

Learning women's anti-violence work:

A phenomenographic study

By

Margaret M. Alexander

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We accept the thesis as conforming to the required standard

.....
Dr. Alice MacGillivray, Thesis Supervisor

.....
Dr. Cris Sullivan, External Reader/Examiner
Professor, Ecological/Community Psychology,
Associate Chair, Psychology Department, Michigan State University

.....
Jo Axe, Committee Chair
Acting Head of the Malat Program, Royal Roads University

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Abstract

This study explores ways in which workers understand learning in relation to their work. The participants worked in Ontario women's shelters. The research method applied in this study was phenomenography. Eight women's anti-violence workers shared insights through semi-structured interviews. Four qualitatively different ways of understanding learning in anti-violence work emerged from the data. The study suggests that women's anti-violence workers understand their learning as deeply embedded in their work contexts and in the changes they are trying to effect. The scope and focus of these changes varied. The findings of this study could assist in the development of conceptual frameworks for training anti-violence workers. The researcher also suggests that communities of practice may be critical forums for learning, as they are designed for situated workplace learning, and can evolve with changing contexts.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.0 Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore the qualitatively different ways that women working in women's anti-violence organizations conceive of learning in relation to their work. The findings of this study explain aspects of the learning experience from the perspective of the workers which, in turn, will support the development of learning opportunities that meet the needs of this unique group of workers. In this chapter I outline the research problem and explain the reasons this research is important. Following that I describe the limitations and delimitations of this study. In the final sections of the chapter I provide an outline of the structure of the remaining document.

1.1 The Research Problem

Ontario's abused women's shelters are part of the larger North American women's movement and share a rich collective history that includes: political action and engagement; government lobbying; grassroots strategy sessions; organizing protests and marches; and the creation of additional programming for abused women and their children. Organizations that began solely to shelter women have increased in size and scope and now offer a range of community programs in addition to their residential services. Different from many other fields of work, women's anti-violence organizations present a unique combination of service delivery with a gendered analysis of violence against women and involvement with a social movement, in this case the feminist movement, also known as the women's movement. The Assaulted Women and Children's Counsellor Advocate Program [AWCCA] at George Brown College in Toronto is the only program in Canada that addresses the learning needs of these unique organizations (AWCCA, 2011). Historically most women learned their work on the job.

Women's anti-violence work is not standardized or prescriptive in the sense that there is no governing body that sets service standards nor is there a standardized program one must complete in order to enter into the field. Each woman's anti-violence organization is an autonomous entity with its own Board of Directors, sets of policies, mission statement, and mandate as developed by their Board or Board and staff together. There are many different women in leadership roles in the women's anti-violence field and the accompanying social movement, many of which have had different conceptions of this work. Consequently there are differences as well as similarities in the ways women's anti-violence work is interpreted and performed, just as there are many ways of interpreting feminism and performing the work of the feminist movement. It makes sense that the workers themselves have different conceptions of their work, even when they share the same job title.

Women working in anti-violence organizations have an interest in keeping abreast of new ideas, in current issues, and in deepening their practice. According to a report conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, anti-violence organizations generally maintain a professional development allocation in their budget that supports workers to attend various training events and programs. The training budget is usually quite limited, resulting in few formal training opportunities for most staff (Bay Consulting Group [BCG], 2009). Directors and managers of women's anti-violence organizations looking for ways to maximize their professional development budget have to balance several key elements when making their choices, these include but are not limited to: cost including registration; travel; accommodation and backfill for shift workers; covering missing staff for the duration of the training event; content of the material including relevance; choice of staff person or persons that can attend; and the outcome or effect of the training may have on the job performance. Organizations in the

Ontario's remote north most often find themselves unable to access many training opportunities as a great deal of the events take place in the southern parts of the province. Conversely, there are few training opportunities that are developed specifically for women's anti-violence workers; this is especially true of training that incorporates a feminist social movement framework with service provision, even in the southern part of the province. In light of these issues, women's anti-violence organizations have come to identify professional development opportunities as one of their priority needs (BCG, 2009).

Recognizing the limitations and the careful consideration that accompanies decisions about professional development for anti-violence workers, it is critical that materials and training events create learning opportunities that are meaningful to these workers and worth the cost and effort associated with participating. This study aims to better understand what kinds of learning opportunities will be meaningful to women's anti-violence workers by examining how the participants understand their work and their learning to become anti-violence workers.

1.2 Why This Research Is Important

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, or OAITH, is a provincial coalition that was founded by workers from women's shelters in 1977 (OAITH, 2011). The Association's objective is to create social and political change that will benefit abused women and their children. While its primary focus is not training, over the years in response to member requests for learning opportunities, OAITH has developed various training materials for member and non-member anti-violence organizations. The work of OAITH is largely carried out by their Board of Directors and two action committees, the latter members of which are comprised of workers from member organizations.

OAITH identifies funding as an enormous problem for both the Association itself and the member organizations. The Association used to host a spring meeting of representatives from

member organizations that offered both formal and informal training opportunities. They had also provided some financial support to assist members to meet quarterly in their regions. In these meetings there was exchange of information, networking, and building of relationships that encouraged problem solving, planning, and learning from one another (personal communication, Eileen Morrow, OAITH Lobby Coordinator, June 25, 2010). In 1994, OAITH's core funding from the province was eliminated and since that time it has survived through membership registration fees and time-limited project funding from various government ministries, thus reducing its ability to support member organizations in accessing learning opportunities. In 2009 OAITH received time-limited project funding from the Ontario Women's Directorate for the development of new training materials for women's anti-violence organizations. As part of the project OAITH redesigned their website incorporating Web 2.0 tools making their website more interactive for their members. Their hope was that the new tools, consisting of a member's only discussion board, a member's only blog, and web conferencing software, will enable members who are located throughout Ontario to communicate and learn together in a more cost effective way. The tools are designed to maximize access in training (personal communication, Eileen Morrow, OAITH Lobby Coordinator, June 25, 2010).

Knowing that funding for training and materials development is inconsistent, OAITH would like to create a conceptual framework or template that will guide the development of materials and training opportunities for this project and future projects that may unfold, to ensure they are creating training that satisfies the needs of workers (personal communication, Eileen Morrow, OAITH Lobby Coordinator, June 25, 2010).

1.2.1 About The Researcher

In 2010, I was hired under a two-year contract by OAITH to coordinate the above-mentioned training project. My experience as a frontline worker and a manager in the women's

anti-violence field, as a teacher in the AWCCA program, and in developing training materials and workshops for workers contributed to my familiarity with the subject matter and the context within which it applies. My familiarity with the women's movement and women's anti-violence work was beneficial in conducting this research because it allowed me understand the connections between the social movement, the work, and the internal workings of organizations. My relationship to the work and the participants is addressed further in other areas of this document, as my ability to bracket my own conceptions was an issue of validity.

1.2.2 Significance Of The Research

With limited resources and time sensitive funding OAITH proposes to develop a conceptual model or framework for training development for women's anti-violence workers that can be meaningful for a wide range of workers from across the province. The training they have developed thus far has broadly focused on topics that are relevant to the work in a generalized way, but may not have been presented in the various ways that workers conceive of their work. This will limit the meaningfulness of the training from the perception of learners. The findings of this study will result in OAITH having a better understanding of the training needs of their members.

1.3 The Research Question

The aim of this research is to explore qualitatively different ways of understanding aspects of the experience of learning to be a woman's anti-violence worker from the perspective of the worker. My primary research question is: what are the qualitatively different ways that women's anti-violence workers experience aspects of learning their work? I have an additional interest in how women perceive the use of newer computer technology and web 2.0 tools in their learning. To that end I explore significant variation in ways the workers experience:

- A) their work in general;

- B) their identity in relation to their work;
- C) their community in relation to their work and their learning to work;
- D) learning to be anti-violence workers;
- E) their work in relation to the feminist movement; and
- F) computer technology and web 2.0 tools in relation to their learning.

1.4 Structure Of The Report

This report contains five chapters including this one. The second chapter reviews the literature and identifies the areas of interest that guided the research. The third chapter addresses the methodological procedures that were used in this study. Chapter three also presents the theoretical assumptions that were behind the decisions to use this approach. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the data with quotes from the participants to illustrate each finding. The fifth and final chapter discusses the findings in relation to the literature that was reviewed prior to the research and new literature that addresses areas not foreseen prior to the study. Chapter five also identifies areas for further research and concludes with recommendations for a conceptual framework for training women's anti-violence workers.

1.4.1 Terms Used In The Report

There are several terms used in the report that are explained here for the sake of clarity. These terms are used in reference to the type of work and the type of social movement that relate to this study. My use of the term: "women's anti-violence work" is an attempt to delimit the group of organizations of which I am speaking. Within the group of organizations workers have varying job titles, ways of identifying themselves and notions of their work. In my attempt to be inclusive of these I use the term: "women's anti-violence worker."

The women's social movement has a number of branches and offshoots that are named for their ideological focus, such as the feminist movement or for their topic focus such as the

shelter movement. An in-depth look at the various formations and labelling of groups, while an interesting topic, is outside the scope of this study. For the purposes of consistency in this report I will refer to the social movement related to women's anti-violence organizations as the "feminist anti-violence movement." I use the term "women's anti-violence movement" to signify the theoretical framework that underpins the social movement work that women's anti-violence organizations are involved in. This ideology is confirmed on OAITH's website on their "About Us" page where they say they "operate from an integrated feminist anti racist/anti-oppression perspective" (OAITH, 2011).

1.4.2 Focus Of The Literature Review

The theoretical assumptions about learning that frame my approach to this study are that learning is something that each of us does within ourselves and that we do it through our engagement with the world and connection with others. As humans we make meaning of our life experiences and, further, as adults we have developed a host of prior meanings from which we begin to make sense of new experiences (MacKeracher, 2004). The focus of this study is women who are adults learning about their work. How they make sense of their work has connection to their life experiences, including their work experiences and the people, places and information they have had exposure to. MacKeracher (2004: 27) says of adult learners that: "[l]earning focuses largely on transforming or extending the meanings, values, skills, and strategies acquired in previous experience". In this study the workplace is intrinsically connected to a social movement. As a result, the literature I reviewed in preparation for this research related to workplace learning and social movement learning.

1.4.3 Methodology

In order to describe the various ways work and learning are understood I chose to conduct a qualitative study using a phenomenographic approach (Marton, 1981; Marton &

Booth, 1997). Phenomenography is an interpretive, non-dualist approach in that the person and the phenomenon are seen as connected and people are asked to explain how they understand their experiences (Marton; Marton & Booth; Trigwell, 2006). Marton describes this distinction as “second order” (p. 178) meaning the focus is on the phenomenon as the individual perceives it, with no determination of the ‘truth’ of the phenomenon itself or the ‘truth’ of the individual’s perception. This method answers the question: what are all the ways people think about that?

Phenomenographic research is designed to understand how people understand and conceive of their own reality, so it is important that the questions allow the participants to provide a detailed explanation of their experiences (Marton, 1981; Dall’Alba, 1986; Bowden, 2000). Information was collected through semi-structured interviews that were audio recorded with the participant’s permission, and were then transcribed into text.

The content of the interviews was analyzed to identify themes and patterns, which indicated concepts that were related structurally. Within the themes, distinct concepts were identified and charted or mapped out to demonstrate distinct conceptualizations that are structurally related, this is called the outcome space. The categories demonstrate the range of perception within this sample group, not the range of perception within each individual (Bowden, 2000, Åkerlind, 2005).

1.4.3.1 Research Limitations And Delimitations

One of the limitations of this research concerns the number of participants who make up the group in this study and the question of saturation. Trigwell (2006) suggests that data saturation in a phenomenographic study can be met with 20 participants. This study, with only eight participants, does not meet the criteria to ensure saturation, meaning it is possible that a higher number of participants may have resulted in more categories in the outcome space. The lower number of participants does not however mean that the categories that are presented in this

report are invalid, rather it means that there are likely more ways to experience the phenomenon that are not presented here. In terms of limitations this study answers the question: what are some of the ways in which women's anti-violence workers experience learning their work? This research is presented as an exploratory enquiry into the area of social movement and workplace learning and indicates areas for further study.

Another area of limitation in this study concerns the nature of the utterances of the participants and to what extent their responses are influenced by the language of the interview questions (Säljö, 1996). It has been suggested that a way forward here would be to pose interview questions as problems allowing the participants to speak about the phenomenon using language in the way they would choose (Säljö, 1996). Another approach is for the researcher to pay attention to conception and meaning during the interview process (Sin, 2010). The latter is how I attempted to address this issue. I asked participants what they understood as the meaning of key concepts that were explored in the interview. At times I had a certain concept I wanted to explore and so I explained what I meant by the words I was using. The question of influence is addressed further in chapter 3, methodology.

An issue that is both a limitation and delimitation is that the study is focused on the perceptions of women's anti-violence workers in Ontario and so the participants were intentionally limited to workers employed in women's anti-violence organizations. The participants in this study are all members of OAITH, which is a provincial association with voluntary membership. I drew on this pool of workers because of the convenience of access to mailing lists and because this research was of interest to and supported by OAITH specifically. The membership of OAITH at the time of the interviews contained 55 member organizations, approximately half of the organizations in Ontario (personal communication, Eileen Morrow,

OAITH Lobby Coordinator, August, 2011). However OAITH is thought to be a politically motivated organization and its members may be considered to have stronger ties to the feminist anti-violence movement than non-members. This statement has not been researched so I reiterate the words “may be considered”. It is important to note that this study is not intended to be a representation of how all women’s anti-violence workers understand their learning, instead it speaks to some of the ways that learning anti-violence work can be understood.

1.4.4 Findings And Discussion

The findings of this study are reported in chapter 4. Chapter 4 contains a detailed explanation of the four categories and their characteristics and includes quotes from the participants themselves. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the structural relationship between the categories and the outcome space.

Finally, chapter 5 discusses how the findings relate the literature reviewed prior to the interviews and addresses the new insights brought forward from the data. This chapter concludes with recommendations and ideas towards the development of a conceptual framework for the development of training for women’s anti-violence workers.

1. 5 Summary

This chapter introduced this study by explaining the research problem and its context. I have explained the barriers experienced by women’s anti-violence workers trying to access training and the considerations that are important in the development of training for these workers. The limitations and delimitations of the study were explained as was the methodological approach. Finally, I provided a description of the structure of the document with an overview of the literature that guided my thinking and the methodological approach that was used in this study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This thesis examines the experience of learning to be a women's anti-violence worker from the perspective of eight workers in women's anti-violence organizations across Ontario. To inform my research I explore literature related to seven themes about learning. Specifically they are: social movement learning; individual identity formation and learning; collective identity formation and learning; liberation learning; social learning; situated learning; and tacit and explicit learning. In this chapter I provide a synthesis of the relevant literature and situate my research within the discourse of learning.

2.1 Social Movement Learning

Social movement learning is recognized as being informal or incidental as well as formal and purposeful. It is informal because learning is said to occur through engagement with the issue, which Foley (1999) calls learning through the social struggle. If, for example, the movement is organized around reforming same sex marriage laws, the participants in the movement will become more informed about key elements of this issue. A lay person involved in this movement may come to know more about marriage laws than some lawyers.

Social movements involve themselves in formal education as well. Events are planned for members in a way that ensures they understand the issues well enough to participate in the actions of the group, but are also planned with the surrounding community in mind, as a movement's aims often include changing society's perception of the issue to gain support for the cause. The feminist movement has a range of examples to draw on in this regard, ranging from books written by leaders in the movement, such as Judy Rebick's *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution* (2005), to women's studies and feminist studies programs in colleges and universities.

