. When people try to give me undue power...I really make an effort not to take that on.

I encourage groups a lot. I encourage women to seek out women's AA meetings or twelve-step programs....I do think for women with certain issues, they at least need to have some all-women groups....because women's issues are different from men's. And women in mixed groups tend to defer to men a lot. Or caretake them. I do try to inform people of political stuff that I know about too. If I know clients are into those kinds of things, I try to inform them, or encourage
them, or hear about their participation.

**Discussion of Approaches to the Social Work Process**

A number of themes emerged from the analysis of the responses of each woman to the four questions. These responses are grouped by theoretical perspective.

**Liberal Feminists**

With respect to problem identification the only theme held in common by Dee and Georgia was that they particularly look at sex-role expectations, sex-role socialization, and the resultant internalized oppression experienced by women. Dee listens to how women devalue themselves. Georgia seeks to understand how women have been taught to behave, and how this affects their perceptions.

In assessment, a number of different "filters" are used. Feminism is one lens which focuses on the internal and external limitations women feel they experience. Georgia tends to put more emphasis on a systems perspective and sex-role expectations. Dee looks at resources and supports, particularly mentoring supports for women. Dee takes a broad systems perspective in looking at how people view themselves in the world.

Both women use a wide variety of treatment strategies and goals. Dee believes therapy should be brief and
preparatory to group work. She favors all kinds of groups, especially groups providing support or giving people a sense of community. Empowerment, building social supports, and social skill development to help her clients feel more in control of their lives, are important treatment goals. Dee encourages clients to engage in political activity as one means of connecting them to the larger community. While Georgia's primary treatment strategy is individual and family therapy, she also makes referrals and involves client in groups when indicated. Her goals in treatment are to empower clients through exploring choices, making informed decisions; and, for women in particular, helping them develop a sense of self apart from other people in their lives.

*Radical Feminists*

Dorothy and Joan share a common theme in problem identification—both look at how power gets used in relationships. Dorothy believes there are differences in the way male and female therapists view the problem of domestic violence. She is particularly sensitive to the issue of power in battering relationships. It is Dorothy's belief that women who react to domestic violence with violence are often labeled as abusive themselves, rather than being seen as trying to regain power in the
only way they know. Joan uses a multi-theoretical approach in problem identification. She pays particular attention to the interaction between individuals. She is also sensitive to women's oppression, and looks at the affects of sex-role socialization and the accompanying internalized oppression experienced by many of her clients.

In assessment, Dorothy looks at women's view of themselves and how they have internalized their oppression. She tries to avoid labeling clients, and is especially sensitive to using terms which might blame the victim. Joan looks at the sex-role socialization of women and men. She has also redefined her concept of 'normal' because of her feminist lens—the nonstereotypical role is 'normal' from this viewpoint.

Dorothy offered a few ideas on treatment strategies and goals. She does not use any particular theoretical framework in her practice—inner child work is predominant. Clients determine what they want and need from her, and are involved in setting treatment goals. Joan has several treatment strategies and goals. She is especially concerned with helping women develop themselves to the fullest extent. She believes women need to learn to deal with power and control issues so they can survive in their families and in the world. Joan is also
concerned with helping male clients explore how sex-role expectations and cultural bias against women has affected their own development. She often uses individual therapy to help clients develop a "sense of self" before putting them into a group. Empowerment, increasing self-esteem, and developing life-skills are important treatment goals in Joan's practice.

Socialist Feminists

Lucy, Tobi, and Barb approach problem identification from a common perspective. Each looks at where the client is coming from in terms of history and values, where the client is now, and who the client is as an individual. Lucy uses intuition and non-verbal cues to identify how the incorporation of traditional values influences a client's thinking and self-esteem. Barb identifies her feminism as one of several lenses she uses in this phase of the process.

In assessment, Lucy and Barb particularly look at larger systems and historical processes. Barb pays attention to how women have been abused or oppressed, and the affects of such factors. Tobi is mostly concerned with looking at who the client is and how she is working to help herself.

None of these women imposes treatment goals on the
client. Goal setting is a mutual process wherein the client's involvement is seen as empowering. In terms of treatment strategies, all three women use groups in addition to individual or family therapy. Tobi makes an effort to expose women living in shelter to women working in a variety of nontraditional roles. She is also interested in helping women become politically active. Barb keeps her clients informed of political issues if they have an interest in this area.

Discussion of Comparison of Actual and Ideal Perspectives

How do the women in this study fit within the models of feminist social work practice developed by Nes and Iadicola? In the following sections, the views of each woman are compared to the frameworks identified as ideal models of liberal, radical, and socialist feminism.

Liberal Feminists

The liberal feminist perspective in problem identification focuses on individual deficits, problems in opportunity structures, social-institutional supports, and the ways in which sex-role socialization and sexism impact these factors. There is also a high value placed on client self-determination and freedom of choice (Nes &
Iadicola, 1989).

Both Dee and Georgia said they look at how women undervalue themselves and the relationship of internalized oppression to sex-role socialization. Dee looks at the client's access to resources and supports, especially mentoring supports for women. Georgia looks at problems within a "whole context", and is aware of the differences in opportunity structures for women and men. In her view, men have a sense of entitlement that women do not have, therefore, one aspect of her role as a feminist social worker is to help women get what they need by negotiating the system. While Dee and Georgia give special consideration to the problems women face, they are equally concerned with how men have been oppressed in this society.

In assessment, liberal feminists typically evaluate each of the four areas noted above in terms of the "degree and salience" of the areas which the client specifically defines as a problem (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 16). Dee identifies how women view themselves, their position in the world, and the internalized messages they have which tell them how far they can go and the limitations they face. She continually evaluates the social supports her clients have, and encourages them to become involved in supportive networks to build a sense of community. Dee
also pays particular attention to multicultural and class issues, which is seen as falling more into the socialist feminist perspective. Georgia gives special attention to the impact of systems on her clients, as well as the role expectations people have for themselves and each other.

In treatment strategies and goals, liberal feminists employ a variety of approaches with the goal of enabling clients to pursue fulfillment of their own life choices (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 16). There is an emphasis on traditional therapies, including individual, family, and group. Georgia is primarily involved in providing individual and family therapy, where her primary concern is helping clients make informed choices and negotiate systems. Dee explicitly states she does not view individual treatment as the best solution for most clients; instead she views most therapy as preparation for group work. She is likely to get her clients involved in regular group activities as a way to give them a sense of community, and also to provide a nonhierarchical setting where they can practice social skills. Dee feels that political activity is a desirable treatment strategy.

Dee and Georgia attempt to help clients understand how societal constraints may cause individual problems. Georgia frames this in a systems context, and works to help clients learn how to negotiate the system. Dee
exposes sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia as being part of the "bigger picture" which contributes to individual problems. Both women are concerned with moving out of authoritarian and hierarchical relationships with their clients. Georgia analogously refers to her work as sharing a journey with her clients, wherein clients are both respected and valued as teachers. Dee and Georgia place a high value on freedom of choice and expression, and they work with clients around empowerment and identifying how to best get their needs met. Client self-determination is paramount.

In summary, when compared to the liberal feminist model developed by Nes and Iadicola, Dee and Georgia fit on a number of variables, but they also differ on several major attributes which are characteristic of liberal feminists from a theoretical perspective. First, neither woman spoke of identifying deficits in either clients or opportunity structures. Both tend to look at the strengths possessed by each client, and pay special attention to the client's view of herself in society as well as what she has been taught to believe about herself. Second, Dee and Georgia resist requirements to label or pathologize clients, although there are some requirements for them to do so in order to receive insurance reimbursement. Third, treatment strategies and goals are
directed less toward correcting individual deficits and more toward giving individuals the skills they need to feel like they have more power over their lives. Fourth, Dee's infusion of class considerations into her practice approach is a hallmark of socialist feminism which is not usually expected to be seen in a liberal feminist.

**Radical Feminists**

Because radical feminists see patriarchy as the root of human problems, an object of treatment is to help clients recognize how the choices and limitations on the range of alternatives available to them are a product of patriarchy. Radical feminists do not believe that raising the client's consciousness and helping them make free choices is sufficient. The radical feminist social worker also attempts to show the link between personal growth and fulfillment and making choices that fall outside the parameters of patriarchy (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, pp. 17-18).

Dorothy and Joan appear to have similar approaches to problem identification. Dorothy is especially concerned with how power gets used in relationships. She is also keenly aware of how patriarchal structures perpetuate inequality and oppress women. Because she believes the structures of many systems are inherently biased against
women, she finds herself championing women's causes when individuals get caught up in systems. However, she also views the problem as so intractable that she avoids interaction with such systems whenever possible. Joan uses a systems perspective in problem identification, and she pays special attention to the interaction between individuals which results in problems. Dorothy and Joan are especially sensitive to the roles of women in society, and are quite supportive of women who choose to try nonstereotypical roles. They see women as "normal" even if they choose to step outside of typically feminine role expectations. Joan works hard to be supportive of women because she sees them as being in an "underdog" position. She looks at the affects of sex-role socialization and sees that women internalize oppression from the way they criticize and undervalue themselves. Dorothy is sensitive to differences in the way problems are identified by male and female practitioners, and believes there is a tendency for male therapists to blame women for their own victimization.

In assessment, Dorothy and Joan fit into the model in the respect that each looks at sex-role socialization and its affects on self-esteem and identity. Additionally, both consider the extent to which relationships and institutional structures perpetuate hierarchical and
patriarchal relations, and they work toward exposing and equalizing the power differential in these relationships. Dorothy is especially cognizant of the impact of patriarchal institutional processes on the individual, noting that women coming in for traditional mental health services often face the same stereotypical and patriarchal assumptions in treatment as they do in the larger society. Joan looks at the interaction between individuals, and is particularly concerned about helping women learn to "survive" in their families and in the world.

In terms of treatment strategies, radical feminism takes four basic forms. First, radical feminists view consciousness raising as a central component of treatment, and they seek to have women understand that their problems are shared by all women. Second, group therapy is preferred over individual therapy because there is greater emphasis on sharing responsibility for common human problems. Third, support and self-help groups focusing on strengths rather than deficits are important approaches in this perspective. Fourth, radical feminists believe strongly in incorporating political action into the treatment process (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 18).

There are five essential treatment goals in radical feminism, the first and most important of which is creating individual and collective awareness that the
personal is political. Radical feminists are also identified as having the additional goals of: (2) eliminating artificially created sex roles and moving toward sex role transcendence; (3) assisting women in reclaiming power and control over their lives; (4) mobilizing and politicizing women to effect change in the larger social system; and (5) establishing alternatives for women that are outside of patriarchy (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 19).

For Dorothy, treatment strategies and goals include supporting clients in making choices, especially nonstereotypical choices. She believes in client self-determination, and avoids client efforts to place responsibility for making decisions on her shoulders. Dorothy is non-directive in her approach. She asks clients what they need and want from her, and attempts to bring theory in as needed to deal with particular issues. Joan uses a multitheoretical approach in her practice. Her main concern is helping clients develop their "full selves", and this includes incorporating masculine and feminine attributes. Within her groups, Joan helps women understand how they have been oppressed, and works with them in developing skills to survive in the world.

In private practice, Dorothy and Joan use individual therapy as the primary treatment modality, however, they
also use groups. Joan runs groups for women, but hesitates to put them in groups until they have developed a "sense of self". Outside of her private practice, Dorothy facilitates groups for male perpetrators of domestic violence. Here she works to help batterers understand the relationship between their own socialization and victimization experiences, and the affects of violent behavior on their victims. Joan uses consciousness raising in her work with adolescents as well as in her individual work with women and men.

Neither Dorothy nor Joan spoke of encouraging clients to become involved in political activity. Although they do not see themselves as political activists, they feel they are individually political in quiet ways and on a smaller scale. Both women believe it is necessary to work with men to promote individual and societal change. They attempt to help men gain an awareness of what women's experience in society has been and how they may have been involved in oppressing women.

Dorothy tends to reject working within systems, preferring private practice so she can do what she wants with fewer constraints. Joan works within systems to promote understanding of the affects of sex-role socialization on women and men.

In summary, while Dorothy and Joan are similar in
many respects to the radical feminist model presented by Nes and Iadicola, a substantive difference is that they have not incorporated political action into the treatment process. Although both women see political activity as something feminists do, they do not see themselves as taking an active role in mobilizing clients to become agents of social change.

**Socialist Feminists**

According to Nes and Iadicola (1989), socialist feminists examine problems in terms of "the impact of institutional processes and belief systems that manifest both patriarchal gender and capitalist class relations and the impact of other forms of domination, such as race and age" (p. 19). From a socialist feminist perspective, problem identification addresses how problems arise from the choices made by the client and from the limitations of choices available to clients, both of which are a product of their structural position in the society as defined principally in terms of the class and gender systems (Nes & Iadicola, p. 19).

Lucy, Tobi, and Barb are sensitive to gender issues, and identify the ways in which women and men are oppressed in society. Additionally, of the three socialist feminists, Tobi and Barb are especially cognizant of class
issues in practice. Barb is also specifically aware of how the material conditions women face may lead to depression. She believes some depression is based upon women's realistic appraisal of their position in society. Lucy looks at the relationship between the incorporation of traditional values and women's self-esteem and thinking. Tobi articulated the need to understand where the woman is coming from and what she is doing to help herself.

