

Section 3

Inquiry as Consultancy Practice

A core inquiry question that emerged from the previous section was how can women sustain and nurture subjectivity, identity and ways of enacting power and leadership when these are at odds with predominant masculinist cultures?

The discussions with contributors in Chapter 6 about their experiences of working with women in organisations suggested that:

- Women drew on political or alternative belief systems to work against social conditioning.
- This was necessary to exercise generative forms of power and authority in relation to each other as well as in relation to men.
- In work environments which devalued women's professional competence; women tended to form alliances on the basis of exclusion, and to have difficulty maintaining these when a reward or insider status was achieved.
- This posed specific challenges for feminist consultancy and collaboration.
- Consultancy practices developed for sustaining women in resisting predominant gender cultures were concerned with how to maintain generative balance between nurturing and challenge.

In Chapter 7 I picked up the thread of exploring how to sustain a generative sense of self in devaluing social environments. Through inquiry practices I explored, enacted and conceptualised alternative strategies for nurturing subjectivity and developed different forms of agency in connection.

The texts reviewed in the first part of Chapter 8 focussed on the challenges of moving from binary opposition in conceptualising and enacting gender. They suggest that to enact gender differently the 'the otherness of the other' must be acknowledged and represented. The focus on enactment as a means to reproduce or challenge gendered power relations, offered potential for conceptualising how gendered power is enacted by women in relation to each other.

In the following section I explore in greater depth the issues associated with power and trust that I identified with contributors in chapter 6. I describe my experience of the challenges of maintaining 'subject to subject' interactions with women within my consultancy. In chapter 12, I further conceptualise these challenges and the associated skills for feminist consultancy.