New Social Movement [NSM] theorists such as Melucci (1980) believe that new forms of collective action, those occurring since the 1960s, involve structural processes as well as cultural processes in the formation of a social movement. Different from older social movements that were focused solely on class struggles and access to wealth, NSM are organized around issues of ethical and moral values, focusing on ideas like inclusivity, democracy and equity. Struggles of these kinds require participants in the movement to enact an ethical standard in their thoughts and actions; they are required to believe in inclusivity, democracy, and equity and, in so doing, to be inclusive, democratic and equitable in their engagements with the world. Actors in NSM are likely to organize in an effort to resist the dominant cultural narrative and challenge oppressive social norms that limit individuals in their lives, whether in the political or personal arena (Poletta & Jasper, 2001).

The struggle for women's equality was around long before the 1960s and cannot easily be summed up as one movement; there are variations of beliefs in the social and political causes and effects of women's status and the remedies involved in changing it. However the idea that women are subordinate in society and that change is necessary is generally associated with the feminist movement, which, in turn, is the focus of both NSM and older movements. The goals of the feminist movement are to challenge structural inequality, the distribution of resources, and the social structures that construct gender social norms (Halsanger, Tuana & O'Connor, 2011).

Social movement learning is relevant to this study because of its prominent focus on transformation of individuals and of society. Actors within a social movement are seen as individuals who envision changing the world to reflect what they want it to be. Learning here emerges from living and engaging with the world and through the process of comparing and contrasting that real experience with traditional knowledge frameworks that have been

constructed by dominant culture and creating alternative frameworks to explain and interpret the world (Danni, 1996). Women's anti-violence workers' learning would seem to align with social movement learning theory in a variety of ways. For example I have often heard anti-violence workers consistently critique and reframe traditional patriarchal frameworks that view violence against women as an individualized and private relationship problem and further, women's anti-violence organizations frequently conduct public awareness events to share alternative frameworks for understanding violence. As such the concept of social movement learning appeared to be a pertinent area of exploration in relation to this research.

2.1.1 Individual Identity Formation And Learning

Actors in new social movements engage in learning processes that engender personal identity transformation as well as collective identity formation with the group. As members of a movement focused on moral values, the actors work on transforming themselves into good people who think as well as enact the values of the movement (Kilgore, 1999; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Freire (2009 [1970]) describes a similar epistemology in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where he posits that before the oppressed will engage in liberation struggles they must first learn about oppression through reflection; they must almost re-invent themselves outside the framework they have always known, which is that of their oppressors' view of themselves (p.48).

The work of Friere and others who write about counter-hegemonic learning are the foundation of radical education practices because of the focus on emancipatory learning. Social movement learning theory shares similarities with radical education and emancipatory learning because they both focus on the individual in relation to larger society. Emancipatory education encourages individuals to understand the underlying social issues that marginalize them and engage in critical thinking about strategies for change. This work would seem to connect in

fundamental ways to women's anti-violence work which seeks to work with abused women to understand their lived experience in relation to other women and in doing so assist women to resist oppression. I explore this area of literature further in section 2.2 of this chapter.

2.1.2 Collective Identity Formation And Learning

A social movement can be defined as “networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities” (Diani, 1992, pg.3). Collective identity is a shared connection; it is ideology, emotions, and experiences shared amongst individuals who then make up a group or community (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). The collective identity is distinct from a personal identity but it becomes part of the personal identity and vice versa (Polletta & Jasper, p.285). For example, it is the shared belief that women as a class should have full and equitable rights to self-determination in society that delineates those who identify as feminists from those who do not. From this encompassing belief there are further developments of thought and theory as to the causes of and remedies for the barriers to women's self-determination, which has resulted in there being different kinds of feminists.

Collective identity is a process that involves relationships and people working together to identify strategies or actions that meet goals as defined by the group. This process involves a shared language and framework comprising the rituals and cultural artefacts whose meaning has been constructed by the group (Kebede, Shriver & Knottnerus, 2000; Polletta & Jasper, 2001 p.285). It also involves a shared history of the processes past and how they relate to the current environment within which the collective functions (Melucci, 1995; Kebede et al.; Polletta & Jasper). The process of constructing meanings, actions, and goals continues not only with the emergence of new members of the group, but also in response to the changing environment. This can ensure the stability and continuity of the group through the sense of belonging and

solidarity. Melucci suggests that the process of creating a collective identity involves the group of individuals (or sub groups) negotiating and renegotiating the process of constructing social action (p.44).

Analysts of social movements refer to the institutions that create space removed from the control of those in power as “free space” (Evans & Boyte, 1986 as cited by Kebebe et al., 2000 p.319 and Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p.288); or “submerged networks” (Melucci, 1989, p.56-57). These institutions, such as shelters for abused women, allow for conversations where individuals discuss their lived experiences and relevant events in the world and construct “counterhegemonic [sic] ideas and oppositional identities” (Polletta & Jasper, p.288). Social movements tend to develop their own name for this process as demonstrated by the Rastafarian movement where this process is called “reasoning” (Kebebe et al., p.319). Rastafari gather in the woods or in someone’s home and share experiences of oppression, but also develop subversive strategies such as the creation of Rastafarian language (Kebebe et al.).

Feminists call these conversations consciousness-raising sessions. In her paper “The Personal is Political”, Hanisch (2006 [1969]) identifies “consciousness-raising groups” (p.1) as places where women come together and share personal experiences with each other for the purpose of developing a shared vision or understanding of women’s oppression. The process asks women to identify the day to day experiences that were a struggle and see those struggles from a point outside from what they had been socialized and conditioned to think of as normal. The meetings become learning forums where everyday women make meaning out of feminist theory and contribute to the development of further theory (Hanisch). Over time, the moniker “feminist consciousness-raising” fell out of fashion; however, the conversations where women

share experiences and construct counter-hegemonic ideas continue to exist as women's support and information groups, volunteer and staff training sessions, and coalition meetings.

2.2 Liberation Learning

There are several themes that appear as foundational epistemology of "liberation pedagogy" (Freire, 2009 [1970], p.54) also known as emancipatory learning, that I believe share similarities with learning that occurs in the context of a social movement. The first is that of collective engagement where information is shared between members of a group that also share a similar reference point. This notion suggests that learning is a social activity; that we make meaning as we engage with other people. Another theme is the internal process that involves aligning our own experiences and observances of real life with the perspective of reality that we have learned from those in authority. This theme speaks to the idea that we learn by doing or living and that we can give authority to that learning as it is equally if not more valuable than being told what to do or think. A third theme is that of emotional connection. The emotional connection relates to the motivation for learning and how one feels about the information as well as the emotions of the learner in relation to the self and others. In truth, liberation pedagogy involves an emotional aspect in relation to others; it requires caring about other human beings and positioning the self and others as human subjects as opposed to non-human objects (Freire, p.44). These ways of learning are particularly profound and fitting for women who, as an oppressed group within a patriarchal society, are experiencing the devaluing of their knowledge and authority. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) describe women's ways of knowing as a process of aligning the internal and external voices: what we are told is true and the realities of our own experiences lead to a newly constructed knowledge (p.133).

These elements of emotional connection and women's ways of knowing are directly related to understanding learning women's anti-violence work. In my experience the vast

majority by far of workers in anti-violence organizations are women. My experience has also been that the majority of workers who do this work, do so because they have compassion for women who have experienced violence in their relationships. While this study does not seek to understand questions of sex, gender or emotion connect with learning, there does seem to be some obvious relatable aspects of liberation learning and emotional connection to what is learned and women's anti-violence work which requires feelings of compassion.

2.3 Social Learning

Social learning theory posits that every engagement with the world results in the individual understanding the world in their own way; in other words, they make meaning of the engagement (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Wenger & Lave, 1991). Engagement in this context is social because people live in a world occupied by people and every engagement either directly or indirectly involves other people (Wenger, 1998). Viewing learning from a social perspective suggests that learning happens in much more informal ways as a reciprocal process between group members that goes much deeper than information exchange. Active participation in groups gives us the framework from which we make meaning out of information and the ways in which we make meaning lead to our becoming part of the group (Wenger; Wenger & Lave). Thinking of learning as a social enterprise requires acknowledging the potential for learning in both formal and informal engagements within a group and thinking of practice as a process that can become a focal point for engagement. Rethinking learning with a focus on participation helps to better understand learning for individuals, communities, and organizations (Wenger, p.7).

Wenger suggests the term Community of Practice [CoP] for this process. In CoP, meaning making is both the product of engagement with the community and is the process by which the community becomes a community. The central focus of CoP is to negotiate the meaning of their mutual enterprise. Another way to look at it is, the practice of the community is

to make meaning of their shared enterprise. Meaning making results in a shared interpretation of what members do and who they are, along with other boundaries that demark the community of practice. It is the reification of meaning, for example, that becomes ground rules of behaviour and action within the community and answers the question of how members can identify each other (Wenger, 1998).

Meaning undergoes consistent revision and re-creation. It changes and hopefully deepens and is in constant flux through the entire community but also through each individual within the community. Each person brings their own historical and social perspective to each engagement and experience, thus meaning becomes new both for individual and for the community. Individuals shape the community and the community shapes the individuals (Wenger, 1998, p.56).

There are shared meanings that distinguish woman's anti-violence work from other types of social or community based work this includes language that is sector specific. For example, the acronym VAW which stands for violence against women is known within woman's anti-violence organizations as the issue that is addressed by the work of the agency. Women's anti-violence organizations are commonly referred to as VAW organizations. The origins of this terminology is unknown however my experience has been that workers within this field will often use the term as a form of resistance to the dominant culture use of the term domestic violence which is known as a gender neutral understanding of violence in intimate partner relationships. My understanding is that using the term VAW denotes a gendered analysis of violence that emphasizes the prevalence of violence against women in society. The use of the term VAW as a form of resistance is an example of a shared meaning developed by the group. It

was the recognition that shared meaning exists within this group and that shared meaning may connect to identity in some way that led me to explore social learning literature.

2.4 Situated Learning

Situated learning revolves around the idea that you learn through doing, not simply by engaging in an activity but through the process of negotiating the meaning of what you are doing; thus meaning making is the primary activity of learning. The idea of situated learning suggests that learning is a social process that involves participation in the world (Barub & Duffy, 1998; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Wenger & Lave, 1991). The roots of situated learning can be traced back to theories of learning first systemically articulated by Dewey (1903) as he advocated for education reform. Dewey urged changes to the school system to provide opportunity for children to engage with the real world as he believed that learning involved engagement and activity (p.202). He was among the first to challenge the notion that learning was purely the transmission of codified information from the teacher to the student. Learning happens through the act of making meaning from our experiences. Wenger proposes that meaning making is a process of negotiation (p.52). He expands on the idea of negotiating to mean a process that is composed of “continuous interaction”, “gradual achievement”, and “give and take” (p.53). Negotiation of meaning includes its constant renewal with every new experience; even with an experience that regularly recurs, it is anew an experience each time, therefore each time meaning is made anew (p.53). Each and every social interaction, both direct and indirect, is an experience from which the individual makes meaning. Meaning doesn’t exist in the world without people who have created it and meaning doesn’t exist within a person without some interaction with the world to generate it (p.54).

Situated learning theory suggests that the context in which learning occurs is important. Learning requires being involved in real life situations, using real life tools, and engaging with

others who are similarly involved in the enterprise. This theory has been described by a number of theorists as a process that supports the learning of the everyday practices in a workplace (Barab & Duffy, 1998; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Contu & Willmott, 2003). Learning professional practice is coming to be recognized as an important piece of learning that cannot be taught in schools. Situated learning theory is becoming evident in the literature concerning the transition between school and work, especially in the helping fields like social work and medicine (Barab & Duffy; Egan and Jay, 2009). Egan and Jay discuss the disparity of what is taught in school and what is learned on the job and suggest that changing the curriculum is not the answer, but rather suggest a CoP framework for health professionals who are training at both school and clinics. The same focus on learning about something or learning how to do something is evident in Brown and Duguid's work as well. Their study identifies situated learning using Orr's (1996) study of photocopier technicians, which itself does not identify situated learning theory, but is a very in-depth and informative description of how the technicians learn how to do their work. Brown and Duguid place value on the situated learning that occurs amongst colleagues as the way people improve practice and stress that job manuals and other established canons do not actually contain accurate information (p.41).

Barab and Duffy (1998) distinguish perspectives of "situativity" (p.26) in their work as they look at the design of practice fields for students. They indicate the psychological perspective of situated learning focuses on cognition and the learning of a skill through the engagement of real life activities with learning objectives. They go on to describe a more anthropological approach which says that identity as well as skill is constructed in the process of engagement, hinging on the individual's engagement with the community (Barab & Duffy, p.28).

They have found it useful in the design of learning opportunities for students to incorporate both of these perspectives (p.27).

Historically the majority of women who have worked in women's anti-violence organizations did not come to the work with formal training in women's anti-violence work, although this hiring trend seems to have changed over the last decade or so. When I began this work I was asked what I knew about women's oppression and about violence, but there was no requirement that I learned what I know from formal education. As a manager in the work for over 10 years I also did not require formal education as criteria for employment because I believed that if women had knowledge about the issues from their lived experience, the procedural learning could take place on the job. Situated learning theory resonated for me in relation to my own trajectory into women's anti-violence work and all of my work in the field thus far in my life. Therefore it seemed an important theory to explore in relation to this study about learning women's anti-violence work.

2.5 Tacit And Explicit Knowledge

As touched on in section 2.4, above, earlier work of Wenger & Lave (1991) used situated learning to explain the learning and identity formation processes of newcomers to a workplace community under the rubric of CoP. Later Wenger expanded on the concepts of identity and put learning at the centre of several different theories that are particularly relevant to social movements. I accept here that learning, as Wenger suggests, is the impetus for non-conformist ideas, identity, and structural transformations (Wenger, 1998, p.13). For Wenger, CoP is a point of entry into the broader conceptualization of learning as social. This concept integrates the four components that form the basis of social engagement and participation, learning as: belonging, experiencing, becoming, and doing (p.5). Practice involves more than the act of doing something, it is also the shared context within which it is done. This shared context is both tacit

and explicit information that is developed by the members of the community, including the meaning behind the practice and who it is that practices (Wegner, p.47). Duguid (2005) places tacit and explicit knowledge on a continuum with codification at one extreme and “tacitness” at the other (p.110) and suggests that tacit and explicit knowledge are complimentary. A number of scholars distinguish the difference between these two types of information as “knowing how” and “knowing what” (Oakeshott, 1967 as cited in Duguid, p.111; Polyani, 1966; Ryle, 1949). A number of scholars have questioned the idea of finding value in tacit knowledge and, further, the very idea of whether or not tacit knowledge can even exist. This suggests everything worth being taught can be codified and explained (Cowan, David & Foray, 2000). However there are many important things that cannot be codified, such as feeling, intuition, style, and interpretation, to name but a few (Duguid).

One of the difficulties in recognizing and valuing tacit knowledge is that the ways of transmission are not so direct and therefore not as obvious as explicit information. The tacit knowledge of a workplace is found in the stories of events that have happened in the past and the ideas about what should happen in the future. They are the informal conversations shared over a smoke break, over lunch, or when things are slow and there is time to kill. Sometimes these stories address a specific problem and other times they are amusing anecdotes and recollections or even complaints. Stories reveal the complexities involved in the work and the workplace. To acquire and add to the collection of stories and to understand when to tell them is part of becoming a member of the community suggesting rather than learning the practice, learning how to become a practitioner is the greater objective (Brown & Duguid, 1991, p.48).