In assessment, socialist feminists are similar to radical feminists with the additional consideration of class and other forms of oppression. All three women spoke of assessing individuals within broader contexts. Lucy is interested in the affects of culture. This includes an appreciation of different cultural backgrounds as well as an identification of how cultural expectations impact individual functioning. Tobi pays particular attention to where a woman has been and what she is doing to help herself. Barb looks at internal and external factors including history of oppression, experiences with sexism, and sex-role socialization in her assessment of clients. She views certain problems, like eating disorders, as being particularly connected to cultural prescriptions for women.

Consciousness raising, support and advocacy groups,
and coalition building are typical socialist feminist treatment strategies. Treatment goals are the same as for radical feminists, however, socialist feminist social workers also try to raise political consciousness and show the linkages among the different systems of domination in society (Nes & Iadicola, 1989, p. 20).

For the socialist feminists in this study, clients are always involved in goal development and selection. Barb is clear that she does not want to be viewed as the authority in someone else's life. Empowerment and reconceptualizing power are important values held by each of the women. Lucy, Tobi and Barb also speak of being respectful toward clients, regarding each person's perspective as meaningful regardless of who the client is.

Consciousness raising strategies are employed by all three women in individual sessions and groups. They agree that groups offer an important source of support to women. Barb sees a special value of all-women groups for some clients. From her clinical administrative vantage point, Tobi believes in offering a variety of educational and self-help groups to shelter residents. She also likes to provide role models to the women in shelter whenever possible by hiring women who have nonstereotypical jobs to do work there.

Tobi articulated her views on the cause of oppression
quite distinctively, and suggested the need for a revolution to change the "way things are." While Lucy and Barb did not voice the need for a revolution, they joined Tobi in identifying the need for politicization and encouraging clients to become involved in political activities if they so desire.

In summary, Lucy, Tobi and Barb have many of the characteristics identified as being consistent with a socialist feminist perspective. While they may vary in the level of attention they give to the relationship between oppressions and identity development, these three women have an awareness of the impact of many different types of oppression on individuals. Additionally, except for Dee, Lucy, Tobi, and Barb appear to be more committed to involving clients in political activity than any of the other women in the study.
Summary of Relationship Between Theoretical Framework and Practitioners' Approaches to Social Work Process

Table 1 compares what the participants said they do in practice with the ideal models suggested by Nes and Iadicola. In interpreting the table, the use of a + sign indicates that an attribute is present as expected in the response(s) given by at least one of the women in each of the categories; while the use of the - sign indicates that the attribute is not present as expected in the women's responses. The use of the (+) sign indicates that the attribute is present but not expected; while the use of the (-) sign indicates that the attribute is not present but expected in the participants' approach to the social work process.

An overview of Table 1 shows that the women in each of the three feminist perspectives have more similarities than differences on the various attributes presented. For example, none of the women focuses on identifying or correcting individual deficits, which is a characteristic of the liberal feminist model according to Nes and Iadicola. Likewise, all of the participants identify opportunity structures which impede the client's ability to have their survival and emotional needs met, which is another factor primarily associated with the liberal feminist model. In addition, all of the women pay
particular attention to the affects of patriarchy on their clients, which is a hallmark of radical feminist practice.

Table 1 also illustrates that there are certain attributes which are expected to appear in a particular perspective which are absent in the participants' approach to practice. For example, radical feminists are expected to have collective political action as core treatment strategies and goals, but this is absent in the responses given by Joan and Dorothy. Likewise, certain attributes which are not viewed as part of a particular perspective are, nevertheless, apparent in some of the participants' responses. This is especially visible in the liberal feminist category. For example, consciousness raising and politicization are not major features of liberal feminism, but Dee, in particular, uses both in her treatment approaches. Similarly, Dee is interested in identifying the impact of class in problem identification and assessment. Concern for the affects of class systems is most characteristic of socialist feminism and is not even suggested as an aspect of liberal feminism in the model framework.

In summary, while the women in this study fit into the model frameworks on a number of variables, none of them approaches the social work process in a manner which places them discretely within one theoretical perspective.
TABLE 1 - THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND PRACTICE APPROACH

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<thead>
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<th>PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION</th>
<th>LIBERAL</th>
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<th>SOCIAL</th>
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<td>Opportunity Structures</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex-Role Socialization</td>
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<td>Patriarchal Rlnshps.</td>
<td>(+)</td>
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<td>Class System</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify S/I* Supports</td>
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| ASSESSMENT | | | |
| Degree of Ind. Deficits | (-) | - | - |
| Blocks in Opp. Structure | + | (+) | (+) |
| S/I* Supports | + | (+) | (+) |
| Impact of Patriarchy | (+) | + | + |
| Impact of Sex-Role Soc. | + | + | + |
| Impact of Class | (+) | - | + |
| Impact of Race | + | + | + |

| TREATMENT STRATEGIES | | | |
| Traditional Therapies | + | + | + |
| Group Treatment | + | + | + |
| Self-Help Groups | + | (-) | + |
| Consciousness Raising | (+) | + | + |
| Politicization | (+) | (-) | + |
| Mobilization of Women | - | (-) | (-) |

| TREATMENT GOALS | | | |
| Correct Ind. Deficits | (-) | - | - |
| Open Up Opp. Struct. | + | (+) | (+) |
| Validate Client Choices | + | + | + |
| Raise Consciousness | (+) | + | + |
| Politicization | (+) | (-) | + |
| Empowerment | + | + | + |
| Promote Chg. in Rlnshps. | + | + | + |
| Organizing/Coalition Bldg. | - | - | (-) |

KEY:
* = Social/Institutional.
(-) = Absent but expected; (+) = Present but not expected.
+ = Present as expected; - = Absent as expected.
The variability in responses suggests that practitioners use multiple feminist perspectives in their practice approaches. The characteristics which were anticipated to clearly separate liberal, radical, and socialist feminist practice approaches are not distinct in the final analysis of the actual responses of real practitioners. This is most apparent in Table 1 when looking at the attributes which were present but not expected (+), and in the attributes which were not present but expected (-).

Thus, a major finding of this study is that theoretical orientation is not predictive of a practitioner's approach to practice. While certain attributes are prime indicators of feminist perspectives from a theoretical point of view, in actual practice situations, feminists incorporate multiple perspectives in their approach to the social work process of problem identification, assessment, treatment strategies, and treatment goals.
Comparing Feminism and Social Work

Assumption II posited that feminist social work practice is distinguishable from "good" social work practice by the centrality of its ideology. A major feature of feminist practice is the concept that the values, beliefs, and assumptions underlying practice are both applied and made explicit. Because there has been no discussion in the literature delineating how feminists integrate and apply their values in practice, this became a focus of the current study. A number of questions in the Research Interview Guide attempted to clarify each participant's views on the distinguishing features of feminist practice by asking each woman to respond to the following questions:

Do you think feminism and social work have anything in common?

a. If NO:
   (1) In what ways do you think they differ?
   (2) How might you view a situation differently from a "good" social work practitioner?

b. If YES:
   (1) What do they have in common?
   (2) How do you think feminist practice differs from "good" social work practice?
Commonalities Between Feminism and Social Work

While most of the women view social work and feminism as having common elements, they do not completely agree on the factors they see as common to both.

For Lucy, the similarity between feminism and social work lies in the systemic view she believes both take. Her emphasis is on looking at all systems, including family, neighborhood, and church. She thinks inasmuch as social work has become psychoanalytically oriented and social workers more like psychologists, social work has become too distanced from its original focus. As a result, she feels the profession has "not really attended to the culture and to other groups that are really important to social work as I see it." Nevertheless, Lucy believes feminism has shown social work how to get back to its core values, saying, "...the grass roots stuff that went on in the feminist movement, and empowering people, and looking at where they came from, and looking at the patriarchy, and how the culture influenced us...(feminism) kind of reawakened social work to that dimension of itself that it had misplaced."

Tobi said she could have answered the question, "Do you think feminism and social work have anything in common?" either positively or negatively but since she tries to be positive, she answered in the affirmative.
The following excerpt of her inner dialogue gives a brief look at her thinking:

I could have answered it either way, so when I was thinking about it, I thought, 'Oh, that's interesting that you answer 'yes', because I do try to think that I'm more of a positive person. That was affirming for me that when I went back to think about that...that I would look for what people have in common rather than how they are different."

Tobi concludes that social work and feminism "help people work a process of recovering from oppression. You help people not tolerate the abuse."

Dorothy thinks the commonalities between social work and feminism are not clear-cut. She assumes social work values are "what each individual says they are." She provided her view on the current relationship between social work and feminism:

The social work arena has all the possibilities of social change, depending on your viewpoint and the beliefs you bring to it....I don't know if social work as a profession is looking real feminist, but I think there are parts of it that are. I think the shelter movement and those types of women's services still give an arena to do some of those feminist kinds of things. I think there are pockets of it, but as a whole, I don't think we can say it is a feminist profession.

While Dorothy believes social work might be supportive of feminist perspectives in practice, she added that social work has not led the way in encouraging practitioners to adopt such approaches. She sees that practice areas which might foster a feminist approach are limited.
Joan thinks the ideals of social work are compatible with feminism, however, she also believes the current reality of social work practice is not congruent with these ideals. She explained:

I guess it would depend on who is defining social work practice. If it would be someone who wasn't biased and wasn't prejudiced against any race or gender. I guess for the most part what we say in books and journals about what social work is ideally, I would see it as being very compatible with feminism—on the books. But the way it gets played out in reality—I think that's where it is no longer congruent. At times it can go in different directions. I think ideologically it is the same.

Dee believes social work and feminism have "a lot in common," but does not believe they are the only perspectives holding similar values. She added:

A feminist analysis is kind of what social workers think about. We do look in terms of oppression and power a lot. But social work training is about working with people who have limited power over major decisions in their lives. We don't only work with poor people, but often it is people who have a limited range of options. I think in terms of caring about things like oppression, those are common values. I'm thinking in terms of empowerment. I don't think social workers have a market on that. I think many of the helping professions care about that. We may talk about it more, I'm not sure.

Georgia agrees that social work and feminism have common features by her definition of feminism:

I don't see it as mutually exclusive of men or children or actually any of the population, because I see it more as an empowering agenda than as a kind of authoritative agenda.
Georgia believes social work has been "patronizing and paternalistic, and has taken power away from people in the guise of being caring." While she views this approach as being antithetical to feminism, she credits feminism with counteracting this trend in the following way:

I think what is happening now is re-empowering people, bringing people back and aiding them in their lives rather than taking over the functioning. I think that's part of what the feminist movement has done. (It) has become more egalitarian and more equalizing, so that we're partners rather than hierarchical. For a while I did see that as being antithetical, and not being partners, but I think it's happening more and more.

A further point of compatibility between feminism and social work in Georgia's view is "the...broadening of scope rather than just looking in a narrow way. In terms of looking at the environment, looking at the community, looking at what is empowering and nurturing, and how you grow and function better. I think those two have fed each other and worked side-by-side."

Barb gave her opinion on the things she believes social work and feminism have in common:

...if you're a social worker you understand people not only intrapsychically, but you also understand people in the context of their environment and the broader community. I was a community organizing major, so I was very interested in grass roots organization and that kind of thing. I think you have to understand that women and men growing up in a poor neighborhood or a middle-class neighborhood or in a wealthy neighborhood have different experiences, positive and negative.
Discussion: Commonalities Between Feminism and Social Work

There is basic agreement among the women that the values of social work and feminism are conceptually congruent. However, there is an accompanying feeling that social work may not be fully living up to its ideals. Some of the women believe feminism has had a positive influence on social work either by pointing out the paternalistic and patronizing aspects of current practice, or by refocusing social work back to its original roots. The common features shared by feminism and social work as identified by the participants include:

1. Respect for the individual.
2. Broadness of scope—considering the person in larger contexts.
3. Identifying the personal and societal constraints which are oppressive to people.
4. Explicitly identifying issues of inequality and patriarchy.
5. Developing strategies to deal with oppression and inequality.
7. Inclusiveness.
8. Capacity for social change.
9. Collaborative vs. hierarchical relationships.
In summary, there appear to be more commonalities than differences between feminism and social work; however, the participants did identify differences which are enumerated in the following section.

Differences Between Feminism and Social Work

Lucy believes the difference between feminism and "good" social work lies mainly in the fact that "there's not a lot of good social work practice being practiced." From her perspective, good social work and feminist practice require an "attending to the collaboration, paying attention to the whole system, and not imitating the male system of management." She said, "I don't see that going on out in the world in social work practice so much. Often we buy into the systems that have been imposed on us--passed down. We have these bureaucracies (and) we feel we have to do it that way."

Tobi sees significant differences between social work and feminism revolving around the approach, as well as the content. She explained:

...I think feminist practice would be more assertive and demanding than social work practice, instead of always talking about it so 'nice-nice'. Good social work practice would probably always include systems work, like a family systems approach. I don't think that feminists would necessarily choose a systems approach, especially for dealing with sexual abuse and violence.

(Feminism) is more political. It means understanding
who has the power, and how do you work with that, and how do you use that to help people and not be stupid about it.

Tobi explained how she views the issue of domestic violence from a feminist perspective:

When you do couples therapy with people who don't have power in their relationships, it's horrible. You're not helping them, you're hurting them. You have to really look. I think a feminist would probably really look at what is the truth in a relationship, or to what is the truth in treatment, rather than just pick what they were taught in graduate school, or they happen to be reading a book on family systems theory and they just pick that. Because that doesn't always work. You have to look at what's real and what's really happening.

