Chapter 12

On Thresholds and Borderlands

Section 1
Introduction

Overview

The purpose of writing this chapter was to conceptualise in greater depth core themes that emerged from my case studies and from my wider inquiry. In writing this further cycle of inquiry I set out to consolidate my propositional knowing and to take up a more assured subject position as feminist, consultant and inquirer.

The chapter is in six sections:
Introduction contains chapter overview, method and introduction to key concepts;

Conceptualising feminist learning community explores the epistemological challenges to conceptualising collaboration within feminist communities of inquiry;

Relational Skills for Sustaining Feminist Collaboration conceptualises further the relational skills needed to build collaboration and inquiry between women within these communities and situates my inquiry within feminist organisation research;

Working across Thresholds conceptualises the thresholds held by feminist women who work across subject positions and explores the skills needed by feminist consultants working across these thresholds;

Feminist Consultancy in the Borderlands explores ontological issues raised for me as a

feminist consultant in the case studies, and picks up themes developed in chapter 7;

In *Conclusions* I return to the identity issues raised by the subject position I have taken up in this inquiry.

Method

This chapter was drafted in two stages. My initial intention was to consolidate the conceptual frame I had begun to elaborate in my second case study before drafting my final one. In practice I needed to allow this final case study to take its own shape. I set aside the first draft of this chapter and only returned to it after I had completed my final case study.

Writing this chapter then became a reflection on core elements of my consultancy practice, in relation to cross cutting themes that had also emerged in my inquiry into life process. In it, I pick up themes identified in earlier chapters and relate them to dilemmas within my professional practice. These themes were the subject of earlier cycles of inquiry and are detailed in my mapping of dynamics in workplace relationships between women (chapter 6), in my inquiry journey as a consultant and life process (chapters 3 and 4), and in my inquiry into yearning and un/belonging which (chapter 7). I situate this final cycle of my inquiry within the body of feminist research on gender relations and on women in organisations.

To begin this process of reflection, I identified clusters of key issues and concepts in my case studies and selected those that seemed central to my consultancy practice and which resonated with themes that had emerged from my inquiry journey. These concerned practices I had developed which engaged the tension between inner and outer world realities for myself and for women with whom I worked. I then drew from research that allowed me to explore the issues from multiple perspectives, drawing from psychodynamic, feminist and organisational research sources. I then mapped the issues and concepts I had previously used and embarked on further cycles of conceptualisation, drawing together and developing key concepts from these research sources. In the conceptual map that follows I introduce these key concepts.

Conceptual map

This sub-section introduces the key concepts developed in this chapter. Rather than surveying the literature in these different fields, I chose to engage in depth with selected texts that offered relational and / or feminist perspectives and which were concerned with the politics of the issues. From this position I refer to feminist organisation research and propose areas for more in depth critical engagement.

Feminist research has consistently called into question the boundaries between private and public lives. Writing aspects of my self, which I would not normally share in the consultancy world, into the text of my thesis, evoked intense feelings of vulnerability as well as exhilaration. The discovery of feminist research that offered conceptual frames for introducing these 'private' emotions into my inquiry acted as a powerful legitimising force and reduced my sense of personal vulnerability (hooks 1991, 1996; Marshall 1992; Stanley and Wise 1983; Stanley 1997). Through my reading of these and other texts, I have come to see the work I have done to conceptualise and process emotion in my consultancy relationships and practice and to enable collaboration between women in organisations as a form of relational practice. In this chapter, I develop my own use of this term as a tool for understanding and transforming power relationships (Fletcher 1998).

In each of my three case studies I described inquiry practices I had developed both to sustain my self as consultant, and as a method for doing consultancy with clients and colleagues. In my second case study I introduced the term 'relational practices' to refer to the skills I used to negotiate difficult issues with colleagues and clients. In the third case study I described how I used inquiry to establish a more equal relationship to the project leader, and to enable women in different positions of power to explore the basis for a shared agenda of organisational change. While I named all of these practices as 'relational', drawing from Fletcher, my use of the term was broad and is further conceptualised in this chapter, in the context of the inquiry based methods for which they were used (Fletcher 1998).