The topic of tacit knowledge comes to mind for me when I think of the annual general meetings (AGM) hosted each year by OAITH. The AGM is an opportunity for workers from

member agencies around the province to meet for three days in a host city. At the business meeting they hear reports on the preceding years work conducted by the association and to vote on the direction for the upcoming year. Built into the agenda are presentations on topics of interest to the membership and hand outs of newly developed materials that they may not have had access to in their home region. Members look forward to the AGM, not for the business portion but for the informal occasions to get together in the evening. OAITH books a suite in the host hotel for evening socializing because these nightly events are an important part of the conference. There is an extraordinary amount of information exchange and learning that occurs through the three days of meeting, much of it through stories shared during the socializing events and breaks from the business meeting. In my experience these conversations are rarely instructional but learning occurs nonetheless. Recognizing that tacit learning was such a major part of my own learning to do anti-violence work I decided to explore this topic in the literature review for this study.

2.6 Summary

The literature reveals some interesting points of connection and similarity amongst these seven themes. One point of connection is the notion of learning as doing. For both actors in a social movement and workers in a workplace meaning is made through the engagement in practice. The experience of engaging in practice generates an opportunity to gain tacit knowledge of the practice and thereby gain additional meaning that the literature suggests is not possible through a process of knowledge transfer. Additionally, both social movement and workplace learning theories indicate that individual and collective identity formation processes are engaged through the act of learning when the learning involves practice. Though these theories position identity in some way in the process of learning there is a noted difference in the way the identity is integrated within the individual. The literature in this chapter is relevant to

understanding experiences of learning in this study because women's anti-violence organizations in Ontario emerged from the feminist movement but they are also workplaces. This study offers an opportunity to explore the intersections of workplace and social movement learning.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The following section focuses on the methodological and epistemological frameworks that influenced my decisions going into this project. The section begins with a theoretical perspective and the assumptions made about learning and research. It then moves to an explanation of the methodology and provides details about how the research and analysis was carried out.

The aim of this research was realized through exploration of my primary research question: What are the qualitatively different ways that women's anti-violence workers experience aspects of learning their work? I had an additional interest in how women perceived the use of newer computer technology and web 2.0 tools in their learning.

To that end I explored significant variation in ways the workers experienced:

- i) their work in general;
- ii) their identity in relation to their work;
- iii) their community in relation to their work and their learning to work;
- iv) learning to be anti-violence workers;
- v) their work in relation to the feminist movement; and
- vi) computer technology and web 2.0 tools in relation to their learning.

While interested in the experiences as listed above, I was open to any other experiences that related to learning and working in the field that came up through the interviews. In order to describe the variant ways their work and learning was understood I chose to conduct an inductive qualitative study using a phenomenographic approach (Marton, 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997). The intent of the study is to understand the phenomena of experiential learning from the perspective of the participants, encouraging the articulation of what meaning they have made

from their lived experiences as a way of exploring their lived reality. Qualitative study is particularly suited to this endeavour as its starting place is to assume that humans are cognitively active and their interpretations of their experience influence their behaviour, meaning perception has real consequence in the lived world and should be recognized in order to understand it (Palys and Atchison, 2008). Additionally I chose to use an inductive approach. The nature of inductive research requires that the researcher engage in an iterative and reflexive analysis process that involves creative interpretation of what emerges from the data (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). This study was not fully inductive as I did begin with a brief review of the literature about learning to give me an idea of the ways I might investigate the ideas about learning in this group, but I did not form a hypothesis. Instead in the interviews I explored topics that came up in the literature such as identity, community, technology, and work.

3.1 How This Study Evolved

As noted in chapter one, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses [OAITH] had hired me to coordinate their multi-year training project for women's anti-violence workers across Ontario. This required me to not only develop materials, but to establish training methods that would increase members' access to training as well. The OAITH Board Members were interested in creating learning opportunities that were meaningful to their members and they also wanted to find ways to revitalize the connection between members. To that end I had attempted to initiate a province-wide community of practice utilizing online tools. My original intent with this study was to examine how women's anti-violence workers experienced a nascent CoP using online discussion boards and web conferencing software. In my role of coordinator I engaged in a series of activities designed to encourage the community to begin, however after six months the CoP site was still very much underutilized.

While I had begun the research process in that I had begun a superficial literature review

and had drafted participant recruitment tools, I realized that the original research question I formulated was un-researchable due to the lack of community of practice participants. I reviewed the original purpose of the study and decided that gaining an understanding of workers' experiences of learning is a legitimate alternative pathway to the original aim of developing learning opportunities that are meaningful to the members. I believe the initial intent still has merit as an area of study and hope this study can contribute to research that explores the possibility of a province-wide CoP as a vehicle for learning and connection for women's anti-violence workers.

3.1.1 Context Of The Research

Women's anti-violence organizations most often consist of residential programs either in first stage emergency shelters or in second stage houses. Shelters offer a place to stay for women and their children fleeing abuse from their partner or caregiver, although some shelters will provide service to women fleeing abuse from other people as well. Their services include 24-hour support for women in the house and many offer 24-hour crisis line services as well. Shelters also offer children's programs and group programs and many provide transitional and outreach programs in the community. These programs work with women who have experienced abuse but do not require emergency shelter. Second stage houses are essentially apartment complexes, providing regular living units to women with the addition of security, support, and advocacy services; there is no 24-hour staffing.

There are fewer but equally important organizations that do not provide residential services but focus on legal services, community awareness, and education and training. One of these is the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. While OAITH has endeavoured to provide training for members, the funding for training projects has been rare. As a result the association generally offers one training day per year attached to its annual business

meeting. The training topic is generated by the membership and the Board Committees' organize the day, usually bringing in speakers who have expertise in the issue. From time to time OAITH has had a training project grant approved and is able to offer training that is a bit more substantial in that trainers can travel to regions around the province and offer a one or two day workshop on a specific issue. These usually include written materials for the participants as well.

In 2009, OAITH received multi-year project funding from Ontario's Women's Directorate to develop and deliver a number of training materials for women's anti-violence organizations across the province. As also noted in the introduction, I am currently the Coordinator of this training project. I hope this exploratory study will lead to more research about what makes a learning experience meaningful to workers in this unique field. Knowing that it is difficult to secure grant money for training development, OAITH is hopeful that the research will lead to a conceptual framework that will guide the development of training materials in the future, making certain that it attempts to meet the learning needs of all its members.

3.2 Overview Of Phenomenographic Research Methods

Phenomenography was first identified as a distinct research method in the late seventies by Ference Marton and his colleagues at the University of Göteborg in Sweden (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998; Marton, 1981). Phenomenography is a research approach aimed at "description, analysis and understanding of experiences" (Marton, 1981, p.180). Initially developed to conduct research within an educational setting, phenomenographic research has been used in areas outside of education (Bowden, 1996). Phenomenography is an interpretive, non-dualist approach in that the person and the phenomenon are seen as connected or that the phenomenon exists as various realities as interpreted by the person (Marton; Marton & Booth, 1997; Trigwell,

2006).

The fundamental assumption of phenomenography is that meaning is constructed by the individual as they engage with the phenomenon. The meaning of the engagement does not exist without one or the other, the person or the phenomenon. This assumption is also the assumption of social theories of learning such as situated learning (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991) which similarly understands learning to happen through the engagement of people with the social world. The underlying philosophical belief behind this research approach is that people will perceive an experience differently, that there is a range of ways that a group of people will experience reality and all of these are truth (Marton, 1981, p. 178). This philosophy resembles a feminist understanding of truth and knowledge in that knowledge is a construction by the individual and their perception is largely based on who they are and the life experiences they bring to the phenomenon (Tisdell, 1998). Marton describes this distinction as “second order” (p.178), meaning the focus is on the phenomenon as the individual perceives it, with no determination of the ‘truth’ of the phenomenon itself or the ‘truth’ of the individual’s perception. This method answers the question: what are all the ways people think about that? In this study I am asking: what are all the ways the women in this group think about their work and the learning of their work?

Phenomenography has been used successfully in earlier studies that focus on education and other topics. Studies that include how women experience domestic violence (McCosker, Barnard & Gerber, 2003); how doctoral students experience technology research (Bruce, Stoodly & Pham, 2009); and how teachers understand pedagogic connectedness (Beutel, 2006). I found Beutel’s work particularly helpful in understanding how this research approach applied to my own study as I could personally relate to and understand the categories and outcome space in her

research report.

3.2.1 Understanding The Report

The outcome of phenomenographic research is the range of qualitatively different ways that a group of people can experience a phenomenon. This study aims to recognize the range of ways that women conceive of their work and understand the learning of their work as women's anti-violence workers. The focus of the enquiry is not to better understand the phenomenon in this case learning or anti-violence work, but to identify the limited number of ways that people can understand the phenomenon (Larsson & Holström, 2007; Marton, 1981). The different ways that people experience the phenomenon will be related to one another, consequently the research results are categorically related. It is the researcher's interpretation of the data that determines the categories by abstracting what the participants say in their interviews (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Bowden, 1996). Each category presented in this report describes the researcher's way of understanding the phenomena or a "conception". The conception is both the referential and structural aspect present in the way people experience the phenomenon (Marton and Pong, 2005, p.335).

The report will present how the work and consequently the learning of how to be a women's anti-violence worker can be conceived from the point of view of the worker. Marton and Pong (2005) suggest that each concept can be explored from two aspects: the referential aspect and the structural relation aspect, which involves two levels of analysis (pg.337). After the categories or concepts are determined I will explain the referential aspects of each category and the structural relational aspect which is the structural relations between the categories. The combination of categories and the internal relations between categories is what is known as the outcome space in traditional phenomenographic accounts (Larsson & Holström, 2007, Marton

and Pong).

It is critical to remember to remember that phenomenographic research aims to explore the range of perception within a sample group and not the range of perception within an individual, which requires the analysis of each interview transcript in relation to the others (Åkerlind, 2005; Bowden, 2000; Larsson & Holström, 2007). The focus of this enterprise is difference, therefore common aspects of perceptions are not always reported (Trigwell, 2006).

3.3 The Participants Of This Study

The selection criterion for this study was only specific to two areas: first, that the women were employed by member organizations, and second, that there was significant variation in the length of time women had engaged in this work. The selection of participants aims to produce a group that will maximize variation as opposed to a group that represents the constituency (Trigwell, 2006).

The rationale for using OAITH members was that there was enough variation within the membership of OAITH to find areas of difference in relation to the length of time doing the work and that as an employee of OAITH I had easy access to methods of communication for recruitment purposes. OAITH has a membership that fluctuates from year to year, but at the time of this study, the membership was 52 organizations from across the province of Ontario (unpublished OAITH records). The rationale for seeking out women who were employed for various years as the only other criteria was my assumption that these women would have a lengthier range of experience to draw meaning from over time and that they may also have had experiences of different jobs within the work.

The participants of this study are all women who are currently working in women's anti-violence organizations in Ontario and their respective organizations are currently members of

OAITH. I interviewed eight women for this study, three were women who had been employed five years or less, two women were employed between six and fifteen years, and three were women employed over fifteen years. Each woman was asked to sign a consent form that outlined the purpose of the study and provided information about voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study. The informed consent form is found in Appendix A.

3.3.1. Participant Recruitment

Recruitment of participants proved to be somewhat difficult for this study. I engaged in purposive sampling using a snowball method, meaning I wanted to meet with women within a specific group, had some criteria to meet, and used my networks to gain access to their networks (Palys and Atchison, 2008). I posted a call for participants on the member only section of OAITH's website (<www.oaith.ca>). I also sent out an email to all member contacts explaining the study and asking for participants. At the same time I was delivering face-to-face workshops in six regions in the province and at each workshop I handed out hard copies of my recruitment letter. This letter is found in Appendix B. After completing all the regional trainings, I sent out an email to each of the one hundred and twelve participants of the workshop asking them if they would be interested in being a part of my research. From that email I received two responses that indicated interest. One month later I sent out another email to the one hundred and twelve workshop contacts reiterating the purpose of the study and asking for participants. I received no replies to this email. I also contacted people that I had connected with individually through work, school and training opportunities. I emailed and called these contacts to ask if they would be interested in participating or could ask women in their networks if they were interested and provide them with my contact information. This generated another six women who indicated interest in participating in the research.

A full phenomenographic study contains between 10 and 30 semi-structured interviews at

approximately an hour each (Trigwell, 2006, p. 371). I had hoped to meet with between sixteen and twenty participants, which has been suggested is the saturation point, meaning enough data is collected to discover all the range of ways a phenomena can be experienced (Beutel 2006; Larsson & Holström, 2007). I believe that while the study did not generate enough interviews to reach saturation the information contained in this enquiry is significant as it offers a contribution to the discussion of how women learn to be anti-violence workers and leaves room for further enquiry into this interesting subject.

3.4 Data Collection

Phenomenographic research is concerned with exacting perceptions of a phenomenon through exploring the descriptions one way; some would say the most effective way to do this is through semi-structured interviews (Beutel 2006, Bowden, 1996, Larsson & Holström, 2007, Richardson, 1999). Semi-structured interviewing is an appropriate technique when the researcher is interested in exploring phenomena from the perspective of the subject (Kvale & Brinkman 2009). In order to maintain validity, interview questions should be few and as open ended as possible in order to avoid influencing the categories in the later analysis (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). The initial or triggering questions (Kvale & Brinkman; Trigwell, 2006, p.371) are then followed up with clarity seeking questions that ask the subject to reflect and expand their answer. Phenomenographic research is designed to understand how people understand and conceive of their own reality, so it is important that the questions allow the participants to provide a detailed explanation of their experiences (Bowden; Marton, 1981).

Prior to the interviews for this study I created a list of 12 interview questions that introduced the topic areas I wanted to explore. The list of pre-designed questions and prompts are contained in Appendix C. The first questions concerned permissions and background information about where they worked, their title, and how long they been doing this work. I also

asked participants to disclose their age if they were comfortable. I wanted to have the information in case the analysis led to some kind of connection to age. Other questions asked them to describe their experiences, such as:

- “How do you identify yourself when talk to others about what you do?”
- “How did you learn how to do the work that you do?”
- “Tell me about how you teach others to do this work?”
- “What led you to this work?”

The participants in this study were all known to me in some way or another prior to this study. The nature of the relationships range between the least known: one woman was a participant in a workshop that I had facilitated several months before the interview, to the most known: two of these women and I had been colleagues off and on at OAITH throughout a sixteen year period. These relationships had the potential to influence: how I asked a question, how they answered a question and how I interpreted their answer. In recognizing this potential I took steps to work with “perspectival subjectivity” as defined by Kvale & Brinkman (2009) by understanding how my questions could be seen from different perspectives and being prepared to modify questions as needed (p.170). For example while asking the question: “How do you identify your community?” I realized that the word community was being interpreted differently from my perception of the word. Consequently I began to identify the people I wanted to speak of and asking the participants to identify them in relations to themselves. During the review of the tapes and transcripts I found that engaging in a conversation with participants about the other people in their work lives and their community as they defined it, resulted in some very rich material for the study that my original conception of the question may not have generated.

3.4.1 Interview Process

Interviews were primarily conducted over the phone with face to face meetings where time and geography allowed. In the end five of the eight interviews were by telephone.

Telephone interviews still offer the opportunity to seek clarification of both the questions and the responses. They also allow the researcher to follow up on a chance comment or phrase that may have significance when it is explored.