When asked what framework she used for determining the "truth", she said:

You have to know more things than just systems. It's very complicated. I have an article on how you decide if a couple is ready for treatment together. The first thing is they have to be equal. They have to see themselves as equal. You have to know they are safe to be together. They are not going to hurt each other verbally, physically, or emotionally. If they are going to hurt and threaten each other, then you can't do work with them together. You have to get to that point before you can do that.

For Dorothy, the difference between social work and feminism was less well-crystallized, but she offered the opinion that feminism is not well integrated into social work practice. She made specific reference to the abortion debate, noting that a pro-choice group from NASW was "trying to do some lobbying." Dorothy feels the
present emphasis on family values is creating conflict because the family's priorities appear to be taking precedence over a woman's priorities. In the current debate, she views mainstream social work as being more supportive of family values than women's rights. Her sense is that social work was more of an active force for change in the '60s and '70s than it is presently, and she sees the current trend as "pretty sad."

While Joan believes feminism and social work are ideologically the same, she sees a divergence of approaches between the two in family and couples therapy. She believes social work is more likely to ask women in relationships to make accommodations to the needs of men. Regarding this she said:

I guess for me the main (difference) is when in relationships we're working with families and couples, and we're trying to return the family--the couple--to a more comfortable level. I have seen practitioners focus more on having the woman understand the way the man is in the family, and mold to him and understand his point. I don't see it also going the other way, where the man has to understand his wife's needs, or the mother's needs...

An additional and related problem she sees in the field of social work is the tendency to put too much responsibility on women, particularly mothers. She explained what her professional experience has been:

I just went to a workshop where I challenged the speaker on this. Where practitioners put the entire emphasis for parenting on the mother, and believe
that biologically a child can only bond to the mother, and father is insignificant. So it's when it gets played out in social work practice, (that) all the responsibility goes onto mom. The problems the kids are having are about mom's relationship to the child, not dad's. She's blamed for all of it. Women getting blamed for some of the psychological problems people have--I see as a problem in the field. It has been in our past--(women) being solely responsible to fix it.

Joan specified how she thinks a feminist practitioner would handle these same issues:

I see feminist practice as trying to help both the male and the female live in a more equal role together. In corporations, when people come in as consultants to work with some of the disharmony among the staff, I think that could be a place (where) feminists could look at the male beliefs and values about women more than they do. I think they tend to focus more on how they can help women cope with the problem. I think it's because we tend to be more accessible emotionally, so we relate easier. It would be more of a challenge to get a man to look at his biases, or to challenge the way he views a woman, but I think a feminist consultant would look at both the male and female role.

Dee had a cautionary perspective in her view of the differences between feminism and social work:

...depending on the way you look at feminism--kind of your cut on it--some feminists care more about the plight of women than of men. And the further you get out...on that continuum, the less the plight of men seems to matter. And I think in social work...we try to value them both equally. Social workers may look at sexism, but that's not the only thing they will look at. There could be a different valuing of the experience of women between the feminist and the social worker.

Dee gave an example of how she feels feminism and social
work differ in approach:

I worked at a mental health center for ten years. One of my duties was to run women's groups...this was in a rural county, which is white, Catholic, working-class. When I was running those groups, I would talk to the women some about their experiences, and about being socialized as women, and how that affects what they are allowed to do in their lives. I don't know if I did that as clearly with them as I have with groups where I haven't been in the mental health setting as a social worker. When I went other places, it's almost like I'm wearing a different hat. In the mental health center I was a social worker. But when I haven't been wearing that social work hat, I'll really spend more time with them...

Georgia takes Dee's concerns even further in her analysis of the difference between feminism and social work. She said:

I think good social work practice will help people along the path they determine. I think if somebody is only dedicated to their feminist practice, they could be pushing people into areas where they don't want to go, and ways to behave they don't want to behave. To me that's unconscionable, and irresponsible, and disrespectful.

If it's available, if you have the basic attitude that you can get what you want, (then) let's see the best, most powerful way for you to negotiate it, to get what you want and still (be) intact. I think that's still using the same principles but not banging people over the head with them.

Both Dee and Georgia imply in their responses that feminism, especially radical feminism, can go too far and consequently get away from the basic social work values of individuation and self-determination. They believe the same basic outcome can be achieved with less "overbearing"
tactics.

Georgia's concern about how feminism can go too far is represented in this exchange:

Georgia: I worked with one (black) woman—a wonderful dynamic lady—who was kind of flitting her life away. And (her black supervisor) is saying, 'You have to go to school, you have to do this, you gotta get out there and make something of yourself and get out there and join us!' And all this girl wanted to do was get married and have babies. Now, part of it may have been cultural influence, but this supervisor was furious at this woman for not getting out there and moving the world down! Now how does that serve the client?

Interviewer: And you think that came from her feminist stance?

Georgia: I do! One, I think it came from her ethnic background, and two, I think it came from her feminist stance. And I don't think that is real helpful. I think that's where the liberal kind of fits in as opposed to the radical. And I think that's what social work does. It helps people negotiate systems to get what they need done.

When asked to give an example of how feminist practice differs from good social work practice, Georgia responded that she did not know what good feminist practice would be other than "clearly advocating for the woman above everything." If this advocacy helps the woman get what she needs without compromising her integrity, then Georgia thinks this would be the same thing as good social work practice. Georgia's concern seems to be centered on the degree of self-determination versus coercion that the client experiences. While she can recognize that women
may need "coaching" in how to negotiate the system, she believes some feminist practitioners need to learn "not to overkill."

Barb saw no differences between social work and feminist practice, and she provided an example of what she saw as good social work practice that would also be feminist practice:

I think one of those issues that you have to be aware (of) when you are working with women and they are coming to you because they are depressed...(is) that you are also dealing with women who are single, trying to raise children on twelve thousand dollars a year because they are being paid less than men, or (on) welfare income...and so, they come in with depression. But there are some realities of their lives that take a lot of energy to just deal with on a day to day basis. So you have to take those things into account, as well as to remind them that they are making 59% of what men are making, and that men are not being asked to be responsible for the kids, and that women are carrying an inordinate burden. And so, I think you have to say those things as well as deal with their depression.

Discussion of Differences Between Feminism and Social Work

The discussion of differences is predicated on the respondents' beliefs that social work and feminism are ideologically the same; therefore, identifying differences is more like looking at degrees of variation on a scale than discovering categorical dissimilarities. While every woman did not explicitly discuss every theme presented in this section, the total number of responses were collapsed into six themes which appear to encompass the total range
of responses. First, there is a sense that, in one way or another, current social work practice does not live up to its ideals. Some of the women said this very explicitly, while others alluded to it by noting how far current social work practice has deviated from its historical base. Second, a number of the women are concerned that current social work practice is more oriented to maintaining the status quo than working for social change. This is reflected in concerns expressed by a number of the participants, including: (1) Women more frequently being held responsible for what goes on in relationships, as well as; (2) Women more frequently being expected to deny themselves and to accommodate to the needs of others in relationships, and; (3) The lack of leadership from the profession in the current debate over women's rights versus family rights.

At the organizational level, some of the women voiced concern that social workers have adopted male models of management. They believe this increases the risk of perpetuating hierarchical and patriarchal relationships, i.e., the status quo. Third, feminism is viewed as being more demanding and assertive--more political than social work. Fourth, feminism is seen as being especially sensitive to issues of power--who has it and how it is used in relationships. A number of women in the study
said they are more likely to alter their approach to practice based on their analysis of power issues. Social workers who approach everything from a systems perspective are seen as risking harm to clients in certain situations, such as domestic violence, where the inequality of power may preclude women and men from dealing with issues in a productive way. Feminist practice is viewed as actively working toward reducing the power differentials between men and women. Fifth, feminism is seen as more clearly pointing out the affects of oppression and helping people work "a process of recovery" from all kinds of oppressions. Finally, while feminists and social workers are viewed as having concern for all people, two of the participants expressed fear that feminists who advocate for women above all else run the risk of excluding "half the population," or pushing women in ways they do not want to go.
Feminist Values and Beliefs in Practice

Feminism and social work were identified as being conceptually congruent by most of the women in the study; however, their major criticism of current social work practice was that it does not seem to be living up to its ideals. In order to gain a better understanding of the core values which distinguish feminist social work practice, the women were asked to talk about their values and beliefs, and to discuss how they attempt to make these values and beliefs explicit in their practice.

The women were first asked to respond to this question: There are a number of ideological themes in feminism such as—the personal is political, empowerment, consciousness raising, valuing process as important as product, praxis, and an end to patriarchy—which of these, or any other themes, are most important to you in your practice? This was followed by two additional questions: What is the importance of your values and beliefs in your practice? and, Do you attempt to make these values and beliefs an explicit part of your approach to practice?

Lucy responded to the first question in this way:

If you don't really understand those themes, then you become as ineffective as any other system, like social work. It's often that the clients coming into shelter are so needy....where you have so much poverty, and so many people on drugs, the issues really become a little different. The empowerment stuff I did to help people take charge of their life, you've got to start a whole different place here. So
we've got to become policewomen to police the shelters, to keep the crack and the alcohol and the stealing out of the shelters, which is really when you have to become authoritarian policemen. I mean it didn't feel very empowering! It's like starting where they are and moving with them in a different way.

What Lucy brings out in this exchange is the reality that, while her core values and beliefs may remain constant, her ability to put those values and beliefs into practice is significantly influenced by the context of that practice. In her case, coming from a small suburban shelter to a large inner-city program was a major change which required her to think and act in ways that were sometimes new and not always comfortable for her.

The importance of her values and beliefs in practice are, in her words: "Very, very. I mean it is who I am, and who I am is what I take into that counseling session. And so, I better get real clear about who I am. And I better understand who I'm not."

Besides empowerment, process, and the personal is political, which Lucy selected as the central themes in her practice, a number of additional themes emerged in our conversation. First, Lucy is constantly challenging herself to learn new theories and techniques, and her integration of this knowledge is shaped by her practice experience, in other words, praxis. The following passage depicts this theory-practice interaction:
I'm trying to learn new stuff right now, and integrate it, and it's real hard. I try to apply it everywhere, and it just doesn't fit. So you have to know what fits when and where. It's been a real interesting dilemma for me. After a weekend at the (training institute)...I've got all that in my head and I've got to attend to it.

I found that I was doing way too much in the session. Often our clients here aren't as motivated, but in (the training institute) I didn't have to do that. When I was sitting on the edge of my chair using all that energy, they didn't need it, and so all of my critiquing was that I was doing too much of the work. Let the clients do more work so that I could be empowering them. So, I'm thinking, 'Empowerment, that's my thing. Maybe I should be doing that all the time.' That Monday I came in and I'm sitting back in my chair with my clients and they were getting really 'pissed' at me because my energy was real different. They were really angry at me. So, it set off a whole different dynamic that week, but they hung in there with me...until I kind of got it.

In this example, Lucy shows intentionality in what she brings into her practice—her approach to practice is influenced by her new learning. When she tries to integrate this learning into practice, she gauges its usefulness by the feedback she receives from clients, and she can then alter her actions in some way to increase the efficacy of the new learning in practice.

According to Lucy, her level of awareness tends to be higher when she is doing new learning and is paying attention to the affect this has on clients. This suggests that her awareness of how she is applying her values and beliefs in practice can change, coming in and out of focus as different stimuli trigger new thoughts and
reactions.

Another value which is important to Lucy is paying attention to her intuition or, in feminist terms, "validating the nonrational." Lucy believes this is "real feminist process," and gave an example of how it works for her:

Part of my training at the institute is attending to my self and reporting that out, so that often it's just paying attention to what's going on in my body, and how that comes up then in a metaphor or whatever, and whether it means something to the client as I report it out. And it's amazing how it works—the intuitive stuff.

I visualize stuff and so it's like I'll have a picture or I'll have a song coming up from childhood, and I'll wonder, "What the hell is that coming up for me right now? And it's right on target. It's like, Oh, my God! Sometimes it seems if I stand out of my own way, that my unconscious connects with that client, and more happens than if I'm trying to make it happen.

These experiences admittedly feel "kind of weird" to her at times, but she believes this creative use of intuition is largely coming from the "inner child...(and) connecting with that in a different way." In fact, she said her use of intuition is so ingrained that she sometimes loses sight of it—it goes "out of focus". She is now trying to use her intuition in a more conscious way.

Obviously, Lucy's values and beliefs are critical to her ability to practice, but how she manages to make them an explicit part of her practice approach is depicted in
this passage:

I always speak to the fact that I believe relationships should be more equal. That's my belief system and I talk about how I wasn't aware how important that value was to me...and I'll share a piece of my story. I'll say, 'Maybe you're not aware of where you came from and what you believe about that, or are you? And maybe you've bought into your parent's ideas, or the culture's ideas about a traditional relationship...and just what are yours?' I'll share mine and engage them in theirs...not imposing it, but inviting them to look at it and become aware of where they are.

Tobi is the lightening rod of her organization. She likes to spark new ideas and "stir things up." She has a passion for learning new things, which she uses to raise the consciousness of others. She described how she does this:

I just say things how I think it is. I'll always stir things up. Like if things are getting boring, I'll say, 'Tobi, start talking about something,' because I'm always reading about something so I'll always get crazy about it. It could be one thing one month, one thing the next month...it's always some feminist issue, but I get worked up about it. Like when I was reading that classism stuff, I'd just get so worked up about it, and I keep worked up about it, so I just bring people's awareness to that...