In black feminist inquiry, women inhabit both margins and mainstream in order to transform gendered and raced power relations, and to generate new knowledge (Bell 2000; hooks 1990). In my case studies I referred to the use of the term 'biculturalism' to name competence in moving between worlds (Bravette 1996; Davidson 1997). US post colonialist feminists developed the concept of travelling between worlds to describe their

experience of moving between mainstream and margins (Anzaldua 1987; Lugones 1997).

I have been inspired by this writing to use the concept of 'world travelling' to think through the challenges I experienced as I moved between working environments with different, and often opposing, knowledge paradigms. In the second case study, I explored my experience of these challenges in depth, seeking a form for legitimating knowledge generated by women in the 'worlds' we had created, and within the 'malestream'[1] worlds of their organisations. In my second case study, I introduced the concept of 'thresholds' to explore the use of position power by women to either accredit or withhold accreditation from colleagues with whom they had been working in collaborative spaces outside the formal structure of their organisation. In section 4 of this chapter I develop my use of the concepts of 'world travelling' and of 'thresholds' to conceptualise the skills needed by the feminist consultant who uses inquiry to generate new knowledge as she moves between the different worlds illustrated in figure 1 below. These are the worlds of client organisations and spaces for collaborative work between women, her own inner world and the public world of consultancy.

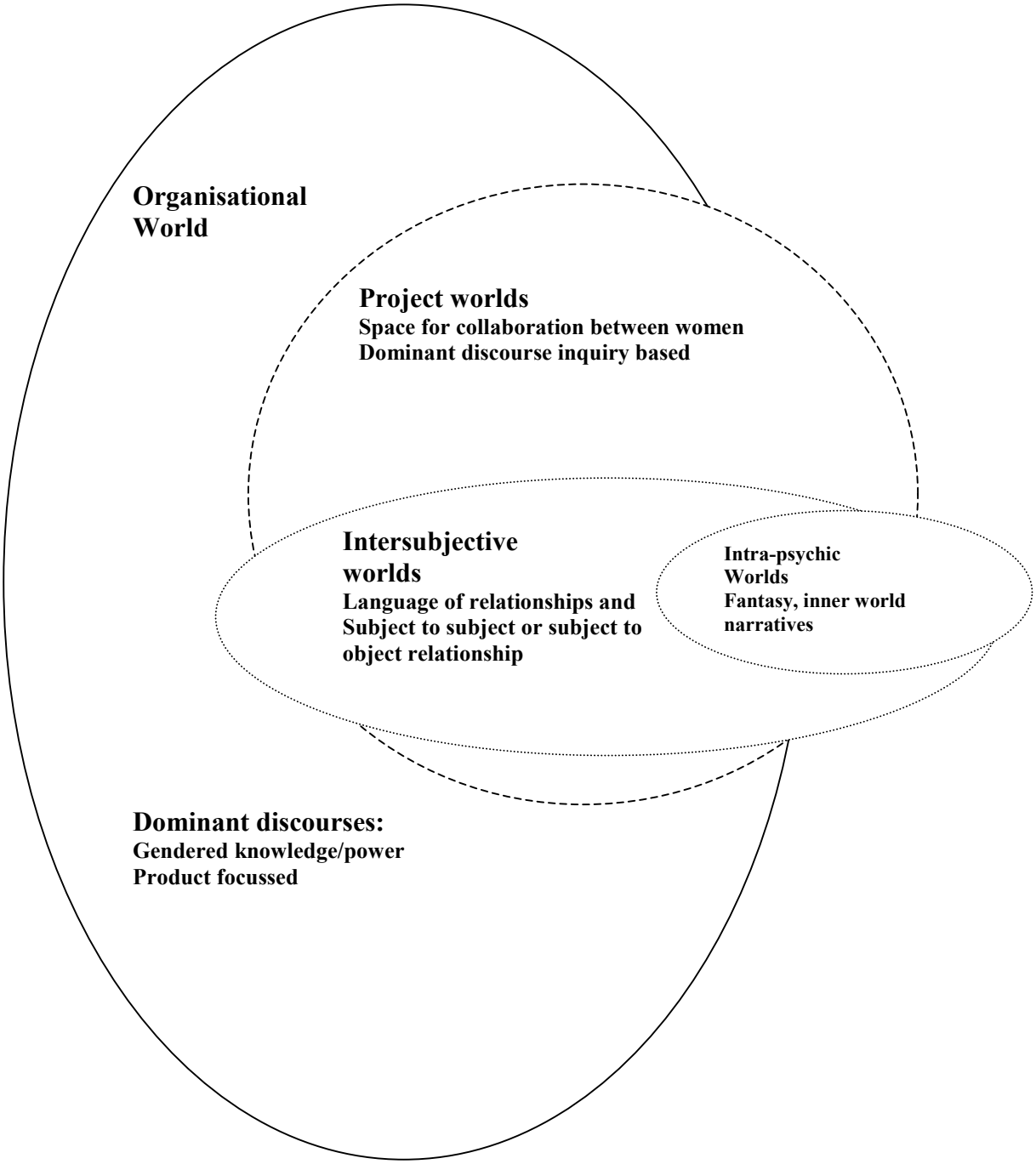
'Borderlands', is the term I used to describe the liminal spaces inhabited by feminists as they move between these different worlds. This inquiry has been a space in which I have brought together voices relating to my inner world and to the external world of organisations. In this space, voices of my inner world entered into dialogue and generated new knowledge about my self in relation to others as I practised my consultancy. In spaces I created through my consultancy, women who were differently positioned in organisations came together and generated new knowledge. Both sets of voices challenged gendered knowing and practice in organisations. In neither case was this process smooth or comfortable; in both difficult issues of power and identity had to be negotiated.

