

Chapter 6

Mapping the Territory of Workplace Dynamics Between Women

Introduction

This chapter presents my analysis of interviews with six women in which I explored our experiences of the dynamics between women in organisations. Through engaging with the data and confronting issues concerning analysis and presentation I developed inquiry practices and a conceptual framework that I developed in subsequent inquiry cycles.

The chapter is divided into four further sections:

In **Methodology**, I introduce my contributors and inquiry questions, describe the interview process and the framework I developed for my analysis.

In **Findings 1** I provide an overview of the substantive issues that emerged from the interview discussions. These are referenced to summaries of individual interviews appended to the thesis.

In **Findings 2** I consider the relationship between the dynamics described in Findings 1 and my experience of the dynamics enacted in the interview session.

In **Conclusions** I return to my research questions and consider how my findings will inform further cycles of my inquiry.

Methodology

Conducting the interviews

This cycle of inquiry was the first in which I invited other women to inquire with me into the dynamics between women in organisations. My aim was to map issues to explore further in my consultancy or with these contributors, through joint discussion of questions I had drawn from my previous cycles of inquiry (chapters 3 and 4).

I aimed to include in my analysis my experience of the quality of interaction enacted in the interview situation as well as the verbal content of our discussion. This was consistent with my inquiry practices in earlier cycles of inquiry. In the Findings 1 and 2 below I describe how I recorded and worked with this data in my analysis. My inquiry questions and approach are appended (appendix 2).

I introduce my interviewees in the section below. In selecting them I considered how to take account of race, sexuality and other identity differences between women.

Feminist research demonstrates that women's experience does not generalise across identities and social position (Page and Lorandi 1991; Bell 2000; Bravette 1996; Cockburn 1995). Research documents how women have organised across divisions arising from ethnicity and nationality and different identities (Albrecht and Brewer 1990; Cockburn and Hunter 1999; Mulholland and Patel 1999; Patel 1999; Yuval Davies 1997). However there is little research on how women work across differences of power arising from organisational position. I resolved to base my selection on women consultants and managers who had expressed an interest in exploring their experience of the dynamics between women, and within our discussions to be alert to how issues of identity interfaced with organisational position.

I approached women I had met through professional networks and consultancy and I had more offers to contribute than I could take up. In my selection I aimed for diversity of political stance and sector. Interviews were tape-recorded and took place in public cafes

or restaurants (2), at my home (2) or at contributors' homes (2). They took between one and two and a half hours.

I introduced my inquiry to contributors by referring to responses to my previous research findings (Page / Lorandi 1991). In numerous workshops and discussions women had shared their frustration and pain at difficult work relationships with women, and their need for opportunities to explore the difficulties and find ways of working through them. I situated my current inquiry as an opportunity to break the taboos in talking about these issues in order to support feminist work.

Previous experience of the highly charged nature of the territory demonstrated the importance of offering a non-judgmental space to enable the material I wanted to work with to emerge. I held in mind a rough map of the territory I wished to explore and used questions I had prepared as a topic guide. I sent these questions in advance to interviewees who requested them. I conducted the interviews as exploratory conversations, offering contributors an opportunity to jointly make sense of the experiences they brought to the inquiry.

I began each session with an open question, designed to get contributors to focus on current 'live' issues related to the inquiry. Some contributors responded with a situation or interaction with which they were preoccupied, others engaged with the topic in a more exploratory fashion.

I worked with examples brought by the contributors, invited each to narrate experiences that came to mind as we talked and to engage in joint sense making of their experiences. At certain points I interjected examples of my own to illustrate an interpretation I was offering or to introduce a different way of making sense of a dynamic they were describing. My aim was to invite a dialogue based on an exchange of experience and of sense making frameworks.

To achieve an exchange that honored the distinctive qualities of each of our experiences, I was alert to issues that were currently alive for me and that influenced my approach to the issues. I introduced aspects of my own experience where it seemed useful to illustrate

and test my own sense making. I made observations that made our sense making frames explicit and invited discussion about them.

The contributors

The contributors were six women in senior management or consultancy roles. All except one, who was a member of a women managers' network, had experience of promoting women's equality in their organisational or consultancy roles. Three had a history of feminist activism. They varied in age between mid-thirties and mid-fifties; all were white, five identified as British and one as multi-cultural. Their personal histories, class and educational backgrounds were very different, as were their ideological approaches to women's equality. I had established relationships based on shared professional interests with four of them and had met the other two through professional networks.

Contributors drew predominantly from professional experience in the UK public and voluntary sectors; two also drew from international consultancy, and one from the US corporate sector. All of them situated their experience in the context of their organisations and sectors within the current social and political environment; several of them spontaneously referred to childhood and family history to explain the lenses they brought to make sense of the experiences they described.

These lenses were diverse. Between them they illustrated a range of different ways of interpreting and acting on the interactions they described. While in no way claiming to be representative, their analysis offers a snapshot of a range of different ways in which women committed to equality currently (in 1999) experienced and interpreted their interactions with other women in their professional roles.

Methodological and ethical dilemmas

I conducted six interviews between October 1998 and January 1999. In April/May 1999 I made transcripts from the tapes; in January 2000 I returned to the transcripts and tapes to begin the process of analysis.

Writing the transcripts reminded me of the many levels of communication in which I had engaged with my contributors; how to make sense of the material was no longer obvious. I had moved from wanting to carry out a simple empirical analysis, to wanting something that could address the representational and inter-subjective content that had been communicated between contributors and myself.

I completed the transcripts and decided I did not yet have the methodological tools to do justice to the richness and complexity of the data I had collected. I was not ready to develop this strand of my inquiry. In my case studies I show how I continued to work with the issues that emerged within my consultancy based inquiry (chapters 9-11).

When I returned to the transcripts after a gap of 12 months, I re-encountered these methodological challenges. How to convey the quality of interaction unique to each, how to convey the dynamic quality of interaction between myself and contributor? I wondered whether I had been naïve in thinking that there could be any cross cutting themes in transcripts that were so diverse.

Several contributors had expressed unease at my focus on women to women dynamics; I had worked hard to assert the value of women as a subject of inquiry in their own right. Had my focus on women to women dynamics led me into an essentialist approach? I had reviewed the extensive literature on gender difference in relation to women managers and leaders and recognised that it was inconclusive (chapter 8). I resolved to situate my analysis of the findings in the specific organisational and political context within which my data was generated. Furthermore, I resolved to situate my analysis in the nature of my relationship to each contributor and the interaction between us during the interview.

While reading transcripts and listening to tapes I found myself making associations between generative and degenerative patterns in women's interactions which were explored in the interviews, and patterns I had mapped in my consultancy and personal life process inquiry tracks (chapters 3 and 4). I developed a method of analysis that allowed me to identify these similarities in pattern, and in later cycles of inquiry I drew from feminist and psychodynamic research to conceptualise them. Within this cycle I experienced a growing sense of confidence as I identified similar patterns across inquiry

tracks. In my discussion with contributors I discovered common ground in our experiences and differences in how we interpreted and made sense of them.

Feminist researchers have asserted that knowledge is embedded in women's day to day experience (Stanley and Wise 1981) and that women jointly sharing their hidden knowing can through a process of joint sense making come up with a dramatically different interpretation of events (Code 1991). In my case studies I develop this conceptualisation of how women generate new knowledge through joint discussion of their experiences in organisations (chapter 12).