Tobi agreed that all of the ideological themes brought up in this question were important to her. The value which is most important to her is process, as she explained in this passage:

I see the importance of process in my life. One day I was reading some feminism stuff, and in the same day I read 'the means is the end'. It was like, Oh God! Yeah, that is so important. You know, valuing the process. So, I've created for myself some groups that I'm involved in that are all process groups.
Before, I would resist process so much because it was hard—the process of getting somewhere is so hard for me. So, that's quite a change that I would value that.

As the clinical director of her agency, she also espouses the importance of inclusiveness and valuing diversity. She takes a firm position on how her employees should put these values into practice:

The (theme of) unity through diversity...the inclusiveness of it, the accepting people for what they are. I insist that we bring people into the shelters. Students come in and they're welcome, and people come in and they're welcome, and those women in the shelter better tolerate new people coming in. Whenever I hear that people have been there too long and they're being judgmental about the women who are coming in, we have a meeting. (We) don't tolerate being mean to women who come in and their hair is pulled out, and they don't have clothes, and they are dirty. We really don't tolerate it, absolutely not. So...including people. And if people have an opinion, no matter how much education they have, no matter who they are, their opinion is worth something.

She also takes valuing diversity very seriously in her hiring practices, noting that she looks "beneath the surface" at "who you are really hiring and what are their values." Many of the people she hires are battered women, and she works with them in the way she hopes they will work with others. She models the respect and valuing of differences she sees as critical to the work they do.

Tobi believes the personal is political, and she is political in her practice. Because she is an outspoken
activist, she feels people have come to expect her to present herself in a certain way. She gave this example:

My executive director always says, 'Say it this way,' and I say, 'Well, they know me and they don't expect me to say it that way,' or, 'They want me to be on this board because of how I am, not just because I work here, but they like what they see, they like my politics.' That's why people want me to be part of this and that. That's why they call me for this meeting, because of who I am. And everything doesn't have to be all nice and sweet. And I don't have to wear high heels, and I'm not gonna, because you can't run fast in them...

When asked to identify the importance of her values and beliefs in practice, Tobi responded:

It makes it possible to come to work. So, that's basically it. If I didn't have values and beliefs, I couldn't come to work. I couldn't do this work if I didn't think ending violence in women's lives was important--if I didn't think it was a women's issue. And showing children another way to be. So, I think it's very important to have that, it makes you be who you are....And I think you can just go along day-to-day and not have any motivation for anything, or not have any strong feelings for anything. It would be hard to live. You'd be depressed.

An example of how she attempts to make her values an explicit part of her practice is illuminated by this discussion of her hiring process and how she involves staff in decision-making:

(In) the first part of the interview I go through all the resumes. I only interview people with something in common with the agency....So, I screen them that way. Then I call people back and do a little bit of interview on the phone. I bring in about ten to fifteen women.
The whole interview is group. I give them five questions they have to answer in the group. I want to see how they can speak, what they feel free to talk about. I just want to see how they present themselves and talk to each other....I observe that for about an hour and then I give them small group exercises, where I split the big group in half, and the exercise is totally laden with oppressions. There are ten women on (a) list, and they have to decide as a group who they're not going to bring into the shelter.

I have my student and advocate listen to every joke they make, everything they say, and if they say--I'm not kidding you--one racist remark, one homophobic remark, one any kind of remark, they don't come to work. I watch their process. I watch if they control the group, and I go back and forth between the groups because I don't want to miss anything. It's totally how I make my decision.

When the group interview is over, Tobi meets with the staff who were present and they pick three women to come back for a second interview. The staff is also present for this interview. After candidates complete the interview process, the staff decides who they liked, what they liked about each person, and who they can work with. Tobi finds by the time the new person is on board, "My staff love them. They're on board before they walk in the door." By using this procedure, Tobi can design questions and scenarios which will challenge the values and beliefs of potential employees. She also reinforces the idea of the process being as important as the outcome because staff feel involved in decision-making.

Dorothy is most concerned about process and
reconceptualizing power as important ideological themes in her practice. She has made a deliberate choice not to work in hierarchical systems because she does not think they are responsive to human needs, as she described here:

I think one of the reasons it's hard for me, and I'm not working in a system like the mental health system, is part of the process stuff. It just drives me wild when human service systems are so dehumanizing and don't include the personal values of the worker to enhance the workplace, and the work performance, and the self-esteem of the worker. I want to keep personalizing it and saying, 'It's me, I can't get along with systems,' but I just can't. It drives me wild! So, obviously I'm not working in a system right now because I feel they could use good feminist kinds of processes.

Dorothy believes people at all levels within an organization should have a voice in the issues affecting their work. The reason for some of her dissatisfaction in working in hierarchical structures is further highlighted in this passage:

When I worked in the mental health center--I'm not a union person, but I wanted to be. Just to start holding the administration accountable to have to listen to what the job is really like on the firing line. I think that's always been a value of mine, having people have input and the nonhierarchical kind of way of coming to what we're about. It drives me wild when I run up against it. It doesn't have to be men doing it either. It's not a gender issue--it's the structure.

Dorothy, like Georgia, voices concern that agency structure "takes on a life of its own" and people, almost without thinking, assimilate the values of their
organization. Those who dare to challenge the status quo, she believes, sometimes end up being labeled as "the problem". She said:

It's the hierarchical structure—who is in charge and how we want to see it. And, if you want to debate it, or have a disagreement, or say it isn't working this way, let's look at it differently, you almost become the problem. Instead of it being more of a collective—let's sit down and see what is really going on—and enhance the workplace as part of our human situation.

Dorothy's belief in the importance of her values in practice echoes the sentiments of Lucy and Tobi. She had this to say about the difficulty she has in separating her feminist values from her identity:

I don't know how to separate them...it's very important. I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing, I wouldn't be working with the population I'm working with...I'm really committed to working with what I feel are some of the disenfranchised. That's why I live in an integrated neighborhood instead of somewhere else. I don't know how to separate it, you know what I'm saying? This is where I said it was hard to see things—to step back from myself and look at it, and be able to define it. So, I guess my values and beliefs are very important to me.

Dorothy does try to make her values and beliefs an explicit part of her practice, as shown in the following exchange:

Dorothy: I don't know how much I say it out loud to my clients about my feminist approach, but I do have a real investment in their own empowerment, in their own individual issues, their nonstereotypical choices if they want to do that. Supporting them, with the societal constraints to work toward keeping stereotypical type stuff going, and helping them deal
with that.

Interviewer: Do you approach that explicitly? Do you lay it out for your people if they aren't able to articulate that's what it is?

Dorothy: I think so. Sometimes it's real clear that it's a woman's issue, and I'll say it as such. 'Sometimes that as women it's like this...' So I do bring it out when it's appropriate. Or, 'Sometimes as women we've been taught...' And they can think, 'Oh, yeah, we have been taught that as women...' So, I kind of use it that way in counseling.

Another way she tries to integrate her value of working with the disenfranchised is by offering a sliding fee scale to people who do not have high incomes or insurance to pay for therapy.

In Joan's practice, the themes of consciousness raising, process, and empowerment are the most salient. As an example, she does educational programming for adolescents on date rape, where she attempts to challenge attitudes and beliefs. She described how students respond to the consciousness raising exercise:

(It) plays out with the largest numbers when I do my talks at the schools because I'm challenging the male belief, and I'm challenging the female belief about themselves. I talk about a scenario where a girl is raped by a boy. What the kids tend to focus on is what she should have done differently. And we take a look at why are we focusing on her. She said 'No', why didn't he listen? 'Well, she doesn't always mean 'no'. ' And the boys are allowed to interpret. I try to challenge the way a boy is looking at a girl. And the way a girl is viewing herself as, 'Well, I really don't have to take myself seriously either. I said 'no,' but I really went along with it, so I guess it's Ok.' So I try to challenge it that way.
One way Joan tries to integrate her values of process and empowerment in practice is by teaching women how to be assertive. She spoke of how some women respond to their new-found assertiveness:

Once women understand what being assertive is and how they can do that...they tend to buy into it and are amazed. They usually come back and say, 'I can't believe (it). I did what you said.' And they still can't believe that somebody heard them and they stuck up for themselves. I feel it's helping people learn how to manage conflict with others, how to manage getting their needs met and not feel they are shorting someone else. The only way they can learn it is by going out and practicing, and that's what I try to help them learn.

The importance Joan places on her values and beliefs is depicted in the following passage:

I would say they are highly important. They are the things I consider when I work with a person. I don't know if it's because when I look at my clients it's through a feminist eye, but I just see a lot of oppression of women and girls in the family. I see women who undervalue themselves. It's sort of like sex abuse. They used to say, 'If you don't look for it you won't find it.' Well, I look for this stuff, and I do find it.

While Joan puts a high priority on supporting women and identifying the issues which have an impact on them, she is also careful not to discount the ways in which men are affected by their experiences. Of this she said:

I really try not to go the other way where we're going to create aggressive, inappropriate women. I feel men have their own issues where they feel they have to achieve, and they feel driven. But I think the basis for them comes from different areas. So I try to remain sensitive to the male struggle as well,
and the issues he has in the family. But I think my work with families is around helping people feel empowered and validated as people.

When Dee was asked to respond to the ideological themes which were important to her in practice, she laughed and said:

You know, it feels a little bit like (being asked), 'What's it like to have skin on your arm?' Because if I just step back and look, those values feel like they are a lot a part of me. I value empowerment. I value self-expression, that kind of freedom of expression, being free to say what you want to say, rather than what you should say—that's a strong value of mine....It's hard for me to imagine being a social worker and not being a feminist.

We spoke of how the literature suggests that feminism and social work are synonymous, with one exception being that feminists are seen as explicitly applying their values in practice. Dee expressed her view of this:

When I was getting my basic social work training they were trying to help us be value free. I guess it's important for me that I own my values, that I make them explicit. When I talk to people I say, 'I'm talking to you right now as Dee, I'm talking to you as a feminist. If you saw a reaction on my face, it's because something you said bumped up against something I'm morally opposed to.' I try to own my values...just to be more explicit with them rather than being this blank screen. But I guess there are social workers who really do try to be invisible in a sense—an authority, but invisible. Yes, being explicit with one's values. I forgot that people didn't do that.

Dee states her values and beliefs are so intertwined with her identity as a lesbian-affirmative, feminist social
worker/therapist that they often remain out of her focus. Currently, her incorporation of multicultural and class issues is more focal in her thinking:

There are parts of it that I think about consciously. I'm really starting to look at multicultural and class issues a lot more than I did before. I feel like I'm adding more depth to what I can appreciate about people's experiences. I've worked with a lot of people of color in my practice, and talked with them a lot about what it's like for me to be a white, middle-class woman, and I'm also a lesbian. But being a lesbian doesn't make me a person of color--I can hide. I can not mention it if I want.

Dee gave the following example to show how she integrates her values into practice:

When I am working with couples--they may be a mixed-race, mixed-class couple--we will explore that as having an impact on what is going on in the relationship.

There are class differences in how you express conflict, how you express opinions. A middle-class African-American woman may have more in common with a middle-class white woman than she would with a lower-class black woman. I'll work with people on that in couples and in individual therapy, appreciating that some of the differences they are experiencing are bigger than, 'Oh, I don't know how to have a good relationship.' Unuh! There's some larger issues here--ways that you have been acculturated or oppressed or whatever words you use, to help them get an appreciation instead of blaming themselves. There are larger systems at work here.

Georgia defined the theme of empowerment as being central to her approach to practice. She elaborated on the meaning of empowerment:

I think the whole thing of empowerment is really the crux to me. It's respect for the integrity of the
individual and, therefore, they learn to be able to respect themselves with whatever they come with. And how to maximize their potential and their capabilities....And that's respect for yourself as well as others.

Georgia described the social work process as analogous to "being on a journey" with her clients, and she spoke of the values she holds in this context:

I feel like we are mutual journeyers. I may know some things more than they do, and they have hired me to share with them and help them learn. I work very hard not to take a hierarchical stance, even though sometimes it's attributed. Part of what I do is I recognize in the people I work with their expertise. As dysfunctional as they may feel, there are still things that they are very good at. I feel like it is a real sharing and cooperative journey, and I share that with them along the way. There are times when I share things about myself and my own life, not to burden them, but to let them know, 'There's not a whole lot of difference between you and me, I just learned some lessons a little bit sooner, or a little bit differently.' I find that goes back to empowerment and respect, and in some ways what I feel like I'm doing is passing along what has been given to me.

Georgia's response was followed by this question, Do you explicitly state that to people--'I don't have all the answers, don't give up your power to me'? She replied:

As a matter of fact, in my office I have a broken magic wand. That was an image I used many years ago. I would tell my students, 'My magic wand is broken, we have to roll up our sleeves and muck around together.' And then about ten years ago, I went into the store and there was this broken magic wand! And I got so excited, and the lady said, 'No, here's one that isn't broken,' and I said, 'No, you don't understand, I want the broken one.' And the two pieces hang up on my wall. People come and say, 'Why is that there?' And I say, 'To keep us both humble.'
This is a hard-working process that we both have to muck through.' So yeah, I tell them up front.