At the beginning of each interview I reminded each participant of the purpose of the research and reviewed the information from the consent form they had signed. I also let them know that they could decline to answer any question and could end the interview at any time. I also emphasized that I was really interested in their particular point of view and encouraged them to respond to the questions anyway that made sense to them. I began to audio record the interviews after this preparation. Each recorded interview was then transcribed into verbatim text. Each participant was assigned a letter of the alphabet as a pseudonym in the transcription for the purposes of confidentiality in the report.

3.4.1.1 Minimizing Bias In The Interview Process

The epistemological foundation of phenomenography is one of social constructivism; knowledge is making meaning and meaning is constructed through a social process involving negotiation (Duffy & Cunningham, 2001). Meaning is not innate and does not exist within the individual or within the world; it is constructed through interaction between the individual and the world (Wenger, 1998). Perception is recognition and interpretation of a phenomenon and the responses to interview questions is the person's discursive account of their perception (Marton, 1981). As we recognize that knowledge is a social construction it must be noted that the context of the interview is also a social process whereby the researcher and the participant are engaged in a conversation about meaning. This implies that the participant is making meaning at the time of

the interview and the context and culture of the interview and the relationship to the researcher has bearing on the perception of the participant.

Some researchers have suggested the technique of “bracketing” (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 297) where the researcher sets aside their own ideas and knowledge about the subject, as a means of ensuring it is the participant’s own thoughts that come through. Phenomenographic research shares methods with several other qualitative research approaches such as phenomenological, where for example the concept of bracketing emerged (Marton & Booth, 1991; Ashworth & Lucas). Bracketing is possible to some degree, but it can also be inadvisable for the researcher to bracket all their pre-conceived ideas, they must at the very least maintain their focus of inquiry so the data collection does not become directionless (Ashworth & Lucas; Sandberg, 1997). The objective here is to remain open to the experiences of the participants as they explain them and not to influence the perception of them with pre-conceived ideas of what they mean (Sandberg). I did this by keeping my awareness of the potential of my prior conceptions present during the interview. This way I was alert and could remind myself to ask clarifying questions when and if I was making assumptions about the experience being described in the interview.

3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data is an iterative process that involves reading and re-reading the interview transcripts with an open and flexible mind that is prepared to consider all the possibilities. The researcher must take a cautious approach to ensure that she/he is not rushing to identify categories too quickly (Åkerlind, 2005; Bowden, 1996). The lack of details about the process of analysis in phenomenographic research has been noted as problematic for several reasons, two of which I address here. One is that lack of detail can suggest ambiguity or a lack of rigor in the findings, leaving the research open to questions about validity and another, one that

relates to my own experience, is that researchers who are new to the phenomenographic method have few references as to the process of creating outcome space (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). The lack of description can lead on one hand to newly developed processes and authentic variation in approach, but it may also lead to work that is not actually phenomenographic in its approach. I chose to provide a detailed description of my steps and my thought processes along the way in order to alleviate these potential difficulties and to contribute toward the assessment of reliability.

3.5.1 Reliability In Data Analysis

Phenomenographic research aims to provide insight about a phenomenon through understanding the phenomena from the perception of the participants in the study. To achieve that aim it is critical that the researcher be able to bracket their own perceptions, opinions and biases to some degree (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Sandberg, 1997). In discerning the degree of bracketing necessary I looked to Sandberg's notion of "interpretive awareness" (p.209) where he suggests that it is not necessary or even possible to bracket all awareness of the phenomenon but to be aware of my own perceptions throughout the process. The key to reliability in this study is that I acknowledge and deal with my influence in an open manner and am explicit in the strategies I utilize to minimize the impacts of my perceptions on the outcomes.

In the data analysis stage I was aware that I needed to bracket my pre-conceived notions formed by my prior relationships with the participants as well as my own conceptions of learning and working in this field. Again I utilized the same strategy as I did in the interview phase. I kept hyper-aware of my own conceptions and referred to the full transcripts throughout most of the analysis. During several steps of the analysis I utilized associates who were not associated with this work or the participants. For example, at one time I gave two different associates select portions of the transcript to read and asked what they thought the participant was saying.

3.5.2 Steps Of Analysis

My analysis of the data began by following the steps of analysis as outlined by Beutel (2006), which was based on her modification of the process of analysis as described by Marton (1986) and Bowden (1996), although I too modified the steps to suit my process. I also utilized Ashworth and Lucas's (2000) suggestions of how to maintain empathy and engagement in the practice of conducting phenomenographic research. My steps were as follows:

Step 1: Familiarization

Step 2: Condensation

Step 3: Comparison

Step 4: Grouping

Step 5: Characterizing

Step 6: Contrasting

Step 1: Familiarization

The first step in my analysis process was to become familiar with the interview transcripts. Even though I was the interviewer for each session some time had passed between the first and the last interview so I believed it prudent to familiarize myself not only with the words used but the nuances as well in order to have a better sense of the context.

To do this I read and re-read the transcripts highlighting comments or phrases that were descriptions of examples, statements that contained an expression of feeling, descriptions of processes, and any utterances that were answers to a question. Phenomenographic researchers agree that the categories must emerge from the participants' descriptions (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Marton & Booth, 1997; Sandberg, 1997). Highlighting examples and descriptions from the transcripts ensured that I remained oriented to the experiences being described by the text (Sandberg).

At this point in the process I was looking at each transcript individually but considering them as a whole, while at the same time looking for clues to the process used to make meaning

by the individual and getting a sense of the meaning she was making of the phenomena. While reading the transcripts I kept guiding questions, for instance, does this tell me anything about how she understands her work or how she learned her work?

Step 2: Condensation

The next step of the process involved trying to condense each participant's statements as described above into manageable pieces of information. I reviewed all the highlighted utterances and asked myself a guiding question that built upon the first question. The questions I used in step 1, above, to guide me through the transcripts still applied.

In condensing the data to a manageable size for the rest of the analysis process I wanted to be able use the utterances of the participants in the context of the whole interview rather than just have stand-alone quotes from the transcripts. I thus chose to identify the main points of the context in addition to quotes. My intent was to continue to use the full transcripts but have a system by which to begin comparison. Bowden (1996) suggests that extracting quotes out transcripts makes it difficult to remember the context of the utterance later on in the analysis (p.61).

In order to be better able to see the individual participants' responses in relation to the rest of the interviews I needed to be able to create a visual reference point. To that end I wrote the main points and parts of the significant utterances onto cue cards. I then taped the cue cards related to each participant in clusters on a very large piece of paper on a wall. Creating this visual reference point was achievable because I had eight participants, it may not have been as easy to do if there had been many more participants.

Step 3: Comparison

The goal of this step was to find key similarities and differences in the participants' statements by studying each statement individually and then in comparison with others (Åkerlind 2005, Beutel 2006). I used markers on the large paper around the cue cards to highlight points that were the same or similar. My preliminary guiding question in this stage was: what does this mean? Followed by: does this mean the same thing?

At this point in the analysis it became apparent to me that there were different aspects of variation to be aware of: that of language and the use of words and that of meaning behind the words. Marton and Booth (1997) note that recognizing this variation is essential in understanding the variation in meaning because often many different statements mean the same thing (p.133). In this case I also became quickly aware of the reverse situation as well finding that there is language that is used by workers in the anti-violence sector that are part of the jargon of the field but that there was some differences in the way they were understood and used by the participants.

Step 4: Grouping

At this point of the analysis the focus widens from individual utterances of each participant to themes in the transcripts as a whole (Ashworth & Lucas 2000; Beutel 2006). The utterances of the participants are grouped according to the researcher's perception of similarities and differences (Åkerlind, 2005; Ashworth & Lucas; Beutel). I added a second large piece of paper to the wall beside the first and began to list I perceived as a significant themes and group comments and points from the cue cards under the themes. I compared the comments and the themes with the transcript as a whole to determine if my understanding made sense.

During this step I became aware of how it important it was to remember the purpose of the study as I found so many tempting points of interest. I took note of the interesting themes

keeping in mind that as a researcher I am a learner too, one who is “seeking to derive boundaries from her most generous understanding of what might turn out to be relevant” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p.132). Ashworth and Lucas (2000) caution against prematurely constructing categories and suggest that if the goal is to keep “faithful to the life world of the participants” (p.305), that there may be important elements to consider that may not fit into structured categories.

The development of questions for myself continued to be helpful as I learned through this analysis. In this step my guiding question was: what is the significant element(s) about learning or doing women’s anti-violence work that is articulated in this statement? I reorganized and re-grouped utterances under different themes and tentatively built several categories. I continued this process over several days, at the same time relating categories to each other to make sure they were structurally related. At the end of this process I had four categories that denoted different ways of conceiving anti-violence work from which I could understand what was important in the learning of it.

Step 5: Characterizing

At this point I diverge slightly from Beutel (2006) in that I merge what she has identified as two distinct steps in her analysis process (articulating and labeling), into one as I found that they emerged in my process at the same time. I call this step characterizing. Characterizing involves describing the specific aspects of the categories in ways that describe both their essence and their structural relationship; the outcome space (Åkerlind, 2005; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Bowden, 1996; Morton, 1996) and giving each category a label that indicates the character.

In this step my guiding questions were: what is the essence of this conception and what makes this concept different and distinct from any other? My process here was to again use a visual aid that allowed me to see all the categories at once and to return to the cue cards where I

had written main points and phrases from the transcripts. Using a large piece of paper with all the categories written in chart form, I listed in marker below them, the characteristics of each category.

Step 6: Contrasting

The aim of this step is to determine the external structure; that is, the structure between conceptions (Åkerlind, 2005; Bowden, 1996; Marton 1996; Marton & Pong, 2005). The way in which this happens seems to be an area of dispute and potential criticism because there are variations of processes of analysis and some may not be as clear as others (Åkerlind). One of the areas of contention seems to be whether the structure of the outcome space comes solely from the data or whether the structure is the judgement of the researcher (Åkerlind; Ashworth & Lucas). After conducting this phenomenographic study my thought regarding this issue is that the description of each conception and the structural relationship between them must be a combination of both the descriptions and the judgment of the researcher. Certainly the character of each category is taken directly from the descriptions in the transcript, however it is the interpretation of those characterizations by the researcher that determines where the boundaries lie (Sandberg, 1997).

For this step I looked for themes of variation, trying to discover explicit and distinct differences between the categories. The themes point both to the relationship between concepts, allowing me mark the distinction as what made the concepts different, this is the structural relationship. Through this phase of the analysis there also emerged from the data some themes that did not fit into the structural relationship but seemed important to understanding the concept. These I identified as “non-critical variation” as they were themes that were shared between two or more categories but did not necessarily fit the primary structural relationship (Åkerlind, 2005,

p.329).

3.6 Validity

In this section I outline the steps I took to ensure the outcomes of this research study are valid and reliable. Åkerlind (2005) suggests the notion of validity and reliability require reframing into the context of phenomenographical research (p.330). Validity in the phenomenography is explained as measuring how well the outcomes correspond to the participants' experience of the phenomena (Uljens 1996 as cited by Åkerlind, p.330.). In my attempt to demonstrate validity and reliability in this study I will focus on two areas as identified by a number of researchers, these are the communicative and pragmatic aspects of the research (Åkerlind, 2005; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Marton & Booth, 1997; Sandberg, 1997).

3.6.1 Communicative Aspect

The communicative aspect of the research refers to the ability of the researcher to demonstrate that their outcomes make sense to relevant communities: other researchers, the members of the population that are represented by the participants and to the targeted audience of the research (Åkerlind, 2005; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Sandberg, 1997). These types of checks often refer to processes that seek feedback from members of these communities by presenting outcomes and incorporating their responses into the analysis (Åkerlind).

Another process that falls in line with the communicative aspect of validity is for the researcher to provide a detailed description of each step of the research, which is what I have chosen to do in this report. A detailed description of the procedures allows these communities to follow the significant elements of the research in order to understand and judge the appropriateness of the procedures undertaken by the researcher (Åkerlind, 2005).

3.6.1.1 Reliability

Reliability is measured as the appropriateness of the methods used in the research (Åkerlind 2005; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Sandberg, 1997). One of the critical procedures necessary to ensure the quality and reliability of phenomenographic research is to demonstrate how the researcher deals with the influence of their perceptions on the outcomes (Åkerlind; Sandberg). Sandberg suggests that researchers undertake and “interpretive awareness” (p.209) throughout the research process.

The steps to maintain interpretive awareness are borrowed from the practice of phenomenological reduction (Sandberg, 1997). They are: remaining oriented to the phenomenon, remaining oriented to the description of the experience not explaining it, treating all aspects as equally important, searching for structural features, and finally using intentionality as a correlational rule (Sandberg). Each of these steps is explicitly identified in the descriptions of the data collection and data analysis procedures of this report.

3.6.2 Pragmatic Aspect

The pragmatic aspect of validity addresses the usefulness of the outcomes (Åkerlind, 2005; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Sandberg, 1994). The outcomes are useful if they contribute to insight and understanding about the phenomenon that meet the purpose of the research (Åkerlind; Marton & Booth, 1997). I hope this study will provide some insight into how to make training and education opportunities for women’s anti-violence workers more meaningful to this group. I believe this study accomplishes that aim.

3.7 Summary

This chapter focused on the methodological approach and procedures used in this study. I began by explaining the context for the research including the aim and hopeful end result. I provided an overview of phenomenography along with some of the theoretical assumptions and reasons why it was a good choice for this research. I explained in detail the procedures used

during the study and the considerations taken to demonstrate the validity and reliability of these outcomes.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter identifies and describes different ways in which workers understand their learning in anti-violence work. These are presented as four categories labelled: personal change (Category A); helping women to change their circumstances (Category B); changing services and service systems (Category C); and changing society and the world (Category D). Further, I will explain the structural and referential aspects of each category (Marton & Pong, 2005).

The data analysis revealed a key overarching finding: workers understand their learning in relation to how they conceive of their work. The learning becomes meaningful as it enhances their ability to perform specific elements of their job in the way they understand their work. A common thread apparent in the ways workers understood their work was that of change and this thread of change is consistent with a connection to a social movement that has as its goal to change the circumstances of marginalized groups in society (Melucci, 1995).

4.0.1 Referential And Structural Aspects

The referential aspect refers to the overall meaning of the category and its characteristics and the structural aspect refers to the variation between the categories that make them different but related (Beutel, 2006; Marton & Pong, 2005). The combination of these aspects will form the outcome space (Beutel; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Pong).

The referential aspects of the categories are identified through the following dimensions: the way the work is understood; the types of knowledge; the information sought by the workers; and the processes used to make meaning. These dimensions are identified as both descriptors of each category as well as areas of variation between categories (Marton & Booth, 1997). As such the dimensions of variation indicate the structural aspect between categories as well.

The structural aspect of these categories will indicate how they relate to each other (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Pong, 2005). Marton and Booth suggest that the relationship between categories form a hierarchy where the categories build in levels of complexity (p.125). The categories in this study do not reflect a hierarchy in the sense that one category is built upon another; instead the categories are important parts of a whole. In this case the four categories make up the range of ways of experiencing the phenomenon of learning in this group. All four ways of understanding the learning are possible and workers can experience one way or all the ways at the same time. I will further discuss the structural aspect of these categories in the rest of the chapter.