The concept of Borderlands, *La Frontera*, was first developed by Chicana US feminist, Anzaldua (1987; 1999) to describe the political struggles of mixed race people in the *Aztlan,* the US Southwest. The concept refers to the political and economic necessity for these inhabitants of leaving the familiar and safe home ground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain (Anzaldua 1999: 35). It refers both to a crossroads and a frontier.

1 A concept widely used by feminists to refer to discourses, practices and institutions which reproduce male power

Figure 1

The feminist consultant inhabiting and travelling between organisational, project and intersubjective worlds



In this chapter, I use the term to refer to the subjective and intersubjective spaces that I inhabit and create in order to enact my feminist politics. Their borders are not congruent with organisational boundaries, but cross them, referring to ontological states of being with their own languages and epistemologies, generative and degenerative qualities:

> This is my home
> this thin edge of
> barbwire
> Anzaldua 1999: 25

The notion of holding open a tension between two (or more) realities is at the core of my sense of self and, I maintain, at the core of the skills demanded of women with whom I work in each of my case studies. While the concept of 'world travelling' refers to the movement between different worlds, and 'borderlands' to an ontological state of being, the concept of 'intersubjectivity' approaches the experience of holding realities associated with different worlds in tension. Using a psychodynamic perspective, it refers to the psychology of holding a sense of the reality of both self and other, of difference and interconnectedness. This raises epistemological issues that are addressed in feminist debates concerning situated knowledge.

The concept of situated knowledge, as developed by feminist epistemologists, offered a starting point for conceptualising the consultancy methodology I described in two of my case studies (Haraway 1991; Harding 1991; Stanley and Wise 1993). In each of my case studies the knowledge about organisational life that women generated through their inquiry led to a gendered analysis of power and leadership within the organisations in which they were working. The issue in each case was how to validate this knowledge within the organisational environments in which they worked, and how to legitimate and accredit our work in producing this knowledge.

The concept of 'situated knowledge' offered me a starting point for conceptualising the skills needed for 'world travelling', and a firmer ground from which to engage with gendered assumptions embedded in these organisations. I used this concept explicitly in my third case study, where I invited colleagues and clients to enter into a dialogue from the positions they individually took up in their organisations, and looked at how their position power shaped their expectations of each other and approaches to collaboration.

In this chapter I use the notion of intersubjectivity as an organising concept for naming and exploring the inner and outer world dimensions of relationships between women which surfaced in my inquiry and which are illustrated in my case studies (Benjamin 1990; 1995). This concept enabled me to discover that the inner world issues with which I had been struggling could be thought about not merely as *intrapsychic*, belonging to my individual psyche, but as *intersubjective, or relational:*

> The intersubjective view, as distinguished from the intrapsychic, refers to what happens in the field of self and other, the crucial area we uncover with intrapsychic theory is the unconscious; the crucial element we explore with intersubjective theory is the representation of self and other as distinct but interrelated beings. Benjamin 1990:20

Benjamin's assertion that these worlds are not distinct, or in opposition, but complementary ways of understanding the psyche, offered me a way of conceptualising my movement back and forth between inner and outer world preoccupations. It also offered a way of conceptualising the difference between feelings and fantasies *about* others and the subjective quality of my *relatedness to* them (Benjamin 1990; Vince 1996: 222).