Georgia's efforts to take a nonhierarchical stance in the therapeutic relationship have to do with her valuing empowerment and her ability to reconceptualize and share power as she makes her "journey" with her clients. She said:

I kind of make the analogy of The Secret Garden. What I'm doing is helping them to find the door that's overgrown and they don't know where the key is but the doors are there. I'm just helping them to find them and cultivate the garden that's inside, but the soil is already there, the stuff is already growing, they've just lost track of it.

So, there's a respectfulness, and a responsibility that I don't take for them. It's not to say that there aren't feelings there, but they are between two human beings who are working together and are on a journey together, that developed. So my clients are in fact teaching me things that I need to learn as they are learning what it is they need to learn. And so, when I thank them, I am truly thanking them for being there for my journey as well as inviting me to join them on theirs. Because it is a very special place to be with people.

Another value Georgia brings into practice is creativity, which she defines as "...being silly. It means challenging my clients to think about things that may or may not be acceptable—but try it! What the hell! Go outside the lines, see what it's like." Creativity also includes learning to value intuition. She gave this example of how she uses non-traditional and intuitive approaches in practice:
A lot of people are on a very spiritual bent, and I don't mean that religiously. (They) use all kinds of resources. This one woman I was working with was having a knee operation. (She) had been a real jock, and (was) losing her identity because she can't do any of that stuff anymore. And she was on her umpteenth knee operation and had been to a healer who said he couldn't work with her because she had metal in her knee--the pin was ejecting itself. So I said to her, 'You know in Native American tradition they carry what they call medicine bags and keep important things in them, and I wonder if you can make sure you get that pin back.' Well, she looked at me and proceeded to take four medicine bags out of the bag she carries around and said, 'I don't show these to just anybody, you know.' And I have crystals in my office, and I have things hanging around, but she wasn't going to--you know, if I didn't take the chance of saying something like that....If you're not willing to open that door--not to push it on them, but to see if it's a way they want to go--usually they've been there but they're afraid to bring it up.

Georgia said the importance of her values and beliefs in practice is "to keep me honest, to keep me humble, to keep me focused on what my purpose is in this, which is to help people along their paths." Her values keep her fixed on what is important to her so that she can know and communicate to clients what she can and cannot do in her work with them. Her clarity of purpose and self-honesty allow her "not to have...to serve everybody in every way around everything. All of those things are reminders to me that they give me, and I feel that I give back, so that there really is a circularity of sharing and respect."

Georgia is clear that she applies her values in practice, especially the values of respect, integrity, and
mutuality. She offered an example of how she does this:

In terms of respect, if I make interventions or I say
things people don't like, I'll say, 'Listen, if we're
going down the wrong path, tell me I don't agree, it
doesn't fit, it doesn't ring any bells.' Fine, this
does not ring any bells, I just thought I would give
it a stab. And I do that all the time.

In terms of the empowerment, there are times when
people will say 'I can get really angry.' (I say) 'I
love a good fight, let's go to it! It will be fair,
it'll be fun, it'll be great!' So I am respecting
what people are saying and not being afraid of them
so they don't have to be afraid of themselves.

Barb identified the values and beliefs which are important
to her in practice in this fashion:

I think that I really am a pretty woman-oriented
person, so that I also value things that are feminine
a whole lot, and I think those are the things I
appreciate. In fact, I have to be careful that I
don't undervalue some things that are more
masculine--rational and logical. I don't always
value those things as much as I could. But I do
value those things, and I do use those values, and I
suppose I even encourage those values in terms of the
work I do. And I try to work with women to value
those things in themselves.

I think respect and caring for people, those values
are important to me. It's very important in our
culture now to be as respectful or caring for other
human beings as we can be....It's more concern with
the person as opposed to the product that's
important.

I have a real interest in (the) spiritual. I don't
know if that's more feminist, but (it is) the kind of
spirituality I would see as more feminist-oriented.
I'm studying Native American Indian traditional
things, so certainly, respect for the earth and those
kinds of things which are seen as more feminine—
those are important to me.
Barb believes her values and beliefs are becoming increasingly synonymous with who she is, and she is comfortable with owning her values and making them explicit in her practice, as she discussed in this statement:

When I first started practicing there was an emphasis on not doing that, and I've just gotten very clear that my values do come through, will come through, and I am real clear that they are my values. I don't demand that clients agree with me, but I will speak them.

I am honest with people when I feel that there is something that isn't in keeping with who they are and their own integrity—any kind of violence or abuse, verbal or whatever. I do talk about that with people. Not in a preachy way, but I do speak to it. If somebody tells me they have stolen something, or lied, or been abusive or something, I don't say 'You are a terrible person for doing that,' but I will talk about how it is that they got to that place, and what it is they may need to do in order not to have that happen again. I usually say it in terms of 'It costs you a lot when you do that.' And they know that—people know that. They understand very well that it's costly to themselves. So I do that much more than I used to.

Because Barb views integrity as central to her identity as a woman and feminist, she sees the incorporation of integrity in practice as reflective of her feminist values. She acknowledges that people who are not feminists might approach these issues in similar ways, but to her it is a particularly feminist way of being.
Discussion of Values in Practice

There are a number of values and beliefs which influence how the women in this study approach practice. The predominant themes mentioned by most of the women include: (1) Respecting the integrity and individuality of the client; (2) Empowerment; (3) Reconceptualizing Power; (4) Validating the Nonrational; and (5) Process.

Empowerment includes such activities as pointing out the effects of larger systems on the individual, exploring alternatives, allowing the client to make choices, and leaving responsibility for decisions with the client. To some, empowerment also includes being creative with clients—encouraging freedom of expression by sharing their own stories, or inviting them to "go outside the lines" in a supportively challenging way.

Most of the women are quite sensitive to the inequality of power in the therapeutic relationship, and they work hard to expose and lessen the power differential. The women in this study shared the concerns they have about being seen as all-powerful. Perhaps Georgia's symbolic use of the broken magic wand is the most obvious expression of the humanness of feminist social work practice—there are no magical solutions or omniscient therapists—it takes people "rolling up their sleeves and mucking around together" to do the work. None
of the women wishes to be in an absolute authority position, none pretends to have all the answers. More often than not, the women in this study struggle with the inherent power given to them in their role as therapist. Perhaps Barb said it most succinctly, "The more you do this kind of work, the more you get out of even wanting to be the authority because you understand there's so much to learn about life..."

Several of the women speak of using intuition and spirituality in their practice, however, spirituality is defined in a broad and not necessarily religious sense by all of them. Tobi views her spirituality as an integral part of her growth process—how she is. Georgia speaks of her intuition as creativity which allows her to open up areas in treatment which might otherwise remain obscure. Lucy speaks of connecting with her inner child and using what comes from inside her to reach her clients. Barb speaks of encouraging her clients to incorporate meditation and spirituality in their inner work. In this regard, each woman seems to feel comfortable using aspects of herself which have yet to be validated by or incorporated into traditional social work practice.

All of the women speak of the value of process. There is a real sense of connecting with clients and traveling with them on their journey—not as the navigator
of the journey, but as a fellow traveller.

The importance of feminist values and beliefs in practice appears to be inextricably intertwined with the identity of the majority of the women in this study. Lucy, Tobi, Dorothy, Dee, and Barb spoke of their values and beliefs as being synonymous with who they are, and also difficult to separate out because their values are so central to their identification as feminist social workers. Joan and Georgia consider their values and beliefs to be an essential prerequisite to the work they do, in that they provide a lens—a way looking at and bringing focus to their work. In fact, for most of the women there is an acknowledgement that they could not do the work they do without their feminist values and beliefs.

It seems clear from individual statements that these women attempt to explicitly apply their beliefs and values in practice, as illustrated in the examples they provided. Many of them clearly articulate their feminist perspectives with their clients. Most are clear that they are not value-neutral—they "own" their values and specifically share them with their clients. They are equally clear that they try not to impose their values on clients.

Values and beliefs may get expressed in less obvious
ways. For example, Tobi integrates her values into her hiring process. She also incorporates her values into the standards and expectations she has for her staff. Additionally, values appear to influence the chosen context of practice for all of these women, in that they have sought environments which allow them to practice from their feminist perspectives with minimal interference.

**Barriers to Practicing from a Feminist Perspective**

Many of the women initially had difficulty coming up with barriers or obstacles to practicing from a feminist perspective. For those in private practice, there appear to be few external barriers. With little prompting, however, they were able to think back on their experiences in social service agencies and identify barriers to the integration of their feminism in practice.

For Lucy, "who is in charge makes a difference. If the director and your supervisor don't understand feminism in the same way you do, then you are forced to do things in a certain way. That's restricting too."

Another organizational barrier experienced by Lucy was a lack of open debate and freedom of expression which led to divisions among staff. As an example, she spoke of the dissensions which existed in her own agency when the
decision was made to begin service provision to men:

Sometimes people get punished for what they believe and think. Even in our shelters when we were making changes and so many of the radical feminists were upset, if I had been in charge of the world I would have allowed an arena for that all to be out in the open. Instead it had to go underground. Then it became an abscess that festered. (It) still lingers, that sickness and division among us. I think that if a leader is aware of the significance of all those different points of view, then they allow for it and allow it to be in the open, and provide for debate. It's healthy for the whole organization. The radical feminists have helped me get clear. I like that fight and the energy. I would never want them to go underground.

Her tactic for dealing with conflict is to "speak to it." She added "if they don't get it when I speak to it, I just have to watch the consequences. And I know they are coming before they happen. I need to say that's my intuition, but that's a reality."

Tobi had a similar response to the question of barriers in practice. She said:

There's a hierarchy here. That's an obstacle—that I have to ask permission to do certain things that are not in my realm instead of just doing it. And things aren't consensus. Like in a management meeting, a lot of things the executive director just decides, and I don't think that one person should just decide things for a whole agency. I think when important decisions are made you should ask the people above you and below you, you don't just ask the board. You ask the board and the staff, and you don't just ask your next line staff, but you ask the next line, and the next line, and ask for feedback from everybody.

For Dorothy, the structure of systems is a barrier which has caused her to avoid dealing with systems whenever
possible. These are some of the barriers she found:

Some of the structure. (And) in the mental health center, even the men you might think are enlightened in peer groups never got it. We had (these) educated, enlightened, therapy-oriented men—especially—who would make sexist jokes, sexist comments, knowing they were just to 'get our goats' and get a rise. And... (he) would start blaming us for being too sensitive. 'It's just a joke, lighten up!' So I thought, if this is going to be the work environment, if these are going to be the people making decisions... It's just so pervasive, it wears you out.

Joan views barriers as emanating more from internal than external sources. She spoke of her own internal dilemma:

I think in the beginning it was my own barrier. It was my own apprehension about being a whole person that was my barrier. I always wanted to help all individuals become more whole. But when I looked at it in terms of feminism, I would catch my breath. And I would do it without really fully buying into it myself. I associated myself as my own barrier.

Joan is fortunate to work in an organization which is supportive of her feminist approach to practice. When asked if her board was explicitly supportive of a feminist approach, or just unaware of particular perspectives, she responded in this way:

I think they are not as aware of the nitty-gritty of our work. If they were, we would probably get some questions about it. I don't know. We tend to have a board that so far has appeared to view everybody as equal and we don't have any problems. I don't sense any 'macho' attitudes that are real prevalent, though I know there are biases. For example, we've never had a female for a board president... I think that's a standard thing—men are at the top. But I don't think they really care (about practice). They don't get involved at that level.
Dee does not feel she has many barriers to deal with currently because she is in private practice. Upon further reflection, however, she had this to say:

I don't feel that I've had external barriers. It's a pretty powerful thing to be self-employed. It's between me and the insurance company basically. As a feminist, I don't know if this is a barrier, I struggle with the power I've been given in diagnosing people--and I have to do it for them to be able to use their health insurance. Now, I've not actively been an activist in refusing to do that.

Internally, it's more how as a feminist I can charge so much money. You know, it's a struggle. It's not a barrier. I've read articles by other feminist therapists about dealing with money in therapy to get better grounded, because it's very awkward. In a sense it's good modeling to say, 'I believe I'm worth this, and I'll talk with you about this, but I want you to see a woman who believes she has some worth, and one way that is expressed is money. It's not the only way.' So, it's not a barrier, it's more of a struggle. I don't think I've had many barriers.

When I mentioned that some of the other women had discussed barriers which seem inherent in hierarchical organizations, Dee responded:

Yeah, I can say when I was working in a mental health center I hit quite a few barriers. It was more around being a lesbian activist trying to get sexual orientation listed as a thing that was safe for employment. I couldn't make that happen. I don't know if that was my feminist values. That was clearly my pro-gay and lesbian posture, which I'm sure is limiting.

In moving from the profession of social work to psychology, Dee has found herself less likely to take an overtly feminist position in certain settings. She
described this in more detail:

I belong to some psychology societies and, locally, feminism isn't spoken of a lot in the meetings I attend. We just had a wonderful feminist psychologist speak about the battered women's syndrome. She's defended a lot of women who have killed their husbands--batterers. It was very different having her talk. I guess I felt awkward because I felt like I'm the only one in this group who would identify themselves as a feminist or very involved in civil rights. That's a place where, in those types of discussions I sometimes have an internal as well as external barrier. Some of it may be internal because I'm concerned about how I will be received in the group I'm coming into. It's one of the places I can think of where I find myself sitting on the things I want to say.