In her account of absorbing and analysing material from her interviews with women managers, Marshall (1995), describes an initial stage of immersing herself in the material. At this stage I immersed myself in my material, focusing on explicit verbal content, and the implicit relational interactions conveyed through voice tone, timing and rhythm. I developed a set of headings, which I used as a template for a first stage analysis of each transcript (see below). I noticed that listening to tapes enabled me to recall aspects of our interactions that added to the meaning of the text, and included headings relating to the interaction at interview into my template. I used this template to write a summary of the overall findings, drawing from each individual interview analysis. In writing this overview, I struggled with a major doubt; how to write an overall summary which remained true to the integrity of each separate interaction? In this chapter I retained individual analyses to illustrate richness of material and inter relationship between implicit and verbal content.

My first stage analysis generated a chapter disproportionate in size to the rest of my thesis. I have selected from it to convey richness of the data and breadth of terrain covered and to provide evidence of quality of dialogue between contributors and myself. I illustrate how I developed a method of analysis that drew from both verbal and non-verbal interaction as sources of data.

Framing the analysis

The template I developed for the analysis was multi-dimensional. It consisted of:

- A summary of each contributor's account of the substantive issues they brought to my inquiry; the experiences they described and statements they made about their sense-making frames.
- My account of the dynamics between myself and my respondent
- An exploration of correlation or contrast between these two accounts
- A note of shifts in my conceptual frame which occurred through this process of analysis

I brought the following research questions to my analysis:

- Is there anything meaningful to be said about the dynamics between women in organisations, which transcends differences of organisational context and the sense making frames of the contributors? How/ can general statements be made without losing touch with situated identities and interactions?
- What is the relationship between the implicit and explicit content of the sessions; the dynamics described and the dynamics enacted as I experience them?
- What is the relationship between statements contributors make about the ways of working they advocate and sense making frameworks– and the stories they tell about the dynamics between women in organisations?
- How can this analysis in terms of methodology or content shape or inform my approach to my case studies of consultancy with women in organisations?

Re-approaching the transcripts after an interval of time gave me a sharpened sense of what had shaped my initial questions and how my stance had changed as a result of discussions with contributors. I made contextual factors explicit in my analysis: relationship with each contributor, and meaning given by political and social context.

Introduction to Findings 1 and 2

This introduction presents two full analyses of interviews. It aims to demonstrate the richness and complexity of the interview data, and my method of analysis.

I selected contributors with contrasting ideological approaches in order to illustrate dynamics which cut across contributors' explanations and sense making frames. The remaining analyses are provided in appendix 3. In the two sections that follow I develop an overview which engages with my research questions and draws from my analyses of individual interviews.

Analysis of individual interviews was an important sense making phase in my inquiry. In order to make this phase accessible for the reader I used a table format that juxtaposed contributors' narratives of lived experience with statements about their conceptual frameworks. While this format does not convey the dynamic nature of our interaction, it is succinct and conveys the breadth of ground covered in each interview.

As a way of adding texture, I juxtaposed each table with my own account of the quality of interaction between myself and each contributor, and explored correlation and contrasts between this account and the tables.

This presentation achieved a number of my objectives for this cycle of inquiry. It allowed me to explore the relationship between contributors' sense making conceptual frameworks as they described them and their narratives of lived experience. It also offered a way of charting my own 'inner map' of the issues that made up the substance of my inquiry in relation to the maps brought by my contributors

Contributor B (interview 3)

B is a freelance consultant who has just left the US corporate sector. In her interview she drew from her experience as an international consultant in this sector.

I have an established friendship with B based on shared professional interests and mutual support in developing our consultancy. We met at an international conference for women managers and developed a playful, cultural commentary of the interactions between participants. I was intrigued with our ability to form a bond across our differences of values, of politics in relation to gender, and sector. In the following table I summarise our discussion.

| Contributor B | | |
|--|---|---|
| STATEMENTS about lived experience; approach and aspirations | DESCRIPTIONS of lived experience | |
| 1 | <p>'I do not expect people to relate to me on the basis of my gender; that is how I am and I would find it difficult to be otherwise.'</p> | B sets herself outside most gendered dynamics; resists gendered characterisation |
| 2 | Gender is mediated through culture difference and qualified by other differences e.g. generation, temperament, skill, experience, context | Older men (60+) in US sometimes have problems in seeing women as peers In some cultures men have problems relating to women as peers |
| 3 | <p>Women are equally competent and able, are not necessarily disadvantaged by gender</p> <p>Competitive dynamics experienced between women are due to being less secure and experienced in being in positions of power, feeling you need to prove yourself, being younger</p> <p>Effective teamwork requires both focus on task and awareness of interpersonal issues and process</p> | <p>Women peers in a US corporation internal consultancy team were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overly concerned with interpersonal relationships • Competitive with each other – in the presence of clients • Less good (than men) at setting emotion aside in order to attend to the task in hand <p>Women clients (in S American cultures) are open to friendship and form strong bonds</p> |
| 4 | <p>Paradigm of good working relationships: balance between task and focus on interpersonal dynamics; not letting your emotions take hold; keeping home and work issues separate; being able to ask for and get direct feedback on performance; not needing to 'prove' yourself; fun and enjoyment –</p> <p>Ability to work in this way for women comes with age and experience – and is culturally specific</p> | <p>Women tend to be more emotional, they can't compartmentalise their life as well as men do...and not all men and not all women</p> <p>Men concentrate more on the task and women looking much more at the whole dynamic</p> <p>Women may have experience of compartmentalising</p> <p>Men bring more fun into work</p> <p>UK women and men are not so good at direct feedback; tend to 'get hurt' and personalise inappropriately</p> |
| 5 | Gendered expectations are culturally specific and may work to women's advantage | B enjoys friendships with women clients in Latin America but is not able to have cross gender friendships except in some cultures |
| 6 | Boundaries need to be kept in all consultant/client relationships in the interests of protecting ability to work to task | Seniority and geographical distance keeps sufficient boundaries-with women and friendship can compromise ability to work to task sometimes |

I wanted to introduce the quality of playful creativity, and its basis in cultural difference which was a feature of our relationship, into my research. I also wished to illustrate our mutual valuing across public and private sectors, in contrast to my experience in the network of which we were both members of being devalued by and devaluing of private sector identified women. However B was reluctant to be interviewed and doubtful about the value of her contribution, as, she said, she did not 'use a gender frame'.

During the interview I felt nervous and conscious of the limited time B had agreed to give. We met in a noisy restaurant of her choice. It was difficult to concentrate on food, eating, and to keep track of the ground we were covering in the interview.

The following (after the table) analysis of the session attempts to convey the pattern of our explicit verbal exchange, in relation to the implicit content:

B reacted defensively to my first rather clumsy attempt to introduce a gender lens into our discussion about cultural difference. She asserted that women were competent, equal and no different to men. By the end of the interview she was open to exploring gendered characteristics of women in work roles, but continued to frame them as specific to culture, and context:

Me: In the last 10 minutes I'd like to hear a little bit about your relationship with your woman boss and know if there's anything you would like to say about your female peers in the team in America – were there any differences that you associate at all with gender?

B: No – individual cultural backgrounds was stronger than that- as I said before I would find the men concentrating more on the actual task and females looking much more preoccupied with the dynamics among people - you know you need both so it was fine...maybe women seemed to be - and I don't know that that could be true in a different context and in another team - more competitive than men

For much of the interview I felt as if I was pushing against, being perceived as seeking to impose a view, rather engaging in playful exchange.