4.1 Category A: Personal Change

In this category learning is understood as workers' changing themselves. The workers are engaged in a process of identity formation as they strive to change from who they are to who they wish to be (Kilgore, 1999; Sandlin & Walther, 2009). These workers are aware of themselves in all their engagements and interactions. For example if they attend a formalized skill-building training they will engage in some measure of self-reflection to examine how the information fits into their sense of self. The workers are intent on expressing their personal beliefs and values through their actions and learning how to do so. For some workers who conceive of learning as changing themselves, this change involves aligning their actions with their beliefs about justice and equity. The participants in this study identify being part of the feminist movement, also called the woman's movement or the feminist anti-violence movement. For others their attitudes and beliefs are of a more personal and internal nature and their changes involve resolving their personal issues and achieving personal goals.

4.1.1 Referential Aspects Of Personal Change

Referential aspects refer to the characteristics of Category A that distinguish it as a separate and distinct way of learning women's anti-violence work (Marton & Pong, 2005). In this category the referential aspects are:

- understanding the work as demonstrating beliefs in helping, justice and equity;
- seeking knowledge that provides insight; and
- self reflection as a way of making meaning.

4.1.1.1 Demonstrating Beliefs In Helping, Justice, And Equity

The focus of the work within this category is to act in a manner that demonstrates beliefs of inclusion, equity, helping others, and justice. Some participants identify this as acting as an "ally". There is importance placed on connecting to people by sharing experience and developing empathy towards others and the work:

They taught me how I could connect with them, how I could be seen as an ally with them as opposed to somebody with authority over them even though my position did have authority over them (Participant A, p. 5).

It could be something as, you know, a couple years I went to the trans march... with...to support my trans friends, so I mean things like that you sort of have to step out of your comfort zone to sort of expand on your horizons and you know increase your capacity. You can't just sort of do the same old thing all the time, so I tried to I try to bring in things into my life as much as possible (Participant D, p. 1).

One participant who had worked in the field for a number of years identifies that she connected with the work in a deeper personal way after attending a vigil to mark the murder of a woman in her region:

That was the day this became personal. That it all came together for me
(Participant F, p. 34).

The worker did not know the woman personally but understood her death as a reason for doing women's anti-violence work. The act of attending the vigil was an expression of her belief in the purpose of her work.

The desire to bring about personal change includes working towards resolving their personal experiences that led them to this work in the first place. In Category A the participants' reasons for entering into the field of women's anti-violence work revealed aspects of themselves they wished to change or transform and needs of their own to resolve. The personal and emotional connection to others and the work is evident in this aspect of the category as well. For example one participant revealed that messages in her childhood had resulted in her feeling fearful of shelters leading her to engage in this work in order to learn the truth about these services and resolve her feelings about them. Speaking about why she had a particular interest in shelter work when she thought about helping people:

I wanted to dispel that myth of what a shelter meant for myself, um, because I feel like if you have those biases in you, then you can't really help people because you're trying to avoid that (Participant G, p. 4).

Other participants identified that they felt they were helped in the past and initially entered into the work to give help to others:

There were people in my life who had reached out and helped me for no good reason and I felt like I wanted to do something to give back (Participant A, p. 4).

I guess I wanted to help others who had gone through what I had gone through
(Participant E, p. 3).

For some participants working on changing themselves involved examining their ways of thinking and their actions in the past in order to align them with the beliefs that they held about inclusion and equity. For example several participants indicated that learning how language can perpetuate stereotypes provided a significant understanding of how to act. Both of these women are talking about learning when they first began this work:

I remember one instance where um, I said ghetto blaster, and, and of my co-workers said, “have you ever really thought about that”, I said “thought about what” you know, and she said “have you thought about what you’re saying”, and I said “no I haven’t”, and so we kind of just talked about the back and forth for a little bit, and it was really eye opening to me that language was huge (Participant B, p. 5).

It was watching and learning, and even catching myself, at times um using oppressive language to be honest with you. For example, like retarded....I got a good lecturing, from someone....it’s not that the intentions are negative but it’s just, the way that you’re raised, and who you’re around, and the language that people use. And you just, you conform, and through conformity, I learned that, that language was acceptable and not oppressive (Participant H, p. 7).

4.1.1.2 Seeking Knowledge That Provides Insight

The focus of learning in this category is to bring about personal change and transformation by examining personal thoughts and beliefs, seeking new understanding, and challenging themselves to believe differently and act in alignment with their beliefs. The knowledge sought is information that provides a different way of thinking, seeing, and understanding. The information is often found through hearing personal experiences of others who are different from themselves. They look to comparing lived experiences, seeking

similarities and differences in those experiences as a beginning point of understanding. Talking about attending a workshop where marginalized people spoke of their lives:

I was able to sort of look at my experiences, look at someone else's experiences, you know, you're able to identify the differences you're able to look at the similarities, you're able to, you know, see how something can be done differently next time, what worked what didn't work, why did my life end up this way and theirs didn't.... all those sorts of things (Participant D, p. 5).

We talked about it all the time. And like, white privilege, which, at first I was really uncomfortable talking about...but because I, like, had no choice, I was able to break down the walls that I had built up about being so uncomfortable about talking about it (Participant E, p. 19).

4.1.1.3 Making Meaning Through Self-reflection

Participants across the entire group identified the same ways of accessing the information they needed to learn, however there was variation in what participants took from the information and how they made meaning of the information. Sources of information for all categories included, but were not limited to,; talking to, listening to, and observing the service clients and more experienced workers; reading information; attending workshops and conferences; attending post-secondary programs or courses; guided experience; learning from mistakes; learning from past experiences; and going by instinct. Participants spoke about how their use of social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter have kept them informed of the issues and events in their community. These participants identified that technology increases their access to information which in turn supports them in their learning:

I think it can provide an opportunity for people to dialogue, for sure in a way that they may not have been able to do before, you know because to have that dialogue at one time you had to belong to something that you know would allow you to be able to do that, but now with Facebook you know people are able to do that in a variety of different venues (Participant D, p. 16).

Facebook is basically the only way that I know anything that is going on. So I guess through Facebook is how I learn about events happening... and go to... and learn about. If there was no Facebook I don't know how, especially because I don't live in Toronto...I don't know how I would know about them and be able to go to them and learn about them (Participant E, p. 15).

In Category A: personal change, participants use the information they glean to engage in self-reflection. The way of making meaning in this category is to examine one's own thoughts and ways of being and recognize incongruence with one's desired way of being. Participants speak of challenging themselves, being thoughtful and examining their actions:

I think the most important thing is to be reflective and I know that's kind of like a buzzword now and I don't think at the time that I was going through that process that we even called it that. I don't think we called it about being reflective, I don't know that we even had a language for it. Um I think the closest thing was knowing, like owning up to your own shit or understanding kinda [sic] what it's about for you and where does that come from you know, being ready to be challenged, so you know for me it was kind of born out of that (Participant D, p. 16-17).

I guess the biggest way I learned was just, um, being scared out of my mind, because I was in it and just pushing myself to do it (Participant G, p. 5).

4.1.2 Structural Aspect

The structural aspect explains what makes each way of experiencing the phenomenon different from the others (Åkerlind, 2005). The interview transcripts revealed a theme of change that was present in the ways the participants perceived their work. One of the ways these categories differ from each other is in the subject in focus for change.

In the “personal change category” of learning, the subject of the learning is the worker themselves. In this category the workers are engaged with learning about themselves, their thoughts and their actions. They see changing themselves as part of the change work they do. The scope of this category in relation to the feminist movement is change on an individual level. The personal change understanding of learning is one part of meeting the goals of the feminist movement in that change starts with individuals within the movement and broadens outward to encompass changing society. Table 4.1 shows the characteristics of the personal change category.

Table 4.1: Structural and Referential Aspects of Category A: Personal Change

| Category A | Referential Aspect | Structural Aspect |
|---|--|-------------------------------|
| Personal change Understand the work through understanding self | -learning through self-reflection -transformation by examining personal thoughts and beliefs -challenging themselves to act in alignment with beliefs -scope in relation to social movement change work is on the individual level. | -the subject in focus is self |

4.2 Category B: Helping Women To Change Their Circumstances

In this category learning is understood as acquiring the tools and skills that support the goal of service provision for individual women and as successfully accomplishing associated

tasks and activities. These workers seek to understand the ways that violence affects each woman individually and to determine what each woman needs to change her circumstances. They see themselves as helpers in the woman's process and learn what's necessary to enable them to act in ways that supports the woman.

4.2.1 Referential Aspects

The referential aspects as revealed by the data for the category of helping women change are:

- understanding the work as providing services to women,
- seeking information that demonstrates how to do things, and
- recognizing that meaning comes from doing it correctly.

4.2.1.1 Understanding The Work As Providing Services To Women

The focal point of the work in this category is the provision of a variety of services to women who have experienced violence with the aim of supporting these clients to change their circumstances. What differentiates this approach from the other ways workers understand their work is that the focus is on one woman at a time as opposed to all women at the same time. Service provision in this context is helping the woman to identify problem areas; seeking solutions to problems that enable women to change their circumstances; providing relevant information; and helping her access the services and supports she needs:

I was a great supportive counsellor in like you know, validating and things like that when a woman would come in, but I didn't really challenge a woman you know, and I don't mean challenge in like an aggressive kind of way, I just mean I didn't really get her thinking, right, I just kind of I kind of went with her and walked through her story with her, but didn't really uh know, try to um, you know

look at different perceptions, and look at different angles to the story and things like that (Participant B, p.).

The data revealed that there were differences in the way workers perceived the relation of service provision to the goals of the feminist anti-violence movement. Some viewed the work as distinct and different from social movement work as described in this comment:

There isn't that political thread in the, in our shelter, so it's really kind of what these exact women need at this exact time, and that's , that's what it's very much focused on (Participant G).

Another worker explains here how her work is related to a social movement:

If we can work with women and children today to help them understand that they don't have to live like this, that there is a better way, that they have a right to live their lives free of violence, then by giving them that information we give them tools and power if you will, to go on and recognize in their world, situations that could be potentially problematic and they will have developed the skills and tools to prevent that from happening further down the line (Participant A, p. 2).

Another perspective suggested that service provision is deeply connected to the feminist movement and further, that making that connection is critical. Here Participant C talks about how she teaches other workers:

I try to get involved in sitting down and talking with the women that are working there and uh engage them in conversations about...philosophical type of conversations. Cause I, to me I think if you, if you don't get that fundamental philosophy, of how we do the work, or why we do the work, why we continue to need to do that work, then um, if you don't get it then, you're never going to get it.

And I think women as well, need to be open to hearing it and you know challenge their thought process (Participant C, p. 14).

4.2.1.2 Seeking Information That Demonstrates How To Do Things

The focus of the learning in this category is the acquisition of a repertoire of tools, resources and skills that can be used in the service of women and their children. The type of knowledge is explicit and is often sought through models, examples, procedures, guides, instructions, templates, and other types of information that demonstrate “how to”:

Very recently I did the Springtide Resources online program for working with persons with disabilities (Participant A, p. 15).

We did some role playing, um at times, the kind where you know, someone would be the woman, and someone would be the worker (Participant C, p. 8).

Another way that we learned was through very specific policy and procedures, so it was very clear sort of what our job expectation was, and the procedure really showed us how to do all of those different aspects of our job. So it was almost like a, sort of like a teaching aid in a way, of all the steps you need to take to you know: fill out an intake form or fill out a pink. And you know they had it set up so they had examples of what the form looks like, what you're supposed to put in there, and so the learning was very, very practical in those ways (Participant D, p. 6).

We all simply, and I'm guessing there would have been about twelve of us at the time that were hired, and we probably went through, page by page, “Understanding Wife Assault”. That was our training book. That was our bible (Participant F, p. 8).

The worker will seek information about how a service or system works in order to support a woman (client) in navigating the system and be better able to adapt to barriers that may occur within that system:

Every single woman that comes in the door is so new for me, so sitting down with a woman, and doing intake with them, and finding out what they need , and where they want to go and then doing that research to find out what, who I can get them in contact with um to get to that next step.....one things I do like is on the internet, is if you're trying to find resources for, for women, um it's all there, you know at least in terms of getting numbers, um at least you get a general idea of, of what these places do, again I'm not from Toronto, I don't know what's out in the community here, um so the internet is, is a really great tool um for that (Participant G, p. 16).

In the next quote the participant identifies it was her own experience of violence that taught her information about what a system was like and informed her ideas of how to help women navigate that system:

So, like, when people had questions I suppose, about, uh, going to the police I was able to answer questions like, “ this is what happens if you were to go to the police, if you didn't go to the police.” Questions like “what the...”, like, “what the sexual assault kit at the hospital has to be”, like, I knew those kind of things anyways, so...that was again my own knowledge of going through it (Participant E, p. 7).

4.2.1.3 Meaning Comes From Doing It Correctly

As noted in the previous category the participants' utilize a variety of sources to gain access to the information required to learn, but make different meaning according to what they

think they need to know for their work. They are looking to understand what happens for each woman and work toward supporting women to change their circumstances. In the “helping individual women category” workers seek to cultivate skills that enhance their response to the needs of specific women. The information or knowledge is transferred to the worker through various means, but the meaning is made when the “know how” is successfully applied:

I just simply said okay help me to understand what that means for you and then through that conversation this particular woman said to me well “why didn't you just ask me that why didn't you just ask that question” so they [women using services] were very specific in terms of what it is they needed me to ask in order for me to get the information that I needed (Participant A, p. 6).

That's how I would learn to do that kind of work which is basically what I do all the time. Like housing and looking for market rentals is, hands on work. Then I would just go back to my supervisor and say: “is this right”? And that's how I would clarify if things were correct (Participant E, p. 5).

This category of learning involves measuring the success of learning in order to acknowledge that the learning has been acquired. There is a right way and a wrong way to carry out a given task or activity. Or several right ways and several wrong ways. The previous quote and the next are examples of how some participants view feedback from service users or supervisors as indicators that they have learned to do a thing well:

I learned from my co-workers, who you know, they checked me when I was wrong (Participant B, p. 4).

The other day I was um I'd been helping this one family that I've gotten really close to um the kid—one of the kids came up and I hadn't been there for about a

week, and he just came out and hugged me and he was like oh I missed you, you haven't been here in so long, and um those, and those are the moments that I kind of I learn from cause that means I did something right (Participant G, p. 5)

Other participants identify learning from their experiences and reflect on what worked and what did not:

I ask the women how it went for them, you know and I think that's really important, yesterday after this interaction with CAS I asked the woman so how was it for you with me being here versus v someone not being here for you, was there a difference, you know, were you okay with me saying what I said when I was advocating on your behalf, is there something you would have liked me to say that I didn't say, so you know whether sometimes those questions are external and sometimes their internal, but I think that's a major part of the learning and to sort of grow in your job, you know because you do learn from those experiences, yeah (Participant D, p. 7).

You have to fall at times to learn, what not to do, or how to change. But for sure I'm not going to trip over this stone ever again (Participant H, p. 12).

4.2.2 Structural Aspect

What makes Category B: helping women to change, different from the others is that the subject in focus for change is the individual woman the worker is working with. In this aspect the workers' view is learning how to help one woman at a time deal with the circumstances in her own life. This view, while similar to Category A works on an individual level of change, the subject of the change is a woman outside of themselves.

This category: helping women to change, can be seen as another level of change that must occur to meet the goals of a social movement that focuses on social change. An

understanding of what needs to change on a societal level begins with understanding the lives of individuals in society. Conversely as individual lives change it contributes to a collective level of change for a group. Table 4.2 shows the characteristics of the helping women to change category.