Dee finds that her feminism and social work values are helping her stay grounded as she moves to a new professional identity. Regarding this she said, "It's a difficult transition and I don't have any idea how I'm going to do it formally or informally. I'm not leaving social work because I am ashamed of it. I think there are some things I can get from being a psychologist that I can't get as a social worker...but it's not shame."

Georgia at first was unable to identify any barriers to integrating her feminism in practice, but she later recounted that she had once worked in a psychodynamically oriented setting where her supervisor told her she talked too much and asked too many questions. She described the limitations she found in that setting:

You couldn't be as interactive. And not being honest with people, not being able to share who you are.
...This whole thing about dual relationships. I think women have a foot up in terms of that because I find I'm much more able to be affectionate with clients—I just happen to be that way. It's much easier for me to do it I think than it would be for a man.

Another aspect of the work which Georgia finds challenging is "dealing hierarchically with other male professionals, with psychiatrists and psychologists who try and organize you." In her interactions with these professionals she practices what she tries to teach her clients, i.e., "...learning how to take them on in a more subtle way and not go head-to-head with them."

Territoriality was the last barrier to practice Georgia mentioned. She does not feel there is a legitimate reason to be territorial in practice. She said, "We're all in it to help the client get better. I have no sense of territoriality or ownership. My goal is their goal, to help them get what they need to be." She gave an example of how she worked with a client around this issue:

A woman I'm working with has been ritually abused as a child. She's just beginning to have memories and it's very difficult. She's working very hard. I was away for four days, so she called people all over the country and then she hooked up with a therapist in town who's done some work with people who have been ritually abused. She said, 'He was very careful, he was trying to be very ethical because I told him I was working with you, and I'm very attached to you.' And I said, 'You know what? I think it's wonderful that you are taking care of yourself. If you want to work with him, more power to you. I'm not kicking
you out, I'm not telling you don't come back. You're doing now what you couldn't do when you were being abused. You're deciding what feels good for you and what is going to be helpful to you. Don't worry that you're getting kicked out and don't worry that you are changing. Your job now is to get yourself taken care of.

Barb said she has not encountered any barriers to integrating her feminist values in private practice. The fact that clients may not agree with her is not a barrier. In her agency practice she believes she has been able to use her feminist perspectives to a great extent, although she acknowledged that within organizations "there are...things that I sometimes feel (are) counter to a humanist approach in terms of dealing with clients..." She added that when she worked in agency administration she found herself "always running into some conflict. It was mainly around treatment of employees or that kind of thing." However, when speaking of her own private practice and out-patient counseling experience, Barb feels she has had freedom to use her feminist perspectives. She explained why she felt this way:

You have to understand that when you do counseling practice it is very autonomous. So that what you do behind closed doors...you can be very feminist and you can even talk about it in your records. I don't think there's any barriers within agencies to do that if you are doing out-patient counseling. Maybe if you are doing in-patient work and you are working with a team, you might be butting up against other team members who are not saying the same things as you are saying. But, if you do out-patient practice, you're very autonomous.
Discussion of Barriers

Two kinds of barriers, internal and external, were identified by the participants. Joan and Dee were the only women who said they had experienced internal, as well as external barriers to practicing from a feminist perspective. For Joan, fear of the power the women's movement was saying she should have, as well as the apprehension she had about becoming a "whole person," kept her from fully owning that she was a feminist until she discovered that the power she was afraid to take did not destroy her. She likes the power she has developed because it makes her feel "safer and more in charge and less vulnerable." In fact, once she understood what having power meant in her life, she wanted to help other women develop their own power, so that they too could also become "fully developed people." Dee spoke of her internal struggle with the power she has in the therapeutic relationship in terms of the discomfort she has in putting diagnostic labels on clients. Additionally, Dee is conflicted about the amount of money she charges for services. Some of this has to do with her perception of her own worth, and from what she said, it appears that she will continue to struggle with this issue for a while longer.

For those women in private practice, which includes
everyone but Lucy and Tobi, there currently are very few identified external barriers. However, for the women who have worked in bureaucratic and hierarchical structures, barriers and obstacles were not hard to pinpoint. Their responses included a number of external barriers which were collapsed into several broad categories, including:

1. **People**—specific managers, supervisors, and fellow workers who do not understand or appreciate feminism in the same way as the practitioner;
2. **Sexism**, including institutionalized sexism, as well sexist attitudes held by others in the workplace;
3. **Leadership styles**, especially "male management styles" which are seen as stifling freedom of expression and participation by individuals at all levels;
4. **Hierarchy**, or those kinds of structures which do not involve people at all levels in decisions which directly affect them;
5. **Context**, including agencies, organizations, or other situations which may or may not be supportive or accepting of feminism; and,
6. **Value conflicts**, which includes attitudes, policies or requirements which are antithetical to some feminists' values, for example, diagnostic labeling and territoriality.

In summary, the women in this study identified a number of internal and external barriers to practicing from a feminist perspective. While all of the women have
worked at one time or another in agencies which were not supportive of their feminism, each is currently employed in a setting where she feels relatively free to integrate her feminism in practice with little or no outside interference.

The Meaning of Practicing from a Feminist Perspective

Assumption III stated that any attempt to understand feminist social work practice must consider the meaning of the experience from the practitioner's point of view. In a phenomenological inquiry, the question being asked is "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (Patton, 1990). Thus, in an attempt to comprehend the essence of feminist social work practice, the last question in the Research Interview Guide was: "Looking back on all you have told me about how your feminism influences your practice, I would like to close this interview by having you talk about the meaning of your experience of practicing from a feminist perspective."

Lucy explained what her feminism means to her in this statement:

It's who I am. That's my passion, that's my heart, that's my way of being. It's validated who I am... in a way that I wouldn't have been validated in the culture at large. I mean, the radical feminists
paved the way for me to decide if I wanted to wear a
bra or not, or to wear deodorant, or shave my legs or
not. So then it could be more choiceful to me. So
even though I made different choices (from) them as
to even who my partner of choice would be, they paved
the way so it could feel choiceful. And I don't
think that anywhere else it would have felt as
choiceful. It made it Ok for me to be angry. It
made it Ok for me to want to be political. And it
provided an arena for me to be political and to come
into my own.

Tobi shared similar feelings about the meaning of feminism
in her practice. She went into more depth in this
exchange:

Tobi: It's very, very important to me. I couldn't
practice without it. That's why I'm not a teacher or
could never do another career or I would never go
somewhere else where I couldn't have my philosophy
and my way of life. I couldn't go.

Interviewer: Your feminism is a way of life? It's
who you are?

Tobi: Right. I've worked hard at becoming this whole
integrated person. I'm absolutely not done, but who
I am is who I am at home, who I am at work, who I am
in my relationships. It's just who I am in whatever
I do.

While Dorothy believes her feminism has helped to preserve
her individuality in practice, she does not feel support
for her feminist perspectives. She elaborated:

I think...when I started twenty years ago there was a
lot of energy and support for it. I think it's
going more isolating. I think there are a few of
us out there, (but) I don't feel the support for it.
I've chosen to go it on my own rather than be part of
a system that's changing. I guess it's made me still
want to keep my individuality more than to go and be
identified with something I can't identify with.
It's probably kept me moving in that direction. I
don't want to have to fight the system. That's where I'm not radical enough to be a social change person. I just want to be able to practice how I want to practice with the beliefs I have and not have to fight the system all the time.

For Joan, feminism means viewing women in a different way and paying attention to their special issues, as she clarified in this statement:

It means that I'm going to be more focused on women's issues. More interested in learning how I can develop their senses of selves and becoming whole human beings. More interested in helping them not to be victims, than getting into being someone who focuses solely on male issues.

In working with men, it also means that I'm going to have that belief I carry about women in my work with them. So that I am looking at their beliefs about women too. And if I find biases, looking at how those can be changed. I would not have done that a year ago, two years ago--I would have just dealt with the presenting issues and not really understood to even look at how they are viewing women. That would not have entered my mind. Now it does.

Dee finds her feminism liberating, both personally and professionally. She shared these views:

For one thing, it means I have more freedom. I'm letting myself out of a certain box I think I was taught to put myself in. For example, being value-free. It's a feeling I have, a certain freedom to express my opinions. To own my opinions. It's very liberating, because I recognize that I have power, and I'm in a hierarchical position above my client. It's not that I'm wanting to be there, but I just plain old am. I know I can't change that.

There are some things that as a feminist I at times try to support myself in. There are times when I do self-disclosing, perhaps of my own struggles. I think I give myself permission to do that kind of disclosing, not because I think that will make the
power differential necessarily equal. I know that can't happen. But I think I give myself permission to use certain interventions that I might not have, in fact, I'm guessing I wouldn't have, before. And I feel as a feminist, because I pay attention to other factors beside the DSM type of axis categories, I have a freedom to help my clients take a look at their lives in a way that is informative for them. We'll talk about the impact of class or victimization--really creating some deep-grooved, bad ways of thinking about themselves. And I think some of those grooves I pay attention to are ones that a traditional therapist might not take a look at...

Georgia also equates her feminism with freedom and empowerment, as she explained in this passage:

It's freeing, it's empowering, it's broadening. I think what it does is it breaks a lot of the bonds of expectation. That it's validating that there's a power and an information and an energy that I'm a part of that feels nurturing and enables me to take some risks that I might not have taken otherwise. I think it's a process, it's not just something that you step into. And...there's a sisterhood that I think is very defining.

And what's interesting to me is how it gets passed along. When we go to temple, the kids will no longer get embarrassed when I either don't say 'he' or I say 'she' for God. And it's like they come to expect it and it's part of their way of thinking. So they are kind of assimilating it without it having to be an indoctrination. I think that's the thing that has been most helpful to me, that I was offended by the indoctrination phase of it...although benefitting from it and feeling that it has become very much a part of who I am, and how I think and what gets passed on. So the thing I think that's important for me is that it's a part of who I am and what I'm passing along, and I think that's the most important thing in terms of a value and an ethic.

Barb believes her feminism gives her the freedom to practice with integrity, which is a core value she brings
to practice. She said:

For me it has to do with integrity. I have to practice in the way that I feel makes some sense. And I try to do that, so I'm a feminist. I need to be able to use that. I can't suppress certain truths I know in order to do my work. I feel real clear about that. I would not do this work and not be able to tell the truth that I would know, whatever that is. Feminism is part of that....I feel a lot of freedom in doing that, and it's very important to me to do that.

Discussion of the Meaning of Feminist Practice

The main phenomenon being discussed by the women in relation to meaning is Feminist Identification (Box 6). This appears to be the core category around which all questions and issues in the study revolve. Two categories comprise the phenomenon of feminist identification. The first is Centrality of Feminism, which has three subcategories:

A. Synthesis: This term was developed by Downing and Rousch (1985) and refers to the integration of personal and feminist values that result in an authentic feminist identity (p. 185). The range in this subcategory is from peripheral to core.

B. Commitment: This refers to the level of commitment to meaningful action included in one's feminist identification. The range in this subcategory is from passive to active.

C. Convergence: This refers to the extent to which an individual's feminist identification is in focus. The range in this subcategory is from seldom to often.
Meaning of Feminist Practice

**Centrality of Feminism:**

A. Synthesis  
B. Commitment  
C. Convergence

**Significance:**

A. Weight  
B. Affirmation  
C. Liberation

Box 6: Meaning of Feminist Practice
The second category is **Significance**, which also has three subcategories:

A. **Weight:** This refers to the measure of importance placed on feminism in one's life. The range in this subcategory is from *not at all* to *very*.

B. **Affirmation:** This refers to the extent to which feminist's believe feminism is integral to their own positive personal and/or professional development. The range in this subcategory is from *not at all* to *very*.

C. **Liberation:** This refers to the extent to which feminist's believe their feminism is empowering, i.e., facilitates personal growth and expression. The range in this subcategory is from *not at all* to *very*.

For most of the women, feminist identification is synonymous with who they are--it is at the core of their personal and professional identity. Lucy, Tobi, Dee, and Georgia expressed this concept in a variety of ways, but the underlying theme was "My feminism expresses who I am". Feminist identification also appears to be a core value for Barb, Dorothy, and Joan, but its meaning was not stated in terms as strong as those expressed by the other women.

The stated level of commitment to meaningful action ranges by individual; however, there is a pervasive sense that each of these women is actively committed to improving the lives of their clients; and, to varying degrees, the broader society through a variety of
approaches. Some will work to empower individuals, some will educate groups of people, some will march for causes, but none of these women will be passive about her commitment to feminism.

In terms of convergence, or the extent to which one's feminist identification is in focus, each woman speaks of having a high level of awareness of her feminism and how it influences practice. This is not to say that awareness is always at a conscious level--several of the women stated that their feminism is so integral to who they are and what they do that, at times, it is out of focus. Perhaps Dee summed it up best when she compared thinking about the importance of her feminist beliefs to being asked what it is like to have skin on your arm--it is so much a part of you that you do not think about it until someone brings it to your attention.

Feminist identification is a substantive issue in the lives of each of these women. Each one spoke of her feminism as being extremely important to her. Tobi, Dorothy, Dee, Georgia, and Barb said their feminism enables them to do the work they do and be who they are in practice. There is a sense of empowerment and freedom--a moving outside of stereotypical constraints which makes these women prize their feminism. For Joan, feminism provides a lens, a way of looking at the world "through a
feminist eye" that allows her to help women discover "their full selves." And while Dorothy does not find a lot of external support for her feminism, she nevertheless sees it as integral to her ability to maintain her identity and to be able to do what she wants to do.