B was responding to me as if I was trying to get her to name gender-related problems that she did not experience. In response she asserted other kinds of differences such as those that were individual, temperament and skill-based, experiences in positions of having power or not, being gossipy or not, competitive or not, or of culture-based gender relations which allowed cross-gender friendship or did not. It seemed to me when I was analysing the transcript that she was defending against assertion of gender-based difference because in her view this would have been a problem, in conflict with the gender-neutral competency-based approach with which she identified. But perhaps this was also an enactment of a workplace dynamic in which women were expected to demonstrate they could perform equally to task, and in which reference to gender difference was taboo. I

recorded feelings of unease, of getting off the track, losing the track, feeling B was feeling constrained, and feeling constrained myself. I also noted a contrast between this feeling of constraint and the more mutually exploratory, playful interactions we were used to. In these we constructed a shared position outside the cultures to which we referred. In this interview I was talking to B as an 'insider', addressing her in her role inside the organisation to which she refers. In doing so we had lost our shared standpoint of multiple identities, moving in and out and across cultures

This sense of constraint was familiar; I had felt this way in organisations when at odds with colleagues or managers who do not want to use a gender lens. In these situations to assert the relevance of gender was often interpreted as unprofessional and oppositional. It risked interpretation of being women lacking competence to operate in an 'ungendered' world.

For much of the interview I felt at sea, uneasy, off track and focus. We were in new territory outside our established playful relational mode and outside previously established boundaries, with a hint of potential danger. I felt protective of my research and potential devaluing of it, and wary of shattering the careful boundaries within which our friendship had been nurtured.

I managed this by paying attention to attunement, making reference at certain points to meeting points between us and once, at a point where B had engaged with my subject, mirroring voice tone to try to convey connection through recognition of the distinctiveness of the experience she was conveying. This skill is associated with 'connected knowing', a form of knowing generated through mutual recognition, which is described in research into women's ways of knowing exchange (Belenky 1986; Clinchy 1996).

After the interview I felt anxious about having crossed some unspoken boundary about aspects of our lives we had not shared within our friendship together. While we have not continued to explore these themes explicitly since the interview we have increased the area of sharing within our friendship and continue to enjoy the playful quality of our first interactions.

Contributor C (interview no 2)

C is an international organisation consultant, who runs a development programme on

women's leadership; she drew from these experiences in her interview.

I had no history of friendship or common networks with C. I had met her at a meeting with her employer, a client organisation, and been struck by the contrast between her strong individual presence and the gender culture in her surroundings, between her approach to consultancy and the more traditional approach of her male boss. I was surprised and intrigued when she expressed interest in contributing to my inquiry.

This was only the second of my interviews; I was still new to the role and to the process, and unsure how much of my own experience and sense making frame to bring into the discussion. In the following table I summarise our discussion.

| Contributor C | |
|---|--|
| STATEMENTS about lived experience; approach and aspirations | DESCRIPTIONS of lived experience |
| <p>1 <i>As senior manager in her organisation:</i></p> <p>'I am perceived as a strong woman, supportive by women lower down, a threat by a minority at peer level.'</p> <p>'My approach to senior male decision makers is to find out what interests them most, then seek their language and bring them round to my way of thinking; some colleagues see this as a threat.'</p> | <p><i>Relationships with women colleagues:</i></p> <p>In the context of reorganisation in her organisation: performance related pay and downsizing- flatter management structures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some women at senior level are flirtatious, workaholic, barking at men- 'Attila the Hen'. • Women like to believe its worse for them; and expect other women to collude with this view, cosy up together in opposition. • C lost some of her women's friendships when moved out of victim role and became successful, 'breaking ranks'. |
| <p>2 <i>As lead trainer on women's leadership development courses:</i></p> <p>C models the approach she advocates women should adopt: 'What we try and promote (on the women's leadership course) is the choices they have in their different organisational cultures; one choice is to leave, let go of old agendas.. this can be painful'</p> <p>and relates it to her own developmental path:</p> <p>'When I discovered the fundamental idea of free will, even if only the free will to react to what's going on, I found that very painful because I couldn't be a victim any more and blame anyone else any more.'</p> | <p>Women in C's generation often do not want to change- they are stuck- because they anticipate rejection:</p> <p>Women don't differentiate between 'they don't like my actions and 'they won't like me'; men have less problem seeing the difference</p> |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <p><i>As an external consultant:</i></p> <p>'Boundaries between friendship and work are more fluid for women I think; this has generative and degenerative consequences'</p> | <p>'One thing that strikes me is the way new professional relationships will start up between women: there tends to be a certain amount of building empathy, getting to know each other- ...and because that tends to be a preferred way for most women we can get into a bit of difficulty ... resorting to overly formal ways of pulling back in to the boundaries'</p> |
| | <p>'Its easier to trust most women and this makes a more collaborative approach possible'</p> | <p>'I am probably more likely to use empathy with a woman, find shared values, and invite collaboration, whereas with a man it's more like challenge: why do you want to do that?'</p> |
| | <p>Women move between different worlds - hold paradox a lot better than men do 'Women move in both shadow and formal systems, like shamans, have a foot in both worlds- are on the edge, subversive'</p> | <p>But - when women do move out of shared worlds and into different worlds crisis may be precipitated between them</p> |
| | <p>Women's investment in formal systems differs with access to position power</p> | <p>Women use elaborate ways of signalling their positioning and value base. in relation to formal and informal systems –</p> |
| | <p>Women socialising together risk undermining their professional position / identity in the eyes of male colleagues</p> <p>Male peers assume opposition/subversion where women cross boundaries set by the organisation and male order of power and hierarchy – and try to keep women apart</p> | <p>If a man takes a secretary out for lunch he's doing that whereas if a woman takes her secretary out to lunch that's two women together, so she's defined by the secretarial position</p> <p>When a woman manager took part in a girls night out some of her senior male colleagues said do you think as a senior you should be doing that? they even had one of the men turning up at the Indian restaurant they were at to hear what they were saying because it seen as what are the women plotting</p> |

In the following analysis of the session I describe the pattern and content of our exchange:

The pattern of the interview mirrored C's description of building relationships with women clients and peers based on empathy and collaboration. She moved between life and professional issues to illustrate her stance and we both used the occasion to invite the other to explore and sense make.

The interview developed into a joint discussion, moving back and forth between examples each of us brought to illustrate or to explore in order to make sense of interactions

link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/m_page.html

between women. Quite often these were contrasted to interactions with men – as if women/man interactions were needed as a comparison in order to check our sense making of woman to woman interactions. This is illustrated in the following, where we are discussing woman to woman relationships in a mixed environment:

M: Working with male colleagues both in my teaching and consulting I'm always on guard monitoring how men and women are relating to each of us and noticing at what points in the conversation I am being spoken to and my male colleague is being spoken to and having to work quite hard not to give up keep being proactive, not to be seen by other women as the woman who has been brought along and is just sitting in...

C: Especially when you get that triangulation because once you lose their attention its quite difficult to get it back – I find a similar thing being very conscious of how long has the attention been with my male colleague and are they beginning to stray into the area which is my expertise and I need to assert my right here and do it in such a way that I do not come over as a pushy aggressive woman and keeping that balance and not fading into the wallpaper...

M: But in order to be able to function in these conditions one has to work really hard on one's sense of self, doesn't one? to maintain that role with confidence and not to be eroded by it...

C: And it's a constant you have to keep on your guard and I find I hear the inner messages that have been in there for years and I have to fight those as well; [ask yourself] do you really believe that or is it just hanging around from somewhere, and not being pulled into that, oh well and ...and if you're tired and have a headache you feel 'let them get on with it!' and you can't really do that one day and then say 'let me have my rightful place now', so it can be quite difficult!