'Intersubjectivity' offers a way of understanding the world of passions and vulnerabilities between women, through a relational lens; a means of conceptualising them without either reducing explanation to individual histories, or representing them in ways which appear to undermine our professional competence. It also offers a useful way of naming the methodology I developed in my analysis of interview material: mapping resonance between the verbal content of interview discussions, and my experience of the intersubjective space between us.

In this chapter I weave together these key concepts to theorise difficulties women experienced in working together across differences of power, position, role and knowledge base. In each case study I referred to moments in which the sense of 'other' between women collapsed or became antagonistic, and described practices used to restore a positive sense of collaboration based on 'self and other'. I explored the impact of devaluing working environments and the challenges that these presented to sustaining coalition between women.

In the process of inquiry I identified more clearly what was at the core of my practice and came to see that this constellation of concepts - 'situated knowledge', 'world travelling', 'borderlands', 'relational practice' and 'intersubjectivity' referred to core elements of my approach. They offered a means of making sense of dilemmas that emerged in the consultancy interventions I describe and of accessing their multi-layered qualities.

In the rest of this chapter, I weave these concepts together to develop an epistemological and ontological framework for feminist inquiry and for my feminist consultancy practice.

Section 2
Conceptualising feminist learning community

Introduction

In this section I conceptualise the epistemological challenges of creating a generative experience of collaboration for women who come together across organisational boundaries. I start by using the concept of 'borderlands' to describe some of the qualities of collaborative spaces described in my case studies; then critically engage with the concept of epistemological community, using the extended epistemology of co-operative inquiry (Heron 1992, 1996; Reason 1988, 1994, 2000). Finally I return to the concept of 'world travelling' to explore some of the generative qualities of connection and exchange which took place between women.

Borderlands

Anzaldua uses the term 'borderlands' to describe an ontological state of being which is rooted in strategies of political resistance. Her struggle is to sustain multiplicity in an identity whose different elements are associated with warring national, ethnic, and sexual divisions. She grounds her epistemology in her analysis of this ontological state and offers it to all those who belong to conflicting cultures or communities and who wish to sustain multiple identities.

Anzaldua describes the experience of traversing different cultures as an embodied process, an inner war. This experience belongs to 'La Mestiza', a lesbian feminist woman of mixed race, belonging to none, partaking of each:

> Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures, and the value systems, la Mestiza undergoes a struggle of the flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture we get multiple, often opposing messages.
> Anzaldua 1999: 100

‘Borderlands’ seems an apt metaphor for the uncertain qualities of the spaces that I inhabit. Drawing from my experience of creating a secure base for myself I have sought to create and hold open these spaces for women in mainstream organisations; these have been shared spaces, which we jointly constructed and for which I as consultant have been responsible. In chapter 7 I used the concept of ‘secure base’ to describe some of the generative qualities of the spaces I aspired to create in my consultancy. ‘Borderlands’, with its connotations of instability and danger, offers a metaphor that conveys something of the changeable quality of my actual experience of these spaces and something of the epistemological challenges at stake.

In 'The Country of ELP' participants described qualities of the shared spaces that we created on the project that had inspired and sustained them in their professional and personal lives. However women refugee managers in my first case study described how sharing painful experiences had initially been empowering but finally become too much to bear. Similarly, partners and clients in the third case study were ambivalent about their experiences of coming together in shared spaces. In this case, difficulties in establishing trust and in building common ground, conflicts which could not be spoken and the 'disappearing' of voices which could not be openly confronted, meant that these spaces were frequently uncomfortable and anything but secure. In each of these case studies, as in my own inquiry into 'un/belonging', I was in touch with a quality of ‘yearning’ for connection and for mutual recognition that infused my experience of these spaces. This lent an edge of disappointment and sometimes of powerful frustration where it was not achieved; and, when it was, a quality of delight. While I do not claim that this yearning was shared by all, conversations with project participants and discussions in earlier cycles of this inquiry (chapter 6) confirmed that it was widely shared, in particular by participants

whose main work focus was gender equality.
Borderlands infused with longing for 'home' seems an apt metaphor for the uncertain quality of collaboration that was possible within these spaces. The challenge was to hold onto the 'yearning' for' home' as a generative force for constructing common ground, while holding in check its destructive power when expectations of finding a home were unmet. In the following section I explore what this meant for building feminist learning community.