Thus, the meaning of feminism, as depicted by the women in this study, is intertwined with their identities and their world-view. Feminist identification is integral to who they are and how they conduct themselves personally and professionally. For some, it is defining. For others, their feminist identification is still in the process of being defined. For all, there is agreement that, without their feminist identification, they could not be who they are and do what they do in practice.
Summary of Findings

According to Bricker-Jenkins, "Feminist social work practice is as feminist practitioners do; a feminist practitioner is one who defines her- or himself as a feminist" (Bricker-Jenkins, Hooymann & Gottlieb, 1991, p. 4).

This study set out to discover not only what feminist social workers actually do in practice, but also how they manage to integrate their feminism in practice. In an effort to delineate the nature of feminist practice, the three major assumptions undergirding the study were incorporated into the qualitative research questions. In the following pages, the major findings of the study will be summarized and presented as they relate to the underlying assumptions.

Assumption I

The first assumption proposed that the essence of feminist social work practice could be discerned by knowing an individual's theoretical orientation and definition of feminism. To this end, seven feminist social workers provided their definition of feminism, and spoke at length about how their feminist perspectives influence their approach to the social work process. Several findings emerged from their responses to the
research questions related to this assumption.

First, because feminism is self-defining and depicted in different ways by each respondent, any explication of feminist practice must be considered descriptive rather than definitive—there is no one definition of feminism which encompasses the entire range of feminist perspectives. This finding is supported in the literature, as there is general agreement that feminism is not a monolith; rather, there are many different ways to approach practice from a feminist perspective (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Bricker-Jenkins et al., 1991; Nes & Iadicola, 1989). While no singular definition of feminism can encompass the entire range of feminist perspectives, there are a number of emergent themes which incorporate the major ideas provided by the participants.

In general, the women in this study view feminism as a broad perspective, as a way of thinking about or viewing the world which includes consciousness raising through an analysis of the affects of oppression on all people, and which focuses on combatting the affects of oppression through a wide variety of strategies. Additionally, feminism is seen as an integral part of one's approach to practice—a way of being, as opposed to a theory or method which is applied only under certain conditions. Also, while the primary focus of attention in practice may be on
individuals, the feminists in this study always view the individual within larger contexts. Along with this, feminist practitioners look for and place greater emphasis on strengths than deficits, and they are generally averse to using labels which pathologize or place negative connotations on individuals. Finally, while many of the participants in this study believe that politicization is a basic component of feminism, political activism remains a "tenuous link in their approach to practice" (Bricker-Jenkins, 1991). Most of the women in this study are not involved in collective social action. While the majority see feminism as being inherently political, few of them personally identify with those aspects of feminism which require a commitment to collective political activism. Some even view feminist politics as synonymous with radical feminism, and they are reluctant to be associated with the stereotypically extreme positions attributed to radical feminists.

When addressing issues concerning feminism and politics, the respondents most often refer to attending to the political dimensions of individual issues which are presented in clinical practice. Being political is more often described in terms of "quiet" and individual actions they have taken on behalf of some person, or in response to some issue. Finally, it is important to note that
while most of the participants are not involved in collective political activism, this does not mean that they are apolitical. All of the women believe they are political in some respect, but for most of them, their political efforts take place in one-to-one contacts with clients, or in individual expressions of opinions to decision-makers. While none of these women can be viewed as revolutionary, they do speak the truth as they know it in their personal and professional relationships. For those who attempt to paint all feminists with the broad brush of extremism, the women in this study offer a countervailing portrait of feminists as women who pursue change in thoughtful, steady, and often subtle ways. As Blanche Weisen Cook says, "Revolution is a process, not an event" (cited in Bricker-Jenkins et al., 1991, p. 3).

In addition to providing their definition of feminism, the women who participated in this study were asked to choose from the screening tool one theoretical orientation which best represented their feminist perspective, and to discuss the influence of this orientation on their approach to problem identification, assessment, treatment strategies, and treatment goals. For most of the women, this choice seemed almost arbitrary because it appeared that few of them identified with the specific theoretical tenets of liberal, radical, and
socialist feminism as delineated by Nes and Iadicola. For example, Dee put herself in the liberal feminist category because she has a "capitalistic" practice; but, she also has a sensitivity to multicultural and class issues in practice which might indicate a socialist feminist viewpoint. Similarly, Joan and Dorothy placed themselves in the radical feminist category, but neither one advocates for a "movement to combat their oppressors", nor would either one wish to be seen as having the stereotypical and pejorative attributes often associated with radical feminism (Kirst-Ashman, 1992). Thus, at least for the women in this study, it appears that one cannot predict how a feminist will approach the social work process simply by knowing her theoretical orientation.

This finding is also borne out in the analysis of participants' responses to the questions related to this assumption. While many of the women appear to approach the social work process within the broad parameters anticipated by Nes and Iadicola, there seem to be more similarities than differences among them. For example, the women, regardless of theoretical orientation, are sensitive to issues of gender oppression, and they bring this analysis to their practice. However, in analyzing the responses to the questions related to this assumption,
none of the women responded in ways which would indicate that they were making clear distinctions about their approach to practice based upon a particular theoretical orientation. For example, Dee, a liberal feminist, believes that individual therapy is most helpful in preparing clients to enter groups and that groups are more useful than individual treatment in many cases. She also encourages clients to become politically active. According to Nes and Iadicola, this approach straddles the liberal, radical, and socialist feminist positions. Likewise, Joan and Dorothy, radical feminists, did not identify the "personal as political" as being a central value in their approach to practice, nor are they involved in collective political activism. This contradicts Nes and Iadicola's representation of the essential characteristics of radical feminist social work (1989, p. 18).

Since the analysis of the participants' responses shows that feminist practitioners do not fall neatly into one ideal theoretical framework, what can we say about the nature of feminist social work if we know an individual's definition of feminism and theoretical orientation? One conclusion which can be drawn is that feminism and theoretical orientation is suggestive, but not predictive, of how practitioners will approach the social work process
of problem identification, assessment, treatment strategies and treatment goals.

**Assumption II**

The second assumption was primarily concerned with discovering the central values and beliefs of feminist practice, and learning how feminists integrate these beliefs into practice. The literature suggests that feminist social work practice is distinguishable from "good" social work practice by the centrality of its ideology, and a major feature of feminist practice is that the underlying assumptions and values are both applied and made explicit (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986: Wetzel, 1986). These beliefs are supported by the findings of the current study.

Additionally, from the content analysis of the women's responses, a number of characteristics of feminist practice presented in the literature are supported by this study. First, values and beliefs are an essential component of feminist practice. Although the manner of expression varied, virtually every women expressed the belief that her practice begins with herself, and that being and practice are one and the same (Palmer, 1991).

Second, all of the women place a high value on process. Each spoke of her identification with feminism
and the impact this has had on her life and practice. While the women are in various stages of feminist identity development (Downing & Rousch, 1985; McNamara & Rickard, 1989), each speaks of her feminism as a journey which is shared with clients in practice. This journey toward feminist practice is a continually evolving process where new experiences and ideas influence personal understandings and approaches to practice. Feminists see the same issues in their professional and personal lives as they see in their client's lives (Glassman, 1992), and part of feminist practice is making "one's self discovery explicit and public" (Gottlieb, 1991). According to Bricker-Jenkins (1991), the relationship between practitioner and client is rooted in the practitioner's consciousness of their common ground (p. 11); and this concept is best reflected in Georgia's recognition that "the difference between them and us is a very fine line." This ability to share one's self in an attempt to connect with the client is different from mainstream social work practice where, according to Gottlieb, "...it is likely that connections would not be made among the professional's personal evolution...and the work with the client" (1991, p. 59). The feminists in this study are on deliberate journeys of personal growth which they judiciously apply and make explicit in practice. They use
themselves and their life-experiences to guide clients on their own journeys. Because of their conscious efforts to pursue growth and change, the feminist practitioners in this study appear to recognize that they differ from many mainstream social workers. In their efforts to help clients understand the influence of larger systems on their lives, these feminist practitioners expose the patriarchal assumptions and institutional inequalities which impact human lives. Currently, mainstream social work is criticized for failing to make these connections explicit, thereby risking maintenance of the status quo.

Third, the women in this study have a major commitment to empowerment and creating choices for clients. Rather than viewing clients as having deficits, most of the participants approach practice from a strengths perspective (Saleebey, 1992). They look at how clients have been affected by the power disparities and patriarchal assumptions which are embodied in their personal relationships and society at large. Feminist practitioners help their clients recognize these implicit limitations, and explore the various options available to them. Saleebey captures the feminist approach to empowerment in this statement:

...the empowerment agenda is not based on returning power to the people, but on discovering the power within the people (individually and collectively). To discover that power we must subvert and abjure
pejorative labels; provide opportunities for connection to family, institution, and community; assail the victim mindset; forswear paternalism (even in its most benign guises); and trust people's intuitions, accounts, perspectives, and energies. Empowerment is aimed not only at reducing the sense and reality of individual and community powerlessness, but also at helping people discover the considerable power within themselves, their families, and their neighborhoods. (1992, p.8)

In this passage, Saleebey is speaking of ideal values in social work practice. These values have yet to be fully actualized in mainstream social work, but they represent concepts which are fundamental to and currently being realized in the feminist practice described here.

Fourth, feminist practitioners have reformulated the social worker/client relationship. The women in this study see themselves as collaborators with clients, and they avoid attempts to be held up as all-knowing authority figures. They recognize that they have knowledge or experience which might be helpful to clients, but they do not view themselves as "experts" who are in a position to know and tell clients what is best for them. This feminist approach is liberating because it enables practitioners to genuinely connect with clients, and allows clients to be the "experts on their own situation" (Saleebey, 1992). These attempts to equalize power, collaborate, and view clients from a strengths perspective are essential features of feminist practice shared by the
women in this study. According to Bricker-Jenkins, this collaborative approach reinforces the connection between practitioner and clients on the basis of their shared human experiences (1991).

Fifth, in keeping with the hallmarks of feminist social work practice which includes demystifying the professional relationship and encouraging the practitioner's consciousness of their common ground with clients (Gottlieb, 1991), the women in this study do not present themselves as the only teachers in their work with clients. Most participants take the position that clients are teachers and they are learners—clients have a direct impact on their professional thinking. Lucy and Georgia said that they explicitly tell clients that they are learning from them, and show appreciation to their clients for sharing themselves and their knowledge. This is an approach which is seen as infrequent in mainstream social work practice, as most often the "direction goes the other way—our new insights, developed in other arenas, are then applied to professional work with our clients" (Liddie, 1991, p. 131).

Sixth, the context of practice is an important consideration to those wanting to practice from a feminist perspective. Many of the participants have attempted to ensure that they can practice their feminism by setting up
independent practices or by choosing agencies which are not antagonistic toward their feminist perspectives. Barriers to practicing from a feminist perspective are both internal and external, and the women in this study speak of their continual struggle to integrate their feminist values and beliefs into their practice settings. In sum, feminist social work practice is a continually evolving process, and feminist practitioners work to create environments that reflect and reinforce their perspectives in practice (Bricker-Jenkins, 1991).

Finally, the underpinning of all feminist practice is an awareness of, and respect for the "clients' positive attributes and abilities, talents and resources, desires and aspirations" (Saleebey, 1992, p. 6). Feminist practitioners are respectful of the client's experience and of the interpretation of meaning given to these experiences by the clients. The client is regarded as "someone who knows something, who has learned lessons from experience, who has ideas, who has energies of all kinds, and who can do some things quite well" (p. 6). This ability of feminist practitioners to explore the meaning of the client's experience is empowering and healing (Palmer, 1991), and helps both to collegially develop "theories" that guide practice (Goldstein, 1985).
Assumption III

The final assumption held that any attempt to understand feminist social work practice must consider the meaning of the experience from the practitioners’ point of view. Because feminism is largely experiential, the best way to understand how feminists experience their feminism is to encourage them to speak for themselves in their own voices.

For most of the women in this study, feminism is seen as synonymous with who they are and what they bring with them to practice. Feminism is intertwined with their identities— they are who they are because of their feminism, and they are feminists because of who they are. These women continually struggle to grow and change, and as they do, they are able to be there for their clients as they struggle to make decisions about how to live their own lives.

For the women in this study, practicing within a feminist perspective means attempting to live without a hierarchy of status and power, and recognizing the social and political effects of oppression on women and men (Palmer, 1991). Feminist practice allows practitioners the freedom to be authentic with the client, and the opportunity to “be there for others in their quest for authenticity” (Palmer, p. 66). As Georgia said, this
freedom also allows feminist practitioners to cast off bonds of expectation and be creative with clients in exploring personal choices in nontraditional ways.

For many, feminism is a passion which gives meaning and definition to their lives. Broadly speaking, it is a "philosophy, a value constellation, that upholds the freedom of a woman to choose her own life path to self-actualization, to create and inhabit her own dreams of the desirable, to discover and reconcile the consequence of life choices for herself" (Mermelstein, 1991, p. 152).