Later C suggested that women were expected to look after the boundaries between friendship and professional relating. Moreover for many women having a woman consultant may have been preferable because as clients they were not having to be 'on guard' against having their power usurped:

C: Maybe that's why so many women end up being consultants because that means being the one that manages the boundaries. You might as well get paid for it if you're going to be lumbered with it!

Me: Why would women want to have us as consultants? Would that not signal lower status for them? There must be ambiguity there...

C: Yes I think there is, depending on what they want to use us for. Many women may feel more comfortable; as our clients they should have the power and I wonder what the power is with the man in the suit consultant: does he usurp the power? A female colleague in a very high powered position had to work hard to establish that 'hang on I'm the client here', because a male consultant who had worked fine with a male manager started very subtly on 'what you need to do, dear, is this'; and it was' hang on a minute I'm the client here...lets make one thing clear...maybe there is the association thing but it works the other way here'.

Me: And then there's how that is viewed by other women..

C: Whereas another woman collaborating can still maintain that subtle power relationship of 'yes we're collaborating really closely here and we share a value here and we can work collaboratively and I'm the client and so I maintain that slight edge'

C was sustained by her sense of self-liberation. The following illustrates her self-positioning and the relationship between this and the stance she takes up in her professional role as leader of a women's development programme.

C: My role is to challenge huge assumptions in the organisation [and in women who come on the leadership challenge course] that it's worse for women, that women are the only ones to lose out in the re-organisation, and that I am supposed to be on their side; that if women are not appointed this is proof that the men are out to get them again; that its better to have a women appointed or in a senior post regardless of her agenda or stance.

.....

It's about being able to embrace the feminine and celebrate it and celebrate masculine energy too...Most [men and women] have a fair mixture of both – I think the fundamental value underneath celebrating diversity is brilliant

Me: I think so too as long as one can keep hold of the frame, which recognises social structures and power....

C: Yes

Both: [Laughter]

End of tape

I came away from the interview feeling exhausted. My 'friendly' approach to the interview, empathy and relationship- building, made it harder for me to keep to my own time

boundaries or to conserve my energy. In listening to the tape I could hear my energy fading only towards the end; the richness and quality of material justified the time entirely.

There were moments when I caught myself feeling more attuned to the women on C's leadership development programme who longed for nurturing, or to seek comfort – and generate energy - in shared 'fight'. When this happened I worked to reposition myself as 'consultants reflecting together'. I was aware of the danger of losing my own political stance because of my desire to speak from a position of consensus and reintroduced a specific reference to power at the end of the taped session. It strikes me now that I was working hard to be 'on guard' against my own desire to turn the interview into a consensus based, nurturing space. In feminist research on friendships between women a pattern of 'merged attachment' is contrasted to 'separated attachment' as a basis for intimacy between women (Orbach and Eichenbaum 1994). In my analysis and during interviews I used this distinction as I tracked my own desire to merge at points where it was difficult to maintain subject to subject dialogue (Benjamin 1990; 1995).

Themes from this discussion proved central in further cycles of my inquiry, and are developed in my case studies. These were: the generative and degenerative aspects of fluid boundaries and collaborative approaches; the tension between desire for shared views and nurturing and the need for challenge in order to be effective as an individual in a leadership position.

Findings 1

Women to women workplace interactions

In this section I map the main themes which emerged from my discussions with contributors. I draw from contributors' accounts of their experiences of working with women in organisations and from their statements about their sense making frames.

Discussion with contributors' moved between narrative accounts of women to women interactions and joint discussion about how to make sense of these. Narratives were often qualified or compared to patterns of interaction between women and men. Three of the contributors (A, C, E) situated their sense making frameworks in personal belief systems

or narratives of how they came to their current beliefs about women's equality. All contributors situated their accounts within specific organisational contexts and referred to women and men in specific work-related roles. Each contributor also made statements about the key factors they considered to be influencing women to women relating in professional roles. These included identity issues such as culture, ethnicity, generation and sexuality.

Some contributors challenged my focus on women to women dynamics and expressed reservations about making any general statements or observations about women in professional roles (F, A, B); others (C, D, E) seemed more at ease with the framework I offered.

Challenge was particularly vigorous from A and B, interestingly from ideologically opposed positions and from very different organisational contexts (A: lesbian feminist ideology, feminist women's organisation; B: culture difference rather than gender lens, corporate mixed organisation). Each stated that my approach implied general statements about gender difference with which they did not identify.

All but one contributor (B) used my approach, for the purposes of the interview, to explore incidents and dilemmas with which they were preoccupied (A, D, E, F), or an aspect of their consultancy practice (C, D, E, F). In one case, F, where the contributor was also my client, we used the interview to jointly explore aspects of our client / consultant relationship. I explore this in more depth in case study 2.

In most of the interviews, it was hard to develop discussion about women to women interactions or to sustain focus on these without reference to men. It was as if the subject 'women to women' could have meaning only by comparison with an externally defined gendered norm and as if contributors were more willing to make generalisations about men than about women. In some cases (A and B), I had a strong sense that they perceived danger in identifying women-specific dynamics, as if women would be defined as lacking and this needed to be defended against. For example (in interviews A and B), men were either 'doing it better' or 'not as well'; assertions were made and illustrated about women's equal competence, alongside negative examples of women in competition not working together effectively. Women-specific qualities and ways of working together

were described (in interviews C and D) in a context of gender relations – women developing strategies for leadership in mixed gender environments. C, E and F described women-only spaces within organisations in which women had developed their own ways of working. Within these spaces, women did value each other; their ability and willingness to accredit this joint work outside these environments was at issue.

Each interview took on a life and dynamic of its own; a quality of interaction which I maintain conveyed a sense of the contributor's approach and preferred way of being in her professional or work role. This was sometimes different to the quality of our interaction in other contexts. In the next section, I will analyse this as an element of their contribution to the research.

I summarised the content of contributors' discussions under cross-cutting themes that emerged from their accounts. The first of these was 'what women bring to work roles: gender differences identified by contributors'. This addressed generative and degenerative attributes which contributors associated with women and their positive experiences of women to women dynamics. The second explored what sense making frames contributors used to explain the specificity of women to women interactions. These were grouped under 'political and social environment'; 'alternative values and belief systems'; 'life experience, learned behaviour and ways of being'; and 'gender norms and socialisation'. I have appended a full analysis of these themes in appendix 4.

Contributors did describe an identifiable set of qualities which women brought to professional roles – and which they believed were more likely to come into play in relation to other women. These took generative and degenerative forms and seemed related to a paradigm of 'effective working' held by contributors. This paradigm combined nurturing and challenge, empathy and respect for relationships with attention to organisational task; paid attention to individual needs without being bound by them; sustained a reciprocal sense of being valued by women while taking on a powerful role in the external world; and enacted fluid boundaries between friendship and work. However, in contributors' accounts, these qualities were seldom valued in the organisational or social environments in which women were working.

In the only women's organisation described, the funding and political environment was seen as actively undermining feminist goals and working methods, making it harder to sustain positive working relationships. In mixed organisations, several contributors described women being faced with a choice: to stick together in oppositional marginal roles or to perform to norms set by organisational goals and culture, in order to succeed as individuals. Women who chose the second pathway were moving between two worlds; they often faced loss of friendship and sometimes hostility and envy from other women who remained in oppositional roles. Trust between women seemed often to be based on shared identity and this could not be sustained so easily between women who were successful in the public arena, or in their organisations, and those who did not get wider recognition.