Power and Trust in Collaborative Spaces

In each case study, women came together across organisational boundaries to generate new knowing and to sustain each other in challenging the gender order in their own organisations. This process was iterative and ongoing; based on the principles of action research (Reason 1988, 1994, Reason and Bradbury 2000) and of action learning (McGill and Beaty 1992; Vince 1996). Their aim was to identify and conceptualise barriers to women's equality and to create innovative practical interventions to tackle them. In this sense they were participants in communities of inquiry, setting out to reach a new understanding of gendered power within their spheres of operation and to develop methods of practical intervention to change the world. The process was time limited but open ended, without predetermined results. It depended on participants' willingness and ability to generate new knowledge through a process of joint exploration, sharing, and conceptualisation (Heron 1992, 1996; Reason 1988; 1994).

In my second case study, I referred to a co-authored paper in which I developed a conceptual framework for understanding the epistemological issues concerned with building 'learning community' with women working across organisational boundaries (Page and Scott 2001). The collaboration out of which this paper was written enabled me to make links between the epistemology and the politics of my consultancy practice. In the rest of this section I explore whether the concepts of 'epistemological' or 'learning' community could be used to convey the collaborative qualities of the spaces which I aimed to create.

In this paper my co-author and I speak of knowledge produced by women in relationships of trust (Code 1995). We make the point that this knowledge is responsible and accountable to the community that gave it birth; that it is shared and not composed of individually owned propositional statements. We then talk about the specific skills and conditions needed to sustain 'learning communities'. These relate to the provision of a

safe space in which differences can be articulated, dialogue can take place and relationships of trust develop (Page and Scott 2001). The paper conceptualised my experience of facilitating a network of independent women's organisations who had come together to learn how to introduce use of information and communication technologies into their day to day practice.

In each of my case studies crises of trust occurred which significantly reduced the scope of collaboration. While these crises took a different form in each case, each concerned a sense that the basis of solidarity between women had in some sense been violated or could not be sustained. Similarly, contributors to my interviews described crises of trust in relationships between women when individual members of peer groups achieved 'success' or external recognition.

How relevant is the notion of learning community, or community of inquiry, to conceptualising the complex processes involved in building trust across differences of power between women in organisational settings?

Participants in each project described in my case studies were women coming together from different organisations to which they were accountable as employees, and to which their change interventions were directed. In order to participate, individuals had to travel between the world of their own organisations and the new world of the shared project. In each case, this presented challenges arising from the different values and cultures embedded and enacted in these different 'worlds'. In each project, they found that in order to introduce learning and new practices developed within the project world into their organisations, they would need to challenge gendered regimes of power and work practices. They had to make their own assessment of how to use their new knowledge, and weigh up how to embed it in their practice in ways consistent with their career and survival.

This posed political and epistemological challenges. However, in each case study ontological issues were also at stake for some of the women concerned. New knowing led to a new sense of self for women refugee managers, and participants in ELP spoke of transformation that had occurred through the processes of sharing and knowledge generation that had taken place in the project. In the Persephone Project women in the client organisation did challenge the gendered regime of power in their organisation, and

in doing so transformed their sense of their own power and place in the organisation. In none of these instances was the process predictable or straightforward:

> The idea of learning communities …requires us to step over borders that, in Anzaldua's words, define the spaces that are safe and unsafe…that distinguish *us* from *them (1987:3);* and to enter that vague and undetermined place – in a constant state of transition – that Anzaldua (1987 / 1999) has termed the 'borderlands'.
> Page and Scott 2001

The learning spaces I created were a base for women to go out from and in that sense 'secure', but by no means comfortable. They were subject to destructive as well as creative dynamics. New knowledge was generated in the context of relationships between participants who then developed it further in their own organisational worlds. The learning in this sense was embedded in relationships, and both sustained and enabled challenge in how gender power was enacted.