Table 4.2: Structural and Referential Aspects of Category B: Helping women to Change

| Category B | Referential Aspect | Structural Aspect |
|---|---|---|
| Helping women to change Understand the work as helping each woman change her circumstances | -learning is gaining skills and techniques to support individual women to change their circumstances. -scope in relation to social movement change work is on the individual level but external to themselves. | The subject in focus is individual women outside of themselves. |

4.3 Category C: Systemic Change

In this category workers see learning as understanding what you need to know in order to effect structural change in institutions and systems. In this report “system” refers to: “a coordinated body of methods” and an “assemblage or combination of things that form a whole” (Dictionary.com, n.d.). Examples of systems include: the legal system, child welfare system, and medical system.

Effecting institutional change is an extension of service for individual women as it is each woman’s report of negative experiences with various institutions and systems that cumulatively act as a catalyst for institutional change. Workers here seek to support different outcomes for women as a group. They view their work as advocacy and learn to be advocates:

I work on behalf of...women who’ve experienced abuse in their lives. I, uh, try to advocate on their behalf at whatever committees that I am involved in, or boards that I am on... in the community, and also on the provincial board (Participant C, p. 1).

4.3.1 Referential Aspects

The referential aspects revealed through the data in this category are:

- the work is understood as creating systemic change within institutions and systems on behalf of women as a group,
- the knowledge sought is an understanding of women's experiences and the workings of institutions and systems, and
- meaning is made through problem solving.

4.3.1.1 Creating Institutional And Systems Change On Behalf Of Women

The focus of the work in this category is to identify gaps and barriers in services, examine the policies and procedures of institutions and systems, and urge policy changes that will remove barriers that women are experiencing. It involves meeting with representatives to discuss women's experiences. At times workers may consider creating services and programs when a need is recognized and not being met by other institutions. The focal point is changing institutions and systems to meet the needs of a group as opposed to an individual, even though individuals will benefit:

I have a boss right now who I have learned a great deal from in terms of advocacy and just the idea of you know, we have a responsibility not just to provide direct service to the women that we are working on behalf of, but on behalf of women all over the place (Participant A, p. 10).

We still work together you know towards a similar goal , and agencies reaching out together and sitting at round table and saying, here's a common issue how can you help, how can you help, how can you help, and what can we all offer together (Participant B, p. 14).

...we got a meeting with [name withheld], Minister of Community and Social Services at the time. And we went in with a pilot program, or proposal for a child witness program in our shelters, a pilot, because we knew these children needed more. And then, so we got our money and that was done local, sort of quietly. We were just doing our job (Participant F, p. 14).

4.3.1.2 Seeking An Understanding Of The Experience

The focus of the learning in the “institutional change category” is on understanding how institutions and systems work and learning how to strategize and organize change. Workers with this category seek examples of experiences and ideas that enable them to problem solve.

Technology and newer web 2.0 tools are utilized by the workers to connect and strategize with other workers:

I do believe that technology can allow me to learn in a variety of ways. I could take online programming, I could participate or comment on a blog, I could post something to the OAITH website and put it out there for others to see and also seek information from others who are doing the same kinds of things (Participant A, p. 15).

And so I did a lot of research on um how women that are sexually assaulted are treated, and women being abused during war times, um and also I did my, a lot of the um, my thesis when I in university last year was on discrimination against women in the Indian Act (Participant C, p. 4).

So we were looking at what kinds of policies and procedures they had in place, what kind of programming, what kind of support, umm, in terms of childcare versus, uh, babysitting. And so I went to, umm, [name of organization withheld] and met with them and brought back, umm, copies of their procedures etcetera

and so we started looking at that and what might work in a rural [area name withheld] area (Participant F, p. 2).

4.3.1.3 Meaning As Problem Solving

Participants utilize various sources to get information about how institutions and systems work and don't work for women and this includes stories from women about their interactions. They are looking to understand how systems fail women and, addressing their change, work toward this aspect. They make meaning by comparing the experiences of what happens for women with what they believe should happen for women when they access institutions and systems. Workers gather information about how systems work and then analyze this information to identify the discrepancies and problem-solve solutions. Making meaning involves investigating, identifying patterns and utilizing reasoning to problem-solve:

When we went into the doctor's office the doctor was very rude and disrespectful and basically said "yep got your blood work back and you've basically got hepatitis A hepatitis B hepatitis C and you're HIV-positive and he just and in fact she, it was a female doctor said so.... And of course the woman just kind of collapsed and I'm trying to hold her up and I'm trying to ask the doctor questions and the whole time and thinking to myself I didn't read this in any book I don't understand what I'm supposed to do here (Participant A, p. 9).

I constantly am sending out information to people from different databases and you know different reports that I've found and I really tried to stick to some really cool community-based research reports and I'm always on the kind of on the hunt for them and you know I'm always sending that out you know anything from harm reduction to you know sort of changes in the OW system, to you know housing

issues or whatever it is, you know I'm always trying to make sure people have that information available to them (Participant D, p. 8)

If a women discloses that she's not safe to go back home, in that part of the support group, where would she go, and then the audit took place, and we found out which places were accessible or not, physically (Participant H, p. 3).

4.3.2 Structural Aspect

In Category C the subject in focus for change is institutions and systems that women will engage with through the course of their lives. This understanding of learning shifts from understanding how to help an individual to how to help the group. This category is less dependent on examining each experience in detail to understand what's needed for individual women as it is with trying to understand the experience from the perspective of the group.

This category is another level of change in meeting the goals of a social movement in that there is an understanding that effecting change requires moving beyond one individual and one problem at time and focusing on changing systems in order to effect the lives of women as group, thereby meeting the needs of more women than just those women the worker has a relationship with. Table 4.3 shows the characteristics of the systemic change category.

Table 4.3: Structural and Referential Aspects of Category C: Systemic Change

| Category C | Referential Aspect | Structural Aspect |
|---|--|--|
| Systemic Change Understand the work is to change systems and institutions to better meet the needs of women as a group | -learning is understanding how systems and services can change to better help women -scope in relation to social movement change work is on the systemic level. | The subject in focus is systems and services |

4.4 Category D: Changing Social Structures

In this category learning is perceived as understanding social structures, attitudes, and feminist theory in order to effect change on a societal level. These workers view themselves as advocates and activists for social justice. Social justice refers to:

structural change that increases opportunity for those who are least well off politically, economically, and socially. [...] Those who work for social justice push to uncover the underlying causes of inequity and seek systemic change in institutions and policies as well as socially upheld behavioural norms that foster fair treatment and share of benefits. [...] It employs a combination of tactics such as policy advocacy, grassroots organizing, litigation, and communications (Impact Arts, 2009).

So it [violence against women] becomes a social issue it becomes.....a huge issue for society that has to be changed. And I think it's a justice issue. I think it's a social issue. I think it's a personal issue. It's a political issue um, and it's a very personal issue (Participant F, p. 12).

4.4.1 Referential Aspect

The referential aspects of this category are:

- the work is understood as changing societal structures,
- the knowledge sought is theoretical, and
- meaning is made through aligning life experience and theories.

4.4.1.1 Changing Society

In Category D the focus of the work is on making structural changes in society, changes that speak to the goals of feminist movement. These changes include addressing the status of

women's equality. Workers view their work as a collective endeavour and believe that changing people's attitudes and changing social norms will result in societal change:

Well, I believe that when you say that you are working to end violence against women that it encompasses a significant element of social justice and social action work (Participant A, p.1).

If it means you have to picket outside the government you have to, to be listened. Even though, yeah we have the right to vote, and we're considered as people, and you know, we can be part of the parliament, and you know run for politics, I still find that there—equality doesn't exist. So it's making sure that we are equal, in all aspects, whether its economical, political, social (Participant H, p.5).

4.4.1.2 Theoretical Knowledge

The workers' learning in this category is focused on understanding how women's inequality is constructed and maintained in society. The workers seek out theoretical knowledge such as how the oppression of women manifests in a social structure; so, while there is an element of understanding systems, the knowledge sought is what the system causes in society as opposed to how the system works. Workers want to hear thoughts and opinions about issues from leaders in the field. They examine issues from a theoretical level and seek to develop an analysis of the problem:

For example at staff meeting every week we set aside a chunk of time to have what we call of a feminist discussion and so each one of us is responsible for bringing something to the table to discuss and we take turns doing that and sometimes it may be an article that we've come across that we want to present to the rest of the team and then discuss it (Participant A, p. 10).

I think, you need, you need to um be open to it, you need to be open to hearing different points of view, and to listening to how people interpret things and their perspective on things. And, you need to, you need to really own the fact that you know, I don't know this, I don't even have an opinion on it because I don't know enough about it and uh, you know, I need to learn about it (Participant C, p. 11).

4.4.1.3 Aligning Lived Experience With Theoretical Knowledge

Similarly to the other categories, workers with this category in focus utilize a variety of sources for information about violence against women, but in this case the focus is on why violence occurs, developing theory about violence against women and creating political, institutional and social strategies to end violence. The workers make meaning by analyzing information for underlying themes and connections and applying reasoning and critical thinking skills. This participant makes meaning through participating in an event that unites people who share the same understanding of the cause of oppression:

So those are two very different types of learning and the one is very experiential you know and it's no different than you know going to different events that have really been motivated by you know different sort of experiences and forms of oppression and resistance that have kind of brought people together in large numbers to create this amazing event where you know it's a moment in time where people have some solidarity, you know? And that's experiential, that's a totally different type of learning then you'll get anywhere else (Participant D, p. 12).

This participant sees learning to use social networking tools as a way to inform and mobilize people as critical in her work:

We were talking about the Step it Up Campaign [a provincial campaign that lobbies government for change], and that, and that Facebook page, for it [the

campaign] to move forward you need people to create some kind of momentum, so you need to have people in a discussion (Participant C, p. 24).

In the next quote the participant is talking about wishing her work had the focus of changing social structures but feels it does not. She has, in effect, learned about social justice work by recognizing what she does not do through her workplace:

I mean I think it's great what we do, for sure. And I think that I, I'm helping ...I hope...I'm helping people. And like, changing individual lives but like I said I'm not changing thought patterns of people. You know? Like me working in the shelter I'm not helping people see that, or I'm not helping abusers see that what they're doing is wrong, that women aren't less. I'm not helping I guess, see that the power and control or anything like that or the dynamics of power. I'm not really changing that in any way (Participant E, p. 21).

4.4.2 Structural Aspect

In Category D the subject in focus for change is society and societal structures. The learning shifts to a broader perspective of change than any of the other categories of learning. This category of learning involves understanding societal structures and strategizing change at this level. Category D speaks to the ideological framework behind the goals of the movement as it seeks to change how the world is unfairly organized.

The “changing social structures category” is another level of learning that works toward meeting the goals of a social movement. This level develops an understanding social structures and their influence on the lives of individuals, institutions and systems and informs the theoretical vision of the movement. Table 4.4 shows the characteristics of the changing social structures category.

Table 4.4: Structural and Referential Aspects of Category D - Changing Social Structures

| Category D | Referential Aspect | Structural Aspect |
|--|--|--|
| Changing Social Structures Understand the work as changing the worldview. | -the learning is understanding the influence of social structures on the group and theorizing solutions. -scope in relation to social movement change work is on the structural and societal. | The subject in focus is society and social structures. |

4.5 Outcome Space

The outcome space in phenomenographic research is a visual representation of the ways of understanding the phenomenon under study, as shown in Figure 4.1 (Marton & Booth, 1997).

The primary relationship between the different ways of understanding is that they refer to one phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2005).

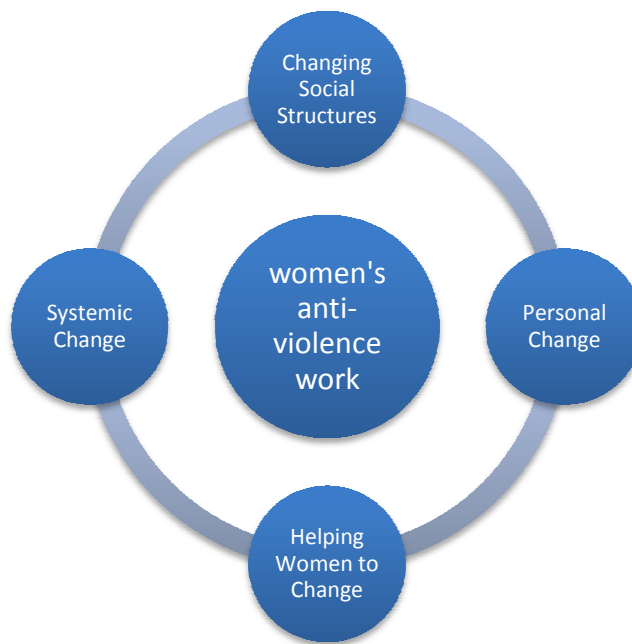


Figure 4.1: Outcome Space

The phenomenon is seen as the whole and in this case the whole is learning women's anti-violence work. This research is aimed at identifying all the ways the participants in this study understand and experience learning anti-violence work. Each of the four categories is part of the

whole; taken together they form a set. The categories in the set are non sequential since none of the participants indicated that one way of experiencing learning was a prerequisite to another.

4.6 Ways The Learning Is Experienced

The data revealed four ways learning anti-violence work is understood from the perception of workers. The data also revealed that learning anti-violence work can be experienced with a single understanding in focus or with several in focus simultaneously. The distribution between participants of the ways of understanding is shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Eight women’s anti-violence workers’ predominant (++) and less dominant (+) ways of understanding learning anti-violence work.

| | Category A Personal Change | Category B Changing Women | Category C Systemic Change | Category D Social Change |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Participant A (21) | + | + | + | ++ |
| Participant B (7) | + | ++ | + | |
| Participant C (25) | | | ++ | + |
| Participant D (10) | ++ | + | + | + |
| Participant E (3) | + | ++ | | + |
| Participant F (26) | + | + | ++ | |
| Participant G (1) | + | ++ | | |
| Participant H (5) | | + | ++ | + |

Note: numbers in brackets indicate years of employment in the field.

4.6.1 Experiences With One Understanding In Focus

All of the workers in this study indicated that they had attended a post-secondary institution at some time prior to working in the field or during their career. I had not asked participants any questions about their education prior to the interviews as I did not intend to distinguish between school- and work-learning. However women brought up their post-secondary education experiences when they were asked these questions: “What brought you to this work originally?” and “How did you learn to do your work?” After post-secondary was mentioned, I followed up with a question that asked them to talk about what their post-secondary experience taught them about the work. A number of the participants indicated that their post-secondary education taught them very little about how to do their work. Participant G says that

school got her foot in the door through placement and got her noticed for having a degree (p. 10); she goes on to say:

The only really other way it helped me was that um, there was just this background of knowledge that I could just pull from on days that I was stuck. So if um, you know people were talking to me about, you know some issues that they were facing, I could go back and even if it was theoretical knowledge, and I can go okay, well you're having a really hard time with shadeism in your community, what do I know about shadeism, these are the things I know, this is the information I could give (Participant G, p. 10-11).

Another noted:

I think the only way you can learn is by working there because I don't really think they can possibly teach you every possible scenario that can happen in a shelter in school (Participant E, p. 6).

In a later part of the interview Participant E identifies a learning experience at school that engendered personal change and social structure understanding:

It definitely taught me about privilege and oppression and social location which is something that I never really looked at before going to college and I have found it extremely helpful (Participant E, p. 18) and

It was, well, it was mainly the privilege and oppression that we did through the classes. We talked about it all the time. And like, white privilege, which, at first I was really uncomfortable talking about...but because I, like, had no choice, I was able to break down the walls that I had built up about being so uncomfortable about talking about it (Participant E, p. 19).

These participants understand their work in one specific way and while they discern other learning that took place at school, they do not connect it to their perception of learning the work.