Contributors did describe their enjoyment of positive work-based relationships with women: connecting easily through shared humour, paying attention to the individual and not the role, shared values, jointly building something, sharing passion for the work, working creatively through shared projects and ideas, buzz and fun. I have said that these positive and enjoyable experiences were nevertheless described with ambivalence. Contributors did not identify these positive experiences easily – it was as if they needed time and space to identify them – to pull them out from a tangled mass of painful experiences and taboos. One contributor (E) spoke of male hostility and suspicion at social contact between women at different levels in her organisation. It was as if women's professional identity was easily lost sight of, within an order of power that was not designed to sustain them in their professional identities (McIntosh 1985, 1989). Some women had learned to navigate between the different worlds of work-based and socially-determined expectations but also needed to learn to sustain positive relationships with other women who were located within each of the worlds within which they moved.

My contributors did not speak of successfully sustaining relationships with women across differences of power. Many of their stories were of failure, of painful breakdown of relationships as they moved between different worlds. The evidence suggests that while they all valued the positive aspects they described of woman to woman work relationships they shared different degrees of disappointment and pain around the negative aspects they had identified.

Each of them considered it essential to have an affirmative alternative value base to sustain them in their own way of being (A, C, E, F) or to have learned experience of how to use power and maintain their authority (A, B, C;D, E, F) in professional settings. None of them considered either the value base or the attributes they brought from socialisation as adequate to equip them to deal with the realities of expectations and responses from men or women in work-based relationships.

The joint sense making in which we engaged to understand this spoke of the importance of a sustaining political and organisational environment. It also reflected back to women a sense of their achievements in order to counter actively the devaluing of these achievements in society and their organisations. Furthermore we emphasised the importance of inner world change and of learning skills associated with travelling between different worlds.

What these contributions suggested was that women needed an ability to work against social conditioning – their own and others’ - in order to access and exercise power and followship. They needed this in relation to each other, as well as in relation to men. Women needed to navigate between the different worlds of professional work-based relationships and social expectations and to develop a set of competencies and belief systems that were adapted to that challenge. However, this was not stated explicitly by contributors - nor is it necessarily a conclusion that they each would share.

Power, trust and collaboration between women

All the contributors told stories that richly illustrated how they worked with the dilemmas that these dynamics provoked. Their stories (see contributors’ tables for summaries) referred to building and sustaining their authority with men as well as women (all except A); to working with their own inner worlds (A, B, C, E, F); to cultural difference in relation to gender-based expectations (B, C); and to the impact of changed political context and environment (A, E).

In this analysis, I selected a cluster of issues that contributors brought to my inquiry and which resonated with my own ‘live’ material. Similar dilemmas had appeared in my previous research (Page 1992, 1994; Evelyn Oldfield 1999) and are core themes of my

link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/m_page.html

inquiry within my case studies (chapters 9 – 11). I present them as a range of different views expressed by contributors about a set of strongly-held dilemmas about power, trust and collaboration between women working on women's equality initiatives and women in more senior positions of power with generic responsibilities. These dilemmas drew meaning from their timing and historical context. They included but were not confined to complex issues about individual advancement in a context of possibility created by collective feminist action to achieve change. Contributors B and D did not describe these dilemmas and significantly were the only ones not discussing women's equality work. These dilemmas also concerned expectations with no clear relationship to political context.

This section is intended as an initial sketch of dilemmas that I will explore and conceptualise in greater depth in later cycles of inquiry. I have presented my analysis under subheadings as a series of linked themes.

Feeling valued, feeling powerful

For each of the contributors *feeling powerful* seemed to be associated with a sense of *being valued* and *valuing the work of other women*. Several expressed ambivalence about position power. This seemed linked to the experience of not being valued or fearing that they might not be liked. Feeling powerful through relationship to others by whom they were valued and liked seemed to be closely interlinked.

All the contributors except B reported negative experiences in relation to women in powerful positions. This seemed to relate to an experience of *not being valued* or *not being supported* by a woman boss who was more closely identified with the predominant organisational culture. F, for example, a local authority equalities officer, felt that her work fell outside her organisation's priorities on two counts: her interactive, consultative approach to policy work and her European project work:

F: That's how I work – creative, out there with people, discussing with them...

Me: Does the outcome culture constrain you working in this way?

F: No, because that's what it's about... producing results, making things happen, that's what gives me a buzz....the fact that I'm out there hustling and agitating, working and creating is somehow seen as not serious work...but I connect with

other people out there and it's necessary to get things done...to get policy drawn up..

Later, F expressed a different set of reservations about the value of her work in the eyes of the organisation. In our discussion, we explored the dynamics between us in working together on the Persephone project in client/consultant roles. F described how she felt when I had challenged her to explore how to validate project results in terms of the priorities of her organisation. In the following exchange, she articulates a dilemma to which other contributors also refer:

F: I find it difficult to be your boss. I just want to curl up in your arms ...when you push me on this, I think 'hell I have to perform for her as well [as everyone else] demonstrate results'...it makes me freeze....what are the results we can show to others in this area ... more exploration is what I need..

M: But that is the language you use isn't it?

F: Yes but I couldn't see how to do it in relation to this project ... I am more connected to it now...I can see the connections and the agendas...social exclusion and Best Value and the whole thing about governance and democracy...just to get them to do age and gender monitoring would do! A proper database...God!

M: Do you mean when I say 'let's have a strategic discussion' you feel bullied....

F: It's the ...pressure to demonstrate results... It makes me feel O God I haven't done it....must be an old tape in my head....of a head mistress.

The Persephone project had provided a rare space for affirmation and regeneration without constant requirement to justify the value of an interactive work style or of women's equality work in a European context. However to survive, this work needed to be justified in the organisation's terms. F experienced the challenge to address this within the consultancy relationship as a violation of its affirming qualities - and felt bullied and disempowered. In my second case study, I show how we worked with these dynamics through my inquiry.

Individual success, collective betrayal

As a senior woman, C described her experience of a similar tension between nurturing and challenge. Feminist women colleagues in her organisation did not trust her once she

had demonstrated that she could perform within the male culture and moved out of a position she described as 'victim role' in relation to male managers. Both they and women participants on her leadership programmes expected her to join them in their oppositional stance. C interpreted this as an expectation that she affirm them as powerless in relation to men. As a result of moving away from this oppositional stance and becoming successful in the organisation, she lost some of her friendships:

What we try and promote [on the women's leadership challenge course] is the choices they have in their different organisational cultures – and consequences of different ways of being a leader - one choice is to leave, let go of old agendas.... this can be painful.

Trust and feminist political loyalties seemed to be at stake here. Women's equality had been fought collectively – yet success was reaped by individuals. This left ambiguous the relationships between individual successful women in organisations and feminist women involved in that collective movement.

A told the following story that illustrated this dynamic in her feminist organisation:

A: In the end, they forced X out.. because she was successful.

M: Professionally successful?

A: She's written books.. She's successful, she's somebody in the women's movement and they couldn't bear it....why didn't they do it themselves? I find it really difficult to understand that resentment....they prefer to actually stop things happening than see anything happen at all that might achieve something for women, change for women...

In this story feminist women did not make an assessment of whether individual success was in conflict with collective goals; instead they experienced success in the public sphere of one of their members as in itself a betrayal.

In her interview A expressed sadness that women did not value each other enough and suggested that this made disagreement between women problematic:

Disagreement is confused with not valuing each other...I think that's where it's tied up with identity – who you are – who else you have in something common with - having a sense of that.

In response I reflected that if women were acting in environments which did not reflect back a sense of being positively valued, then how much more threatening it would be when one is rewarded and others continued to experience themselves as devalued.

Coded loyalty: mutual recognition

C spoke of crises of trust she experienced as she moved between different roles and in different peer groups.