Acts of translation[i] for transfer of knowledge;

Lugones suggests that knowledge is generated, recognised and acted upon within what she has called 'worlds' (Lugones 1997). In each world inhabited - and this may be more than one world at the same time - inhabitants interpret what they see in particular, shared ways and have shared sets of practices. In asking participants in each project to leave the 'world' of their home organisation and to enter a new one, in which they would develop a new set of practices and a new type of perception, my colleagues and I were asking them to become what Lugones called 'world travellers' (Lugones 1997; Page and Scott 2001).

In our analysis of learning community my co-author and I suggested that knowledge was generated through shared activity, recognised and acted upon within 'epistemological communities' (Page and Scott 2001). Through subsequent reflection in this inquiry, I considered that 'community' implied homogeneity of approach that had not been my experience of the projects described in my case studies or compatible with the diversity of their participants. Participants each belonged to different organisations, sectors, and countries; they had different mother tongues and often spoke through interpreters. They each brought with them elements of the epistemologies and politics of the other worlds that they inhabited. These epistemologies were in the main positivist, product orientated,

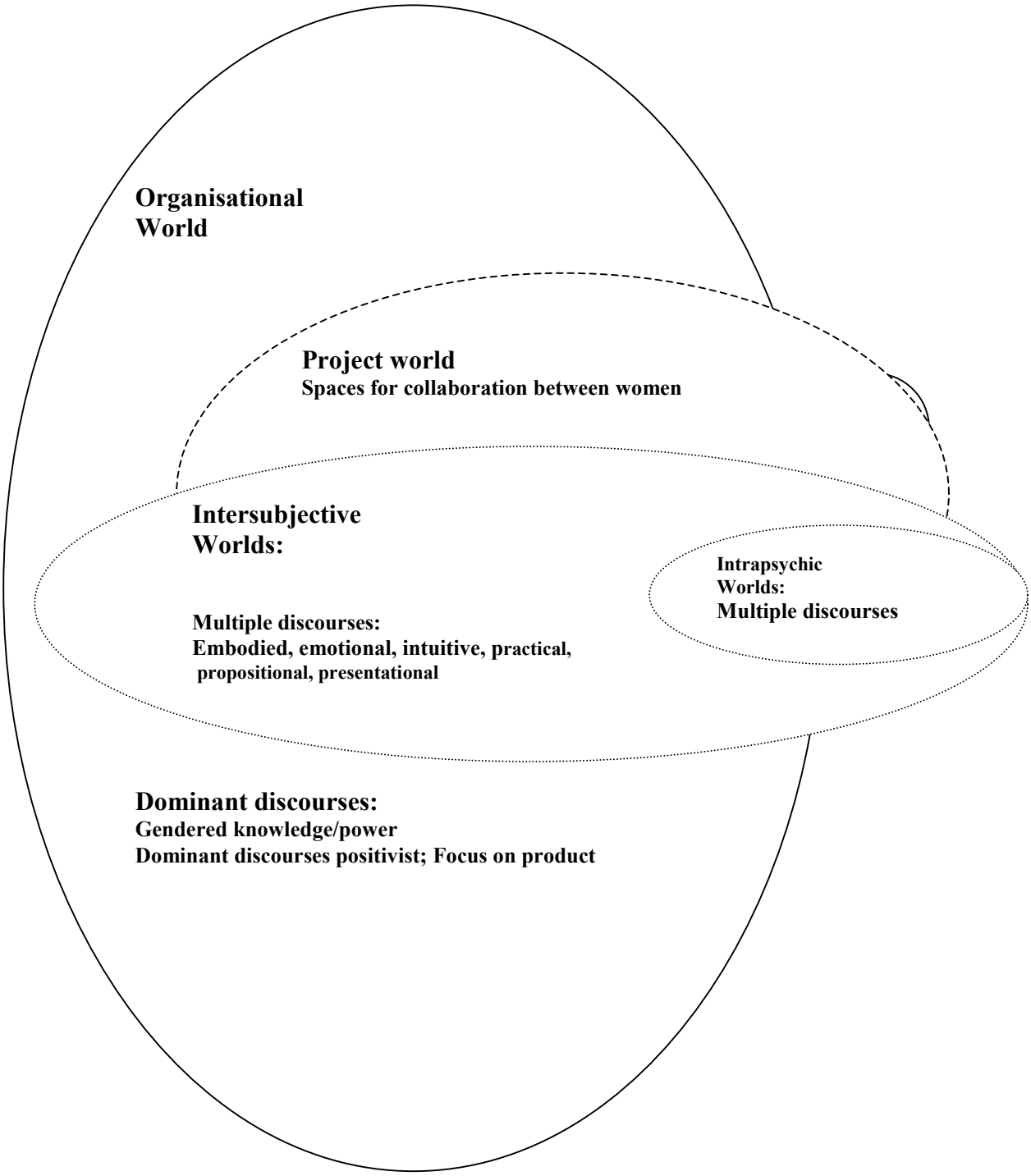
gender-neutral and not conducive to inquiry. They posed different political and epistemological challenges to the women's organisations that made up the network on which my first conceptualisation of learning community was based.
Nevertheless, the concept of 'epistemological community' did seem to offer a way of conceptualising some of the potential, and the challenges, of generating new knowledge from mutual exchange and interaction within these collaborative spaces. Using feminist notions of the term, I might now conceptualise ‘learning community’ as a new epistemological community in the making, struggling to create its own epistemic standards in relation to those embedded in the organisational environments and practices of its members (Nelson 1993).