The understanding in focus for them at the time of the interview is learning that relates to supporting individual women to change their circumstances, anything else was unrecognized or relegated to the background. These statements imply the participants place value on the learning they experience in relation to how it fit their understanding of their work. Participant A mentions value explicitly:

This does not suggest that the other is not relevant or not important, but I can't tell you every theoretical ideology around criminology anymore, like I can't tell you what those theories of criminal activity are anymore, I can name a couple but it wasn't important information for me in terms of working with criminalized women.....learning those theories of criminality and criminogenic factors and those kinds of things, they did not help me to connect with women and connect in a way that that woman felt supported. It wasn't helpful for that but the practical experience of making some mistakes and having the woman hold me accountable that those were my most valuable learnings [sic] (Participant A, p. 16).

The notion of value was expressed in several interviews and inferred in others. I chose not to probe the issue of value during the interview even though it was discussed in relation to the what the participants thought was the best way to learn this work. My reason at the time was that the question of value was outside the scope of this study. I raise the issue of value here in the findings because it was present in these conversations and could be an interesting area for further study. Value is also briefly discussed in chapter 5.

4.6.2 Experiences That Span More Than One Understanding

Learning experiences can hold one way of understanding in focus and they can also hold more than one in focus simultaneously. In the next example Participant A describes her process of learning in reference to filling out reporting forms for women who accessed a service with which she worked. Her experience of learning to fill out the forms required holding in focus Categories A, B, and C:

Given that these women are serving a portion of their sentence in the community there are reporting requirements to others who are not like-minded, and so you know, how to fill out the serious occurrence report and how you actually do that are very different in the sense that the consequences are high for a woman who makes a mistake while she's serving a portion of her sentence in the community, and not that I don't think that they're high for women who are not serving a portion of their sentence but for me it's always been an addition all barrier or difficulty or stress or that women have who are criminalized. And so I wanted to be truthful and honest about reporting the incident but I also needed to find a way to try and show that woman in the most positive light possible (Participant A, p. 13).

Learning to fill out a reporting form can, on the surface, seem simple if the way of learning this is reduced to only one aspect of learning, such as learning the correct procedure to fill out the form. What makes this learning more complex is the additional attention to the systemic barriers the form may represent and the desire of the worker to act in ways that represent her beliefs about honesty and justice. This requires the worker to examine the needs of the individual woman in having her form filled out correctly, examine the systemic barriers inherent in the system for criminalized women, and develop a course of action that represents her

personal values. Participant D in the statement below describes workshops where she learned about social structure issues that create oppressive conditions and, through those discussions, how to work with women who experienced those barriers. The participant had Categories B and D in focus:

Typically through workshops and using focus groups as a way to inform different education techniques and how to talk to youth, so that was sort of used and how to educate us around anti-oppression issues.....for example they would have people who say were HIV-positive, coming and talking about their experience, or someone who had experienced homophobia come and talk about their experience.....it was a valuable way of learning for sure (Participant D, p. 5).

This example illustrates an awareness of the interrelatedness of the levels of focus in the women's movement. An awareness of the interrelatedness of the individual and the group represents a way of understanding that is more complex as it signifies a simultaneous focus of more than one level at a time.

4.7 Summary

The data analysis of this study revealed four distinct ways of understanding learning in women's anti-violence work. These were revealed through interviews with workers in the field. They are: personal change (Category A); helping women to change their circumstances (Category B); changing services and service systems (Category C); and changing society and the world (Category D). These categories reflect a key overarching finding in that the ways workers experience their learning is related to how they understand their work.

Each category is distinguished by variation in the following dimensions: the way the work is understood; the process for making meaning; and the type of knowledge sought. In Category A the work involves personal change where the worker can act in ways that represent

her beliefs. The worker in this category seeks out information that illustrates personal experiences of themselves and others and they engage in self-reflection to make meaning. In Category B the work is understood to be helping individual women change their circumstances. Workers seek out information that provides instruction and they make meaning through practice and evaluation of practice. In Category C the work is understood as making systemic change. Workers seek out information that informs them of the experience of the group and the services and institutions the group interact with. They make meaning through investigation and problem solving. Finally, in Category D the work is understood as changing social structures that create and maintain oppression. These workers seek information about what people think and different perspectives on social issues. They make meaning through analysis and theorizing.

The structural aspect of these categories is indicated in the way they are different but related. The characteristic that is similar through all the categories and therefore relates them is the theme of change: change being the focus of the work and the focus of the learning. The way they are different is the subject in focus for change. In Category A the subject in focus for change is the self; in B, the woman; in C, the systems; and in Category D, the subject in focus is social structures. These four categories together are a non-sequential set of the range of ways learning women's anti-violence work is experienced by the workers in this study.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced categorized ways of understanding, which emerged from the data; this chapter discusses the findings in relation to the development of training for women's anti-violence workers. This chapter begins by identifying how the findings can inform our understanding of women's anti-violence training and be used in the development of future training and education for workplace learning. Following that, I explore the workplace as a site of learning and the potential of a community of practice as a vehicle for ongoing learning and professional development for women's anti-violence workers. Then I examine the use of Information and Communication Technology in learning and identify the barriers and benefits of a community of practice. In the final section I identify areas for future study and share some insights from my self-reflection of this, my first academic research endeavour.

5.1. Using The Findings In The Development Of Women's Anti-violence Training

The transcripts of the interviews with worker-participants in this study indicate that their understanding of learning anti-violence work falls into four categories. The key overarching finding was that the worker-participants' understanding of learning anti-violence work was related to their understanding of their own work. While the aim of phenomenographic research is to identify and categorize the differences between perceptions of a phenomenon there are interesting things to note in the similarities as well. The findings of this study show that while the participants perceived their work differently, all of them identified their learning in relation to what they understand their work to be. The underlying premise of phenomenographic research is that conceptions are developed through personal experiences in combination with interpretation of data received through the senses (Marton, 1981). In other words, it says that there is no one true conception of a phenomenon. The findings in this study demonstrate that even within this

small pool of subjects there exists four distinctly different ideas of what women's anti-violence work is and how it is learned and I would suggest that a larger pool of subjects would yield other ideas.

As women's anti-violence organizations were originally started by women engaged in the women's movement who helped other women, what constitutes women's anti-violence work has always been defined by the women who actually do this work. As women were engaged in the real world practice of helping other women their area of focus expanded in response to both the needs of individual women and the systemic and societal issues that affected women individually and as a group. Therefore it makes sense that as more women with a variety of backgrounds and experiences enter into the field of women's anti-violence work and as they, in turn, work in a variety of organizations with a variety of women, that the work will be understood in different ways. That this study articulates the lenses through which women's anti-violence work is learned is an asset in the development of training for workers. The dilemma is to create learning events that honour the various understandings.

One approach to training requires examining adult learning principles in combination with constructivist learning theory. Adult learners are described in the literature as individuals who can identify what they need to learn and make plans to access what they need to learn. They are further described as individuals who have past experience to draw upon as a frame of reference in their learning and who are motivated to gain new knowledge in order to equip themselves to function in the roles they take on in their lives (Mackeracher, 2004). Adults will understand information from their frame of reference and through the context in which it is received. These principles lend themselves to a constructivist epistemology which posits that individuals make meaning through their experiences in the real world. Hansman (2001) suggests

that learning involves the interaction and intersection of people, tools, and context and in combination these shape what is learned. Given this understanding of learning, a conceptual framework for developing training for women's anti-violence workers must address the people who can facilitate and participate in learning, the tools that the workers will utilize and the context or circumstances under which learning will take place. The information gathered through this study revealed some foundational components that are critical in the development of the framework.

5.2 The Context: Situated Learning

Another similarity that emerged from the data was that participants identified that they learned by participating and engaging in the activities of their workplace. In part, the undertaking of the work formed their understanding of their work and their learning of it. The context of their experiences influenced how they practice. The activities mentioned in the interviews included: meeting with women individually; facilitating groups; engaging in public education; engaging in systemic advocacy; and committee or Board work. This finding supports theories that suggest learning is context based and situated in real world experience.

Many of the participants in this study felt that they did not learn what they needed to know from school. They identified that they learned on the job through trial and error with the support of co-workers or supervisors. In other words, cognition required the embodiment of the information they heard at school. The information became knowledge only as it practically applied to their workplace experiences. In their research on situated cognition, Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989), suggest that knowledge cannot be separated from the context or culture within which it is used, that knowledge is a product of activity (p. 32). My own experience as an educator in a post secondary diploma program that prepares women to work in the anti-violence field confirms this view. One example from school involves learning to counsel abused women.

Even though the students in my program undergo a number of practice counselling labs where they act as counsellors using reality-based scenarios, they regularly express the concern that they are fearful of sitting across from a live woman in distress because they feel they will do or say something that will worsen the woman's distress. Learners are expressing their lack of confidence in their knowledge; they are indicating a need to try it out in the real world and to confirm that the information that they have in their head and the activities they engaged in at school would have meaning in a real world situation.

The participants in this study revealed a similar lack of confidence when they spoke of their beginnings in this work as well. Almost of all of them mentioned that they felt like they knew nothing even though all of them had attended some post secondary education in related fields such as social work and some indicated they participated in community social justice events. Cognition of knowledge consists of embodied action (Varela 1999 as quoted by Cortes et al. p.21). In relation to learning this finding suggests that 'knowing how' involves the ability to practice in the real world.

In his work on workplace learning, Beckett (2001) suggests that trainers look beyond previous conceptions of training which focused on replication of actions and look towards building the capacity of anticipation. He calls this "anticipative action" (p. 76) and posits that to be skilful is the combination of understanding and confidence. When workers understand what they are doing they can enter into a situation with a plan for a positive outcome and even if they have to change course along the way because circumstances change, they understand what they are doing and why and so can modify and adapt to reach a positive outcome. This suggests that training in a woman's anti-violence organization should incorporate the real world practices that workers participate in, as is common when training new staff in many workplaces including

women's anti-violence organizations. A new staff person typically has a designated period where they are required to orient themselves to the policy, procedures, and practices of the workplace. In this scenario, new workers are often partnered with more experienced workers. The more experienced worker guides the newer worker around the workplace showing them where things are, introducing them to other staff and answers questions that the newer worker may have. In some cases the newer worker will spend some time observing the experienced worker while they engage in workplace activities, sometimes called shadowing. This type of training for new workers is a recognized and valued as training by employers even when the experienced worker is not a supervisor but a peer of the newer worker. There is an assumption that learning happens through this arrangement although often the explicit learning is recognized and the tacit learning remains unrecognized. This same arrangement can be used to support continued learning on the job. Workers can be partnered with their peers or arranged in group where they reflect on their practice with their co-workers and deepen their understanding of their actions and resulting outcomes. By having conversations and sharing their experiences of learning they are also producing knowledge that can deepen the knowledge of the co-worker as well.

The term knowledge–practice is used by Cortes et al (2008) in describing the knowledge that is created by social movement actors (p. 20). As noted in Chapter 2, New Social Movements organize around issues of self-determination and inclusion with the goal of societal change. The knowledge created in these movements consists of new ways of being in the world and different ways to analyze political and social structures. This knowledge contributes to the development of theory and practice and as such forms a unique expertise. Women's anti-violence workplaces are sites of knowledge-practice. Women's anti-violence workers are

creating knowledge while they engage in their work. Their practice changes their individual knowledge and consequent practice but also contributes to the learning of the organization and the broader feminist anti-violence movement. The workers create pathways between the knowledge gained from their analysis and their practice. At the same time they create knowledge-practices for others in their organization and in the movement. Through stories, ideas, policy documents, conversations, and other modes of transmission, their knowledge informs others in their network. Learning in this sense is a reciprocal process between actors in the movement or workers in the workplace and a culture of learning is established.

5.3 The People: Communities Of Practice

The idea of community of practice [CoP] emerged from Wenger's work with anthropologist Jean Lave on situated learning (1990). A CoP enables the informal learning that takes place within a community of people who share the same enterprise (Wenger1998). One of the most common influences on learning as identified by the worker-participants in my study is the other women who do the same work. All of the participants said that they learned from: co-workers, co-committee members, colleagues, and supervisors. The concept of a CoP is one way of talking about the ways people in a shared enterprise, such as a workplace or a social movement, learn to make meaning of their enterprise. The four ways of making meaning of the work and learning of women's anti-violence practice can be seen as four components of a shared enterprise or each as a shared enterprise individually that make up the culture of the community. As individuals participate in their real world, they also identify with their colleagues and networks. Learning then includes both the acquisition of skills as well as the formation of individual identity and learning how to be part of the group.

The term 'communities of practice' was first coined by Lave and Wenger in 1991, however both scholars acknowledge that this formation has existed long before the term was

coined and continues to exist even though many communities would not recognize the label or describe themselves using this term. This could be the case at individual women's anti-violence organizations and the provincial network of organizations as well. As noted all the worker-participants in this study talked about how they learned almost all of what they know about their work from the people around them who are doing the same work. This finding suggests that some community exists and that learning happens, but it is not clear to what extent the features of a CoP as described by Lave and Wenger (1991) are at play in these workplaces.

There are a number of features as described by Wenger (1998, p. 125-6) that indicate a CoP is formed, some of these seem to be present in the individual organizations as indicated by the worker-participants of this study. For example there is a sustained mutual relationship between the workers and their co-workers as well as shared tools, resources and language. Other features of a community of practice were not evident in the data which does not mean that they do not exist, only that this research was not focused on exploring a community of practice and therefore did not specifically investigate this concept.

Wenger (1998) suggests that "building identity consists of negotiating meanings of our experience of membership in social communities" (p.145). The four categories of understanding that emerged from the data reveal different ways of understanding learning anti-violence work that are comprised of different ways of approaching the work. Within each category there is an assumed role that is revealed in the distinguishing features. If I were to assign names to these roles I would suggest that role in category one is that of relationship builder, category two would be that of helper, category three is systems changer, and category four could be called activist or theorist. Keeping in mind that the conceptualizations of these roles are my own and were not identified by the participants, the suggestion of roles assumed could be further examined in

relation to identity. An assumption could be made that how the workers see themselves is closely related to how they perform their work and consequently whom they would recognize in their network as part of their work and learning community and who recognizes them. For example if a worker has a perception of the work as supporting women to change their circumstance and sees herself as a helper, it stands that she would recognize other helpers as part of her community and people she could learn from. This would be based on the notion of shared enterprise and shared identity, where the group who identifies in this way would make meaning from an experience in ways that made sense to them. Let's use the example of a woman who has left her partner and has not qualified for an income support program to help explain this idea. A helper may look for ways to help the woman overcome her circumstance, perhaps focusing on other resources available to her. A worker who perceived her work as changing systems and saw herself as a systems changer would make different meaning from the same experience. She might look to the income support program to change their policies in order to better support the woman gain access to money. The approach to the experience would be influenced in part by the participation with others in the group and their responses to the woman's situation. There is a CoP and identity in that the worker will perform in ways that are recognizable to the group (Wenger, 1998); in this way the worker is negotiating her professional self identity through her practice. Newcomers become immersed in the culture of the community through the sharing of experiences, practices, and viewpoints from the more experienced members. At the same time the worker's participation in the experience reifies the interpretation of the experience and reaffirms her understanding of her participation. Her participation in turn becomes part of the knowledge of the community.