We explored how women (and men) used codes to read each other's value position – in order to work out how to position themselves within a group or partnership. In the following, C responded to my story about a dilemma around whether to match my dress to the client or my consultant colleagues when preparing to meet a client:

*C: I'm working in association with you so when you go to see the client, you're us; if you want to dress and act differently where does that leave me?
If you are no longer 'one of the girls' – who are you? And if you are no longer 'you' in relation to my 'me' – then who am I?*

The issue was how could I dress appropriately for my client when my colleagues might read this as a betrayal of feminist values? How could I maintain my feminist identity, and assert my credibility in the mainstream? If dress is code for affiliation on the basis of common values, trust was needed to assert affiliation outside feminist relationships.

In D's account, women built relationships through physical attunement, attention to bodily needs and physical appearance:

I think it's really just small things ..I was thinking about that this morning ... Very often when you go to meet women, they provide food and that sort of thing ... I was working with another associate and she travelled from Wimbledon and the

thing that really outraged her was that he [male client] didn't even offer her a cup of tea whereas with J [woman client] you know she breezed in to this meeting and she had got the biscuits with her and it was 'oh faith' she said 'let's get this sorted out' and she looked at me and said, 'D that's a really lovely scarf you've got on' and equally I would say to her: 'Oh J that's a great hat' and all that sort of thing ..

Asserting power: abuse, nurture or challenge?

Both A, E and F told stories of trouble with asserting – or challenging – women who are exercising 'power over'. In these stories, legitimate use of position power was portrayed with ambivalence, as if closely associated with abuse of power. E referred apologetically to her first management experience as 'believing that it was enough to tell people what to do' and talked about working with women's organisations who were 'denying power dynamics'. F described herself as 'going into 'fuhrer mode' when she asserted her role as project leader and was preoccupied with how this was perceived by the other women. In the following interaction, it is clear that I as her consultant am identifying with the dilemmas that F is exploring:

F: I think I have difficulty with the management role of being in charge and one of the girls...I think there is a difficulty and that's with the whole of the transnational partnership as well...I can't just be one of the girls or one of the partners.

M: That's what happens when we get to the meetings...you disappear into become one of the girls..

F: That's where I want to be; I don't want to be in charge I want, yup.

M: Umm I want to come too..yes..[laugh]

F: Yeah

M: That's what's hard...

F: And I think we all do that

M: Umm

F: Ummm

M: Yeah

F: Yeah

M: So that's a difficulty?

F: Yeah and I don't know that the transnational partners understand that...or they may be conscious or aware of it at some level...

M: What - your wanting to be one of the girls or manager...?

F: The two things - the tension between the two ...then there are times that I say come on let's do this and I get into, I don't know, Fuhrer mode, you know...That's what I feel ...fuhrer mode that's it ...as if asserting feels like being a fuhrer - ummm.

In contrast D described moments where she had to make a judgement about whether to support an individual or challenge her, in order to support the process related to the task. She showed that she was able to make this judgement, in a way that kept in balance social expectations of her as a woman and the organisational and professional tasks:

I was conscious that she was under a lot of pressure and she was very committed to the project and ...again it was that difficulty of feeling you had to challenge professionally but how to do it without undermining your nurturing role.

Mainstream or margins: sustaining trust between women

Contributors' stories seemed to circle around a set of linked dilemmas. They drew strength from feeling valued – and also experienced women colleagues and clients looking to them to gain a sense of being valued. But most of them faced a choice: being valued by women as 'one of the girls' or seeking to be valued on their organisation's values and priorities.

Being one of the girls meant not exercising power but being equal. If they exercised organisation position power, in relation to women, it began to feel abusive and to be experienced as such. They then risked being cast out, losing affiliation and affinity. Yet they could not rely on being valued in the mainstream either, where they faced another set of gender dynamics.

In order to be trusted and to trust other women, they felt they needed to demonstrate and signal 'togetherness' and this seemed to mean shared oppositional stance on the margins. Togetherness in success for women felt like a contradiction in terms and individuals who went 'outside' the circle of women's bonds were often experienced as traitors, operating to a different set of values and therefore no longer trustworthy. They were perceived as 'controlled', 'remote' and sometimes undermined women's solidarity and the equalities work other women had been carrying.

These contributors seemed to be signalling that they and/or women with whom they worked faced a paradox. In these organisations, which included women's organisations, they were struggling with stark choices. Once choice was to remain in the ranks of women who positioned themselves as powerless and ineffective in order to retain affiliation and trust of their fellow travellers. Another was to move on and lose this trust, affiliation and affirmation.

At stake seemed to be the terms and basis of being valued and trusted. Underneath this there seemed to be something much more profound concerning identity and affiliation. Contributors faced choices of by whom and on what terms they wished to be valued. Linked to this were dilemmas about how to construct and sustain their integrity and a self-sense which felt affirming. Feeling powerful for these women seemed to be linked to a sense of feeling valued, but in both mixed and women's organisation##s they found this extraordinarily difficult to attain and sustain.

Collaboration between women

The material suggested to me that each contributor independently of ideological stance, role, identity or sector, seemed to have developed a similar paradigm of 'effective working'. This paradigm combined nurturing and challenge, empathy and respect for relationship with attention to organisational task and attention to individual needs without being bound by them or holding back from taking on a powerful role in the public world. In doing so they entered dangerous terrain. They risked loss of friendship from women who perceived them as breaking ranks or envied their success. Because of gender stereotyping and the resistance of women who challenged them this risked isolation and hostility. Was this because the women who had been their peers felt in some way devalued by their success?

Several contributors spoke of creating women's projects or organisations which valued women in strong roles that did not fit gender stereotypes (A, E, C). Yet these environments were not immune to destructive dynamics; they were a necessary but not a sufficient condition for women to sustain relationships based on valuing each other.

What are the conditions or competencies that allow women to support each other's endeavours and successes within the public sphere outside these women's projects and organisations? How can women sustain these conditions sufficiently to recognise and support individual success in ways that also honour the feminist collective movement for social change that has created the conditions that made their individual success possible? And in particular, how do women consultants position themselves in relation to these dynamics in their work with women clients? And how are these dilemmas represented – if at all – in the consultancy literature? What can feminist writings offer the consultancy field in this respect?

Women consultants have to work with these dynamics with women clients in specific professional contexts. They must establish and maintain generative relationships with their clients who will experience expectations and desires for affirmation, trust and solidarity. The consultant must respond to these needs, but also keep organisational roles and goals in focus. The usual consultancy dilemma of challenge versus support is charged with an additional dynamic of specific expectations and desires that arise between women.

I engaged with these questions in greater depth as my inquiry developed. In the next section I analyse contributors' accounts of how they approached these dilemmas within their consultancy practice.

How contributors worked with power and authority dilemmas

Contributors C, E and F named and explored in some detail the dilemmas associated with how to maintain affiliation with women on the margins while achieving success in the mainstream. C and E had found spiritual practices and philosophies that enabled them to take up a new stance and from which they drew support to act from their new position. This had involved considerable work in their inner worlds and on their sense of self in relation to others in professional and personal worlds. C described her experience as follows:

When I discovered the fundamental idea of free will, even if only the free will to react to what's going on, I found that very painful because I couldn't be a victim

any more and blame anyone else any more. Sometimes being in a victim position is comfortable because then you don't have to make any choices - its quite a huge shift - some women are stuck because they really do not see that as an option.

From their new stance C and E worked with women and women's organisations (E) to offer them opportunities to access the choices they felt they now enjoyed and to move away from old scripts. C described how this meant continuing to work in depth to counter her own internalised socialisation:

M: Going back to you in your role as course director how do you manage the reality you describe that so many women who come on your programmes have bought into victim position and are disappointed when they do not get supported in it? What sort of feelings does that generate in you? how do you manage that?