Summary Statement

As Glassman says, "We cannot go further with clients than we go with ourselves" (1992, p. 165). As we have seen, the feminist practitioners in this study are not satisfied to maintain the status quo. They continue to question and expand their own limits as they pursue personal and professional development. Once they have started on this path of self-exploration and growth, these women are not content to pursue a solitary journey. Instead, they turn around and offer a guiding hand to others who are just beginning journeys of their own.
Limitations of the Study

This was an exploratory qualitative study which attempted to add to our limited understanding of the nature of feminist social work practice by asking feminist practitioners to discuss what they actually do in practice. Seven women of different ages, backgrounds, and theoretical orientations were interviewed, and their responses were analyzed to begin to develop an understanding of the influence of individual feminist values and perspectives on practice.

The study has a number of obvious limitations. First, because of the small sample size, the findings should not be considered generalizable beyond the seven participants. Second, as Tobi pointed out early in the process, the study has a class bias. Because a decision was made to include only women with BSWs or MSWs, feminist social workers without formal degrees were not given the opportunity to participate. Tobi argued, with some conviction, that having a Masters Degree suggests participants had access to resources which social workers with BSWs or no degrees at all may not have had. This is a point well taken. Additionally, there were no women of color in the final sample, although a number of women of color were asked to participate in the study. The incorporation of the "dual perspective" of women of color
could have added depth and richness to the study.

Another limitation which requires comment is the possibility that Tobi's responses were affected as a result of being given two books on feminist practice to read. She stated that she had read *Feminist Visions for Social Work*; however, it is not known how much of the book she covered or to what extent, if any, it influenced her responses to the research questions.

Finally, the conceptual frameworks developed by Nes and Iadicola do not mesh with "real life" approaches to practice, as reflected in the responses of the seven women in this study. There are a number of possible explanations for this. First, the authors admit that the models are "ideal" conceptualizations which would not be agreed upon by all feminists. Second, the participants admittedly did not have an extensive background in and knowledge of feminist theory, and they may have not classified themselves properly. Third, the screening tool may not have accurately captured the essence of the three major perspectives, leading participants to forced choices which did not necessarily represent their particular feminist perspective. While the conceptual models were not found to be predictive of an individual's approach to practice, I found them extremely helpful as a tool to organize my own thinking about the different feminist
perspectives and how they might affect the social work process. Therefore, I see the model as having utility as a heuristic device, if only in the sense of putting forth the major theoretical orientations and implications for practice to spark feminists' critical thinking about their own perspectives and practice approaches.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Come let us walk together--
In gratitude I join your path
For I will never be the same
You have touched me.

(From "Practitioner's Poem", Nancy Palmer, 1991)

Conclusions on the Nature of Feminist Social Work Practice

According to Bricker-Jenkins, "feminist practice is as feminist practitioners do" (1991, p. 4). Although this reductionism sounds simplistic, it speaks to the difficulty of definitively identifying the essence of feminist practice. Each of the seven, self-identified feminist social workers who participated in this study responded to the same questions in a variety of ways. From the analysis of their responses, it can be concluded that there is no one way to practice feminist social work; rather, there are many approaches which have certain commonalities, but also definite differences (Hudson, 1985; Thompson, 1988). The feminist agenda is vast and varied (Thompson, 1988), and there is no singular characterization of feminist social work practice. It has been demonstrated that a number of social workers who
classified themselves as liberal, radical, and socialist feminists had more similarities than differences in their approaches to practice. Further, those differences in practice approaches which did emerge were influenced more by personal values than by theoretical orientation.

In keeping with Bricker-Jenkins' notion that "the principal author of feminist theory is the feminist practitioner" (1991, p. 5), it can be said that the women in this study have developed individualized approaches to practice which are influenced more by their personal experience (dialectic) and values than by formal theory. The concept of praxis—the free creative engagement in the world by the individual, who is changed by the experience and who thereby changes the world (Donovan, 1990)—is an important aspect of feminist practice. Because feminist practice has a phenomenological focus, it incorporates and reflects the perceptions and meanings of the individual's experiences. The experience of practicing from a feminist perspective is described and interpreted, and the interpretation of the experience gives an indication of how the individual makes sense of her world (Patton, 1990). As stated previously, few of the participants have an in-depth knowledge of feminist theory, and they do not necessarily relate theoretical concepts of feminism to what they do in their work with clients. They may not
even know that what they do in practice has a counterpart in feminist theory. Yet, these women from varying backgrounds and experiences have developed and applied feminist practice perspectives in ways that are consonant with much of the feminist literature. On the basis of this study, it appears that feminist practice is driven by the values and beliefs which are part of an individual's feminist identification. It is the value base of the practitioner which is most indicative of how she will approach the social work process. The dialectical process of challenge and change seems to be a major part of the participants' personal growth and evolution as feminists. These women did not learn how to be feminist practitioners in graduate school; rather, they learned to be feminist practitioners by struggling to integrate their feminism into the theories and methods they were already using in practice (Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Hudson, 1985; Rosewater, 1984).

Feminist practice is seen as "an open and dynamic world view. Continual self-scrutiny, challenge, and revision are not only ethical imperatives, but the essence of the practice" (Bricker-Jenkins, 1991, p. 4). The women in this study embody the essence of feminist practice in that they continue to struggle and engage in the dialectical process, and, as they are challenged, they
rethink and revise their approach to practice. Thus, feminist practice is not static—it is an ongoing and evolutionary process where practitioners explicitly share their own experiences and analyses with clients.

Feminist practitioners have been criticized for lacking a coherent theory base from which to practice (Hudson, 1990; Rosewater, 1985). Several authors have suggested that feminist practice is the theory, and that feminist theory comes from practice (Bricker-Jenkins et al., 1991; Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986). The principal author of feminist practice theory is the feminist practitioner (Bricker-Jenkins, 1991). These concepts are supported by the findings of the current study. Not one of the participants claimed to have been taught how to practice from a feminist perspective in her undergraduate or graduate education. Instead, in their efforts to integrate feminism into practice, they have tested the theories and methods they did learn, and they have expanded or revised them to fit with the realities they have experienced in life and in practice.

A major finding of this study is that feminists integrate their values in practice. Feminist values and beliefs are so integral to the identity of practitioners that they cannot be separated out in practice. Feminists also specifically apply their values in practice. They do
this in a variety of ways, but an essential aspect of this approach to practice is an ability to own one's values and to share those values without expecting the client to adopt them as her/his own. A sense of respect for the individual and an appreciation for the client's right to choose permeates feminist practice. Feminist social workers value their clients both as teachers and fellow journeyers. Feminist practitioners strive to be open and honest in their interactions with clients. They do not pretend to have all the answers, nor do they wish to be in the authority position often attributed to them because of their role. Feminist practitioners believe that they may have something to offer the client by way of learning or experience, but they see the client as the expert on her/his own situation.

Feminist practice perspectives are multidimensional, and practitioners recognize that there are many different ways to perceive and interpret reality. Feminist social workers seek to find the meaning of experiences in the terms used by the client, thereby assisting clients in finding and developing their own voice.

For the women in this study, the ability to practice from a feminist perspective is what keeps them in practice. They see their capacity to integrate feminism in practice as both liberating and empowering. Further,
the degree of importance attributed to having this freedom to practice is reflected in their choice of practice settings. Some of the women choose to work within systems, while others try to avoid working in hierarchical and bureaucratic structures. While each setting presents its own challenge to feminist practice, practitioners work to create environments that reflect and reinforce their approach to practice (Bricker-Jenkins, 1991).

Feminism is consonant with the values and ideology of social work. There is both an appreciation for the dignity and worth of the individual, and an awareness of the variety of contexts which influence individual choices. However, feminist practice differs from mainstream social work practice in that there is a conscious awareness of the values and beliefs underlying practice and these underlying assumptions and values are both applied and made explicit.

Saleebey contends that the importance and usefulness of any perspective lies not in some independent measure of its truth, but in how well it serves us in our work with people, how it sustains our values, and how it generates opportunities for clients (and their environments) to change positively (1991, pp. 15-16). The consonance between the expressed values of feminism and social work suggests that social work can indeed be enhanced by
incorporating a feminist perspective

**Implications for Social Work Policy**

The new scholarship on women has pointed out that women have "systematically been omitted in the subject matter, theory, and research of education" (Tomm & Hamilton, 1988, p. 64). Even though by the mid-1970s, over 5000 courses on women were offered and over 300 Women's Studies programs had been established on campuses throughout the United States, feminist scholarship "still occupied the margins of the androcentric academy, reaching only a small audience of students in courses outside the 'mainstream' curriculum" (Aiken, Anderson, Dinnerstein, Lensink & MacCorquodale, 1988, p. xiv). During this period, social work education took preliminary measures to create a gender-inclusive curriculum. The 1977 Council on Social Work Education curriculum policy standard on women was an important step in bringing women's content into the curriculum (Tice, 1990). Additionally, the CSWE Project on Achieving Equity for Women in Social Work Education supports mandatory curriculum content that counters institutional sexism and the inequities, beliefs, and attitudes that result from it (Knight, 1991). In spite of these standards, Abramovitz notes that "there is little to suggest that social work is effective in dealing with
women's perspectives in the curriculum" (cited in Knight, 1991, p. 147). Because education is the primary means through which an individual is socialized into the values, ethics, and perspectives of the social work profession, the apparent lack of content on women in the curricula is of serious concern (Knight, 1991; Minnich, 1990; Ray, Murty, Matison & Tucker, 1990; Tice, 1990). Closely related to the lack of women's content in the curriculum is the paucity of strongly feminist faculty in schools of social work (Knight, 1991). The presence of feminist faculty appears to be a key factor in determining the extent to which women's issues are covered in course content. For the women in this study, there were few academicians to serve as role models for feminist identity development; and fewer—if any—organizational supports to encourage and promote consciousness raising or feminist scholarship. The women in this study clearly stated that they did not learn about feminist theory or practice in their graduate education. Dee was the only participant to get any exposure to feminism in higher education, and that was via an informal discussion group led by a professor who was also a feminist. Unfortunately, when that professor retired, the group also ended because there was no one with a similar commitment to feminist perspectives to keep the group going.
Thus, it appears that if schools of social work desire to incorporate the "new scholarship" on women, they need to make a commitment of resources—especially faculty appointments and clear expectations of time spent on content on women—if there is to be a serious attempt to reduce the gender bias currently existing in a majority of social work programs.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Feminist identity development is believed to be a multi-staged, evolutionary process which is often triggered by the realization of the individual affects of those personal or societal arrangements which promote and perpetuate inequality (Downing & Roush, 1985). While this study did not specifically address how the participants first came to feminism, their responses indicate that feminist identity development is a personal evolutionary process involving conscious struggles to gain awareness and incorporate new understandings into one's personal and professional life. For the women in this study, feminist identity development seems to have been enhanced by exposure to people with similar ideas, as well as work environments which are at least not antithetical to feminist practice perspectives. This suggests that exposure to feminist theory and ideology is a necessary,
but not sufficient, precursor to the development of feminist identity. If schools of social work want to encourage feminist practice, there is a need to provide more than course content on women's issues and feminist theory. For students to grasp the meaning of feminist practice, there likely needs to be a personal epiphany, i.e., an individual understanding of the cornerstone of feminism—"the personal is political". In order to facilitate this development, schools may need to offer consciousness raising groups, as well as creating opportunities for students to become politically active. Schools can also provide role models for feminist practice. Faculty, administrators, field instructors and field placement settings operating from feminist perspectives can be used as resources to provide opportunities for students to learn about and experience feminist social work practice first-hand.

**Personal Reflections and Implications for Further Research**

Phenomenological inquiry is expected to be intersubjective—the researcher both influences and is influenced by the process. Not surprisingly, the process of conceptualizing the question(s) to be asked, doing the research, analyzing the data, and attempting to make sense
of such a vast amount of material has been a journey of discovery and growth for me. I began this study feeling certain that I was a feminist, but also feeling that I was not a "good enough feminist" because I--like the women who participated in the study--was not active in the women's movement, nor did I feel particularly knowledgeable about feminist theory and practice. This dissertation research came out of my own desire to know more about what feminist social workers do, because I wanted to be able to do it too. I was not certain that I could find a committee to support my wanting to do feminist research, and I struggled to find another topic that would be less controversial than feminist social work practice. But nothing was as interesting to me as feminism; and, when I found a committee that was not only supportive, but actually enthusiastic about the topic, there was no reason not to proceed. In the process, I found women who were striving--like I was--to figure out how our feminist perspectives fit with what we were taught to believe about "good" social work practice. I found women who were willing to share their ideas, values, and personal struggles about what they were doing in practice--women who opened up and shared their journeys with me. They have taught me about feminist practice. They have shown me that feminist practice is social work practice at its
best. Feminist practice is a collaborative effort between worker and client. It involves a recognition of our common human experience, and it provides the opportunity to be authentic in the work we do.

The end of this study points out the need for additional studies to further our understanding of feminist social work practice. Several obvious areas of inquiry emerge, including: What do other feminists—men, women of color, and non-degreed social workers—have to say about how they approach the social work process? What are the differences between feminists and "good" social workers in their approach to the social work process? How do feminist social workers who stay in nonfeminist agencies deal with the barriers to practicing from a feminist perspective? Do feminists need to be engaged in political activism in order to be "good" feminist practitioners? In terms of client outcomes, are there clients who will do better with a feminist counselor? Under what conditions will this hold true?

Feminist social work is constantly evolving as its practitioners struggle to give meaning and definition to the work they do. This study has attempted to shed light on how seven feminist practitioners approach the social work process. Hopefully, it will illuminate the path for others who want to join us in our journey.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