The informal learning that occurs through the actions of a CoP is not often recognized in organizations because of its lack of formality. I believe one of the reasons for this is that while training can often be a topic of conversation amongst managers, learning is not. Learning is not a subject in focus for many workplaces outside of schools and therefore not really understood in all its complexities. The idea of training conjures visions of knowledge transfer from an expert to a novice, with the assumption that once the knowledge is transferred it is learned. People are sceptical and undervalue the idea of self-taught or self-determined learning. While the literature has shown the value of informal learning within a CoP, women's anti-violence organizations may not be familiar with the concept of CoP and its potential for professional development. As workplace learning is determined by the opportunities that arise on the job and the informal conversations within the community that practice together, some way must be found to recognize these as learning events and value the individual, group and organizational learning that can materialize from them. The use of a moderator can be useful in concretizing a community of practice and supporting it to emerge as a recognizable learning opportunity. The moderator cannot be a supervisor or be seen to be a monitor as this would undermine the informal learning that can occur. The moderator must walk a careful line between getting the community going and taking it over.

In the previous section on situated learning I proposed the arrangement of groups of workers who could engage in discussion about their practice, thereby helping each other to learn and grow in their work. These groups could be the formation of recognized as CoP that are arranged around one organization or could be further specified to form around different jobs in the workplace. If a number of women's anti-violence organizations were to adopt this way of fostering continued learning in their workplace, there is the potential for communities to engage

with others from other women's anti-violence organizations, creating a large provincial level CoP. This possibility is further explored in the next section as a possible use for information and communication technology [ICT].

5.4 The Tools: Technology And Learning

The use of ICT was one of the areas of interest in this study, partly because it seems on the surface to be a cost effective way of reaching a majority of people who are spread out across a large geographic area. Each of the worker-participants identified some use ICT in the course of their workday, most often email with some smart phone use. In relation to using ICT for learning, six of the eight worker-participants identified that they could see the benefit of things like online training, although they were not experienced in using it. The other two worker-participants actively use Facebook to keep themselves informed about events and issues in the community.

Much of the literature about the use of ICT for learning at a distance is related to education in the form of an instructor-student relationship, where educators explore the ways to best use the technology to enhance and support students learning. This information is useful for the situations where a developer will use ICT for the purpose of skill acquisition and information transfer in the development of online training. There are different considerations in the use of ICT in supporting communities of practice to develop and flourish. They include: the potential barriers to building community when the participants may not know each other in their real world; the ability to convey tacit knowledge; and finding ways to develop a culture of discursive communication in an online environment. An online CoP should enable members to do the same things they would do in person: hold discussions, engage in peer consultation, problem-solve specific issues, and share information on emergent practices and research. Present-day technology does allow for these activities to take place across geographically dispersed workers

in Ontario, however there are still a number of barriers to address that would affect the success of a CoP.

The barriers to using technology in learning identified by the worker-participants in this study and in other research includes: the lack of information about what technology is available and how to use it; the time it takes to learn and get used to new systems of communication; the initial strangeness of online relationships; the cost and availability of some technology in certain geographic areas; and the lack of trust in the technology (Butler & Sellbom, 2002; Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007).

Some of these barriers can be addressed through the use of a point-person or persons who facilitate and encourage technology-assisted communication in the early development of a CoP. These individuals should be knowledgeable and enthusiastic users of technology who can envision the benefits of online communication for the purpose of learning. In their book *Digital Habitats* (2009), Wenger, White, and Smith refer to this role as “technology stewarding” and suggest that this role is part of leadership in a CoP (pg. 24-25). The point-people should be members of the smaller organizational communities of practice in order to share information that is located in the practice of real world work and where they can be recognized as members of the community. This strategy can be an effective way of building a CoP as other workers hear of the it and become interested in finding out if it useful to them. Point-people can also hold their own discussions to share information and solve the problem of how to get other workers involved, in essence creating their own branch of the CoP.

Another barrier is access and information about what technology is available and how to use it. This type of learning lends itself to the use of technology assisted distance training methods because it involves demonstrations of use and information transfer. In this case a series

of demonstration videos using screen-casting software that could be hosted on the CoP website would be useful to members who are not as knowledgeable or comfortable using ICT. In regards to the emotional feelings of discomfort and lack of trust in using a computer to mediate relationships online, these feelings can only reduce through practice over time. As more workers engage with the CoP its use can become normalized and incorporated into regular workplace practice.

5.5 Areas Of Further Study

In this discussion I propose the use of a CoP as a method to support workplace learning and ongoing professional development for women's anti-violence workers. Further, that use of ICT can link the site specific CoP with other organizations and form a larger CoP across Ontario. The use of online communities of practice to support learning amongst workers who are separated by geographical distance seems to be gaining in popularity, but there are still few studies that have explored the effectiveness of a real world communities of practice on worker's knowledge and professional development. Piloting this initiative would make an interesting research project that would make a welcome contribution to the research on workplace learning and virtual communities of practice.

Another area for further study is the connection between learning women's anti-violence work and social movement learning. The theme of change that is present through the four categories indicate that a connection between the two exists, however the ways that the worker-participants perceive social movement learning in connection with their work was not really explored beyond a superficial level in the interviews nor reported on in the findings. I think this area of focus deserves closer scrutiny in a later study because women's anti-violence organizations came from the feminist social movement and some would say they have evolved in

ways that they no longer reflect their feminist roots. It would be fascinating to examine the evolution in understanding of anti-violence work and the influences on these understandings.

5.6 Final Thoughts – Self Reflection

On a final note, I would like to take the time to share my thoughts as I reflect on my journey to conduct academic research. This was my first experience conducting this type of research and hindsight, they say, is 20/20. Now as I have reached the end of this process I find that there are some things that I would have done differently. Things that I believe would have made this research more reflective of my beliefs and values as a racialized woman of multi-heritage and as a feminist. This paper sometimes speaks in a voice that I can't quite recognize as my own.

When I first began my Master studies, I found that I had carried an image of university that had been constructed through the lens of my early years and my social location as a poor, racialized youth. In that location I had understood that a university education was not for the likes of me; that I was not smart enough, and that university was for rich white people. Unconsciously at first I approached my studies with the internal narrative that I would soon be found out to be a fraud and then kicked out. Several months into the program I became convinced that I couldn't possibly be engaging in school properly because I was getting good grades. Basically as strange as it sounds, faced with this discrepancy (that I wasn't smart enough but was getting good grades), I imagined that I must be doing something wrong. It was only after I had finished the program that I realized how these thoughts affected me so profoundly and how that in turn affected the work that I have produced.

As a feminist activist and educator I have participated in conducting research many times, usually for the purposes of program development in the agencies that I have worked in. In fact while I have been at OAITH I have had occasion to gather information from frontline workers

and service users for the purpose of developing workplace training. These research projects were different in their scope but also in their processes, most notably in the reporting mechanisms.

As I engaged in research for the purpose of attaining a degree, I believe my lack of confidence as an academic resulted in my setting aside the things that I value in terms of knowledge. One of these values includes a feminist anti-oppression analysis of the social and institutional structures that both constructs and legitimizes dominant culture knowledge as truth and marginalizes other ways of knowing as alternative or illegitimate. For this project I looked for a method that would conform to what I imagined was academic research. To be clear, no one told me that I had to do research this way. What I recognize in hindsight is that I had set aside my true self in order to conform to the image of a Master student and thesis writer that I had constructed.

I chose to use a phenomenographic approach for my research because as a methodology some of the underlying beliefs resonated with my own and because it is a type of research that originally focused on understanding what people's perceptions are of their learning, so it seemed a good fit. However, while I was engaged in the process I found it limiting. I felt confined to a structure that left out as much information as it revealed. In the end I believe that the information contained in this paper contributes to the discussion about learning and work and so I am satisfied with what I have done. But I am really excited about the unexpected learning that emerged from this process.

I began this journey by holding what I needed to produce in the end in the centre rather than holding myself in the centre. Now I know to hold myself in the centre and look to the alternative ways of knowing that make sense to me to guide the research processes. For example as a racialized woman who has both First Nations and African heritage I am first a storyteller and I learn best from stories told. In this study I had the honour to meet with eight women, almost all

of whom I knew in some way or another outside this research. I spent over an hour with each one and learned so many things about their lives and their work that I had not known before. From each of these women I learned a great deal about the history of women's anti-violence work and the future of women's anti-violence work. In the stories they told I learned how to better do my work. I believe that the information provided by these women has the potential to answer other questions that were not within the scope of this study, questions that perhaps have not even been thought of yet.

I have since learned that there are ways of conducting academic research that celebrate oral teachings and storytelling and that researchers can hold up the stories and allow others to learn from them what they will. The stories themselves become the knowledge rather than just a report on them and the people who tell them. I think there are many stories still to be told especially by women who have worked with other women who have experienced violence and I look forward to supporting the sharing of those stories.

I have also learned that pushing boundaries and challenging limitations about knowledge is the work of a researcher. This understanding has replaced the internal narrative that influenced my thinking when I began school. This learning feels very empowering for me and I believe it can be for others like me, who make it to university but aren't sure they belong there because of who they are. I would like to encourage other women who are about to embark on their first experience of academic research to examine their own beliefs and ways of knowing and put themselves in the centre of the work they create.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Social Movement or Community of Practice?: Workers from woman abuse shelters and their perceptions of learning and identity.¹

The Purpose of the Research

The aim of this research is to explore qualitatively different ways of understanding the process of learning to be a worker in woman abuse shelters in Ontario that are members of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses; a provincial lobby association for feminist anti-violence workers.

I explore significant variation in ways shelter workers experienced:

- A) their identity in relation to their work
- B) other shelter workers in relation to themselves and their work
- C) experiences of learning to be shelter workers
- D) experiences of technology as a support to learning and connection to others in their group
- E) their work in relation to the feminist movement

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) is a provincial association whose members are feminist anti-violence organizations from across the province. OAITH is interested in finding ways to re-connect its members to each other to lessen isolation and increase skill-building opportunities. They believe as do I that the leadership and knowledge of the issues that can lead to skill building can come from within the community.

Voluntary Participation

Participation is completely voluntary. There is no financial remuneration for participation. If at any time you choose to withdraw your information you can do so by sending an email to the researcher, (see the withdrawal section below for more information).

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research

If you chose to be interviewed you will be asked to participate in a face to face or telephone meeting where the researcher will ask a series of questions about your experience working and learning in a woman abuse organization. The interview will last approximately one hour and will be digitally recorded with your consent.

Risks and Benefits

Your participation in this study can help in the planning of learning experiences for members of the women's anti-violence community and helps explore the use of a community of practice as a skill building practice.

By participating in this study you may learn about your work and the work of your colleagues in the province of Ontario.

¹ The original title of the research was changed later in the research process to the current title.

One potential risk is that you may feel an obligation to join the study because of your membership in OAITH. Please note that whether you join the study or not; has no affect on your membership in OAITH.

Withdrawal from the Study

You can withdraw your consent at any time without providing any reason. Your decision to stop participating, or to not answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, or the nature of your relationship with OAITH either now, or in the future. Upon withdrawal from the study all information gathered from you up to that point would be returned to you. You will be asked to inform the researcher of your decision to withdraw.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Your identity and information will be protected and anonymous in the report. All interview recordings will be transcribed by a paid professional transcriber who will be given the content of the interview without personal data. She will also be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Information you supply during the research will be held in a secure location and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Any quotes that are used in the thesis or subsequent publications will be attributed to pseudonyms.

It should be noted that the OAITH website host is called Liquid Web and is based in Chicago and so information shared on the website is subject to the **Patriot Act**. The Patriot Act “allows the Director of National Intelligence and the Attorney General to direct communications service providers and similar private entities to assist in authorized foreign intelligence activities targeting individuals located outside the United States” (US Dept. of Justice, 2010). Follow this link for more information <http://www.justice.gov/archive/ll/highlights.htm>

Researcher

Margaret Alexander, graduate student in the Learning and Technology program at Royal Roads University. Margaret is also working for the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses on a contract to develop training tools for the association and its members.

Questions about the Research?

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact the researcher

Legal Rights and Signatures

I _____, consent to participate in the study called: Social justice and social learning: Feminist anti-violence workers’ perceptions of a community of practice; conducted by Margaret Alexander, Researcher.

I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____ Date _____

PRINT NAME: _____

Participant

Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Researcher

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Hello

My name is Margaret Alexander and I am a graduate student in the Learning and Technology program at Royal Roads University. You will also know me as the OWD Training Project Coordinator with OAITH.

I am writing this note to invite you to be a participant in a research study called: Social Movement or Community of Practice?: Workers from woman abuse shelters and their perceptions of learning and identity.

About the research:

OAITH is interested in finding ways to re-connect its members to each other to lessen isolation and increase skill-building opportunities. They believe as do I that the leadership and knowledge of the issues that can lead to skill building can come from within the community.

The purpose of the study is to gain insights about learning and identity, and explore “communities of practice” (Wenger & Lave, 1991) as a viable method of supporting the learning goals of both the individuals involved and the feminist anti-violence network as a whole.

How can you participate if you choose to?

I will ask approximately 20 people to participate in the study by meeting with me to discuss their thoughts and feelings about learning about how to be a feminist anti-violence worker.

It is important for you to know that your membership is not contingent on participation in this study. The participation in the online community forums is entirely optional.

Your participation in this study can help in the planning of learning experiences for members of the women’s anti-violence community and helps explore the use of a community of practice as a skill building practice. By participating in this study you may learn about your work and the work of your colleagues in the province of Ontario.

The Informed Consent Form. If you decide to participate there is an Informed Consent form that I will ask you to sign prior to the interview. I will send the form through email and also have it available on the OAITH website for download. This form explains the project and your rights as a participant in the project.

If you have any questions about the research, participating or the questions, please feel free to call me.

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Question 1: Can you give me your full name and tell me where you work please.

Question 2: Do I have your consent to record this interview?

Question 3: If you are comfortable with it, can you tell me how old you are?

Question 4: Can you tell me about how long you have been doing this work?

Question 5: Can you talk a little bit about your position and how you identify yourself as a worker?

Question 6: Please tell me a little bit about the work that you do, and feel free to give as many details and explain it in any way that you want.

Question 7: Do you see your work as part of a social movement?

Question 8: How would you define a social movement?

Question 9: What social movement do you believe your work is part of?

Question 10: Can you talk a little bit about how is it that you came to be doing this work?

Question 11: How did you um learn how to do this work?

Question 12: Can you identify the ways that you feel you learned how to do your work?

Question 13: When you first started working with abused women, how did you learn how to do that work?

Question 14: Can you tell me how you help others to learn to do your work, to do this work?

Question 15: Can you talk a little bit about how you continue to learn to do your work?

Question 16: What are the most valuable ways for you to learn how to do this kind of work?

Question 17: Who do you see or identify as part of your work-related community?

Question 18: How you would identify those community members?

Question 19: My questions now are going to move to technology and asking about technology and how technology relates to your learning and community. When I say technology I am going

to define what I'm talking about in terms of technology because we know technology is a pencil, right? Any kind of tool that helps in an activity, but what I'm talking about is mostly the sort of technology that has been enhanced around communication in the last decade or so, so things like cell phones and smart phones and the Internet and Web 2.0 tools. I'm identifying web 2.0 tools as the various sorts of software that has been developed that allows users who are not software developers or a technicians, to be able to change things on the web or add to things on the web. So I am looking particularly at these kind of communication developments over the last decade and I'm wondering if you see a place for technology in relation to your own learning and continuing to grow as a worker or as a person does this work and if so, how?

Question 19: I'm at the end of my questions. Given the intention of this interview was to understand community and understand learning in relation to doing this work, I wonder if there's any sort of wrap-up statement or anything that you feel you want to add to anything that you've said.