C: Very uncomfortable because of my own conditioning. It could be a very easy week, I could give them the nurturing and they would go away happy. I am of a generation where that was expected - my own mother worked while I was being brought up but number one priority was still the nurturing; it's very difficult! The way I deal with it is to think I'm giving people what they need not what they want; also to keep reminding myself I'm there to challenge in a supportive way not to be prescriptive and I have to be very conscious of what's my stuff. Sometimes it can feel bloody awful and I wonder why I bother.

E described her work with women's organisations as follows:

I always acknowledge people when I go into women's organisations because I know how much women's work has been devalued ...as women we focus on what we've not done or achieved...and don't stop and say what have we done/achieved.

She actively countered the devalued sense of achievement that she believes disempowered members of women's organisations, placing their achievements and the forces against them in political and historical context, and their own life cycle. She described herself as 'holding up a mirror' to transform self-perception, countering women's low self-esteem, and encouraging them to enlarge their vision of their self-potential. She

was the only one who explicitly drew upon political contexts to enable contributors to make sense of their experience of being devalued. In contrast C worked within a management developmental frame, challenging her participants to acknowledge the constraints of gender role stereotyping for men as well as for women.

In the quote at the beginning of this section F spoke about the pain she felt at being challenged by me as her consultant to consider strategies for taking the project work into the mainstream of her organisation. She struggled with anger at receiving challenge instead of nurturing, feeling judged and found wanting, being not good enough to succeed on the organisations' terms, and then saw a way of taking up the challenge within the systems and priorities of the wider organisation.

Contributors seemed to be suggesting that generative use of power by feminists in relation to other women involved nurturing and challenge, caring about the individual within a nurturing space and caring about how that individual would act as an agent of change within the mainstream. They described women as needing and seeking caring and nurturing from each other, and described themselves as seeking to give and receive without sacrificing task and effective performance to meet organisational goals. However because they were working in environments which did not value the caring, nurturing elements and sometimes saw them as in conflict with effective performance, it was difficult to think outside this split. The idea that professional relationships should not be friendships and that emotional detachment was necessary to perform to task were the rules which women and men were expected to keep, and which most contributors described themselves as following.

Yet their descriptions of how they related to their women clients and colleagues showed that they were telling this story slant: there was a difference in how they worked with women who they trusted and with men, and the difference was in how they interpreted the boundaries between friendship and professional relating, emotion and task. As contributor D said in response to an example from me:

It is possible to care for the individual and the process, although this may be misinterpreted by male colleagues or clients who tend to sexualise this way of relating - and by women working to this model.

In contributors' stories women in power were regarded as either providing or betraying these needs for care. Their success in the public sphere was often envied, and sometimes received with a hostile response appropriate to an attack. An attack on a shared sense of self that may have been shattered by individual success may well have been what colleagues experienced (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983).

Contributors described their strategies and struggles to hold the two together. Their stories, like the dynamics of the interviews, show them moving between the two ways of being, now combining them, now separating, now adjusting the equilibrium in interaction with others.

This theme and its associated tensions resonated strongly for me as I reflected on my own developmental path during the course of this inquiry. In the case studies that follow I explore how I worked with them within my own consultancy relationships with women clients. I conceptualise them more fully as my inquiry develops.

First, in subsection Findings 2 below, I explore the interactions between contributors and myself within the interviews, and relate these to the verbal content that I have summarised and analysed above.

Findings 2

As I listened to interview tapes and analysed the transcripts I had a strong sense that there was a relationship between the dynamics described by my contributors and the dynamics enacted between contributors and myself; between the explicit and implicit content of the interview discussions. I wanted to make a preliminary exploration of how I might conceptualise this relationship and of how to include the implicit content in my inquiry. This was effectively a first step in developing a methodology able to make the implicit explicit, to address unconscious dynamics in order to explore the relational aspects of how women work together. It was also a way of including my own experiential material, drawing on my own reflexive practices, in the data and analysis of the interviews which made up this cycle of inquiry.

In writing this my approach was shaped by the notion of 'implicit relational mode', a key concept drawn from relational psychology (Lyons-Ruth 1998; Stern 1998). This concept, developed by psychoanalysts interested in understanding the dynamics between therapist and client, refers to the music behind the words, the unique quality and pattern of interaction between any two individuals. In their research there are specific moments which mark points of transition in their interaction, moments where a change in awareness takes place, where new understanding passes between therapist and client. While I did not expect to find this happening in an interview situation, I was interested in exploring pattern, and whether there was a quality that could usefully be described as implicit relational mode in these interviews.

My notes showed that my experience of the interview dynamics resonated powerfully with my experience of relationships with women clients. There were also interesting parallels and contrasts between the interview dynamics and the dynamics of relationships with women described by contributors. I start with my experiences and then move back to contributors' descriptions.

In both A and B, my first two interviews, I had an established friendship with contributors. In each case far from reproducing the interaction and content to which I was used, the discussion marked an unanticipated shift in our usual way of relating. In case A the inquiry introduced challenge, engagement with different views – and modelled positive aspects of working relationships described by the contributor. In case B reservations with the gender frame that I introduced seemed to mirror negative associations with specifying gender difference in the corporate culture which B described (see Introduction to Findings 1 and 2 above).

In both interviews there were points of convergence where contributors seemed willing to engage with the frame I was offering and to find it illuminating, and points of resistance and challenge where my frame was contested and the contributor reasserted their own stance:

M: What I'm interested in exploring is ..and I know there may not be straightforward answers - what you experienced in that team as a woman of a certain cultural background, as well as in your consultancy. Let's start when you came into the team: did you have any specific expectations?

B: No none whatsoever, none whatsoever!

M: *You didn't expect to be valued or perceived treated in any particular way because of your gender?*

B: *No!*

M: *That must be quite unusual?*

B: *That's how I am [voice rising] and what I said on the telephone. It would be very hard for me to really look at that – it never crossed my mind!*

M: *Yes, yes.*

B: *It never crossed my mind in the US – maybe because the person I was reporting to was a woman, a woman headed the whole department. [thoughtful] There was definitely in meetings no hint of any different attitudes and I felt very comfortable with people my age...slightly uncomfortable with men in their early 60s who probably didn't have much exposure experience of women in the workplace but for anyone up to the age of 50 or so it was not an issue ..maybe the only thing I can think of is we can bring different approaches in how we deal with situations and if anything it was very healthy to have both males and females on the team and there was no feeling you were not one of the gang.*

In this interaction my introduction was clumsy; I introduced the subject as an 'expectation' of different treatment – a position with which B does not wish to be associated and from which she vigorously dissociates. Then when I accept her rejection of unequal treatment she was able to move on to explore specificity of interactions between women as a possibility.

Interviews with C and E were the longest and most demanding in terms of energy, perhaps enacting the quality of attention that they each gave to clients. My interview with F was a mutual exploration of the tension between desire to be cared for and the need for challenge, the desire to be sharing power and the need to assert position power. The interview with D was the most relaxed; she was also the contributor who named the need to manage the tension between care for the individual and care for the consultancy process.

Reading the notes I had made immediately after each interview brought to my attention a cluster of my own dilemmas around how to retain a sense of self in dialogue. I experienced this physically, through changes in energy level and emotion. Each interview had its own distinct quality of interaction and rhythm. For example at the end of interviews

C and E I recorded a feeling of loss of self, drained and exhausted, and of difficulty in each of sticking to time boundaries. The feeling of well being and easy exchange with D contrasted with the feeling of being 'at sea' in interview B, linked to my fear of having pushed her into territory she had no wish to explore and use of a paradigm with which she could not identify.

It seemed that in each interaction we were enacting some element of the interactions they had described with women colleagues or clients. I was aware that I was playing an active part in this as I experienced changes in energy level as I was drawn into 'nurturing' or energised through challenge and dialogue.

This was hard to capture in my analysis as much of the interaction was conveyed in voice tone, pauses and intonation. Through analysis I saw that I shared much of the paradigm described by contributors of holding in balance nurturing and working to task. Interview tapes are full of the sound of tea being poured, food munched, the buzz of conversation in the places of domesticity or leisure in which we met. There was an ebb and flow of challenge or attunement to the emotional content expressed by contributors, as I tried to enable contributors to find their experiential base from which to engage with the research subject.

In its generative form as I experienced it this balance between nurturing and working to task resulted in a dialogue, in which each seemed to be actively contributing their part to the process and content. Differences of opinion were acknowledged and new thinking as well as a sense of affirmation was achieved through the process. In its degenerative form the process became draining; perhaps too much of my energy went into attunement to the contributor and not enough into direct expression of self as differences of experience and of analysis became blurred.

I encouraged contributors to move between experience in their personal and in their professional lives and to use the session as an opportunity for sense making and new thinking. The interviews do all convey a sense of connecting easily with each other on the level of ideas, creativity, and shared humour.

However these were not static experiences; the interviews moved and flowed, as I used my role as inquirer and the framework I had created for the interviews to gain a stronger sense of dialogue within each relationship, actively working to enable an interaction between equals, each offering an experience and then engaging in joint sense making of it, a process of challenge as well as attunement. To achieve this I had to work, as some of my contributors described themselves doing, with my inner world as well as in relation to the contributors (C), balancing care for the individual with care for the task in hand (D). The process was demanding, challenging and rewarding as a developmental process. It produced unexpected learning and change for myself as well as for contributors.

Conclusions

I started my inquiry into 'what happens between women in organisations' with a hunch that underneath diversity of identity, stance, social and organisational positioning, there might be a set of expectations that informs interactions between women and adds an edge or 'charge' to them. In my own experience this has certainly been the case. I set out through these interviews to understand more what this 'charge' between women might be and how it might be conceptualised.

I also set out to map the territory of how these women experienced women to women relationships in work settings. Through the interviews I set out to identify patterns within their experiences and to compare how they made sense of them to my own analysis.

The process of conducting the interviews and then of doing this analysis, has been deeply satisfying in a way I had not anticipated. Engaging with my contributors and then writing my own analysis has been energising and has brought me a sense of validation, a sense that at last I have been able to open up and express a part of myself and be heard. This is not entirely dependent on you the readers – although knowing that this will be read, that it is in the public arena, is what is making the difference. It is also about daring to listen to this part of myself, to allow this part of myself to speak, a sense of self-acceptance which is new and invigorating.

Hearing myself say this, I can see that this process of engaging with others in order to discover and connect with silent parts of myself is at the core of my inquiry methodology. Furthermore enabling others to engage with hidden parts of themselves, to find a sense of valuing and of being valued in and through relationship to others, has always been at the core of my professional practice.

As my interview summaries show, contributors found that the process of gaining a sense of being heard and/or valued was precarious. They spoke through different conceptual frames about a similar set of dynamics. These dynamics concerned qualities and expectations that they brought into professional relationships and that were seldom valued. They described these in relation to women peers, colleagues, bosses, consultants, and clients - women in professional or organisational roles. I too experienced my own dilemmas about being heard and valued in relation to my contributors and these were played out between us during the interview.

I found it hard to develop or introduce a discussion about women to women interactions without reference to men. In most cases my contributors did too. In retrospect being asked to focus on women's relationships to women implied being able to distinguish what was special or different from women to men. For some contributors this was not something they had considered before and was dangerous, because naming gender difference was associated in their organisational cultures with women being less competent.

Contributors did describe an identifiable set of qualities which women brought to professional roles – and which they thought were more likely to come into play in relation to other women. These took generative and degenerative forms; I describe them in detail in the interview summary tables and analysis of findings. However contributors did not make generic claims that women are different to men; they did not suggest that these dynamics applied to all women, or that they were exclusive to women to women interactions. Throughout each discussion they qualified their observations with references to specificity of context, age, culture, and to differences in women's experience of gender difference.

While contributors described similar patterns of interaction between women, none of them were willing to make general statements about their experience of dynamics between

women. Neither however were they neutral about the subject. The elusive quality to discussion of women to women as opposed to gender dynamics, and the emotional content and tone of our discussions confirmed my initial feeling that this was an area of difficulty for which we do not yet have adequate language.

There are linked questions which emerged for me from the experience of completing this cycle of inquiry, and which I intend to address in inquiry tracks which will focus on my own consultancy practice. They concern how I worked as a consultant with the dynamics of mis/trust between women in working environments and how I tried to create environments within which women were able to provide for each other a sense of the value of their work. Linked to this are questions concerning my ability to sustain myself; in what ways I felt valued or not, and how I sustained a sufficient sense of my own value to sustain my own professional practice. I address these themes directly in the following chapter and in my case studies.

My contributors linked trust with questions around identity and power: how can or do women in organisational roles sustain a sense of identity-in-relationship when they inhabit and are moving between different worlds and when these worlds value different qualities and ways of relating? And in which they hold unequal positions of power? How can they balance nurturing, attention to caring for individuals, and attention and caring for task in environments which do not value women as equals? How can feminist women sustain a sense of self-worth and integrity within 'mainstream' organisations?

These questions resonate with issues of my own which surfaced in my interview process around how to create a dialogue in which I can sustain a sense of separate self. In chapter 4 I showed how this theme has been in the foreground for me in developing my consultancy profile in relation to women in positions of power.

Contributors often had to choose the terms on which they wished to be valued and linked to this, how to construct and sustain a self-sense which maintained their integrity. It seemed likely that feeling powerful was in some way dependent on this self-sense. I am reminded of my previous research where women in positions of power stated that they did not feel powerful (Page and Lorandi 1992). Feeling powerful for women seemed to

depend on a sense of feeling valued but in both mixed and women's organisations they seemed to find this sense extraordinarily difficult to attain and to sustain.

In this cycle I developed a methodology appropriate to this cycle of my inquiry. This enabled me to trace the similarities and contrasts between the pattern of interaction between contributors and myself, and the explicit content of the interviews. Identifying and beginning to understand this intersubjective field as a kind of knowing feels fruitful for my consultancy and inquiry practices; I explore this further in my inquiry 'On the Borderlands of Yearning and Un / belonging', and develop it further in my case studies.

Several contributors directly challenged my conceptual frame; from each of them I took key methodological points which become organising concepts within subsequent cycles of inquiry. Among these was the need to situate my inquiry as a feminist project in its political and historical context and to distinguish between feminist and gender specific statements. Another was to specify the organisational context from which material is drawn. Exploring further what conceptual tools I can develop and use to develop my understanding and inform my practice will be integral to the rest of my inquiry.

During the two-year period in which I conducted this cycle of inquiry I read and critiqued feminist literature on women in management and leadership. Much of this literature is concerned with debates about gender specific leadership style. During this time I became less interested in gender difference and more interested in performative accounts of how women 'do' gender (Gherardi 1995). In preparation for a research contract I made a summary of this literature, illustrating different approaches to understanding women's position in organisations. This research contract became the subject of the next cycle of my inquiry. As a link between these two cycles of inquiry and to illustrate my engagement with this research literature I have included this review in chapter 8.