Nelson’s notion of epistemological community (1993) embraces different forms of knowledge, and asserts that there are many communities that develop and share knowledge and standards. Epistemological communities overlap with larger communities, and are dynamic and unstable; they evolve, disband, realign and cohere as interests and undertakings evolve and are abandoned, and as new experiences, standards and knowledge become possible (Nelson 1993: 148). They are not monolithic, nor homogeneous; but develop categories and standards, some of which each member accepts. Moreover we are each members of a number of such communities. Nelson asserts that it is these communities and not individuals that are the primary agents of knowledge (150). Thus, difficulties experienced by individuals in moving between project and organisational worlds could be conceptualised as conflicts associated with belonging to different epistemic regimes, in each of which propositional knowledge claims were embedded in specific practices which challenged or endorsed gendered power regimes.

While not 'communities of inquiry' in any explicit sense, the collaborative and learning spaces I facilitated did adopt elements of participative inquiry in their working methods (Reason 1994). In case study 2, I showed how joint reflection on practice offered a means for building shared standards for knowledge claims. In this case and, to a more limited extent in case study 3, participants valued and practised reflection on action in order to develop strategies for change. However in all three cases there were conflicts at points when project work had to be legitimated within the positivist product orientated cultures of the sponsoring organisations. That the 'new worlds' tended towards being inquiry based, and participants’ 'home' worlds tended to be positivist and output orientated, overlaid the gendered dimensions of the challenges to existing orders of knowledge/power.

Figure 2

The feminist consultant generating new knowledge, crossing thresholds of organisational, project and intersubjective worlds



In figure 2 above I illustrate the epistemological challenges of moving between these worlds.

In chapter 2, I referred to the multiple forms of knowing asserted by feminist epistemologists and described the extended epistemology developed by practitioners of co-operative inquiry. Within this epistemology, valid propositional knowing is grounded in the experiential and practical knowledge of the subjects in the inquiry (Heron 1992, 1996; Reason 1988,1994,2000). Using this extended epistemology, I will now revisit the epistemological challenges in transferring and legitimating knowledge from the collaborative world of the project to the world of sponsoring organisations.

In each case study, new propositional knowledge was articulated in the process of drafting the final publication. In each case study, propositional knowledge first had to be extracted from the practice and relationships in which it was embedded. This was not a smooth process, as my case studies demonstrate, but fraught with difficult issues that had to be negotiated between women participants and myself. As my supervisor suggested and as my case studies illustrate, this involved acknowledging relationships and projections into their / our ‘other world’ audiences.

The term 'epistemological community' offers a means of articulating some of the difficulties in conceptualising the processes of transfer of learning. If knowledge is embedded in ‘epistemological community’, then 'transfer of learning’ from one community to another is not neutral but subject to negotiation. It is likely to work only if members of both worlds share the same knowledge paradigm, or standards, and are ready and willing to set them aside in order to enter into dialogue.

My case studies showed that ‘world travellers’ who wished to transfer knowledge generated within one epistemological community into another required specific skills. At the very least these skills concerned 'translating' knowledge into a form adapted to make sense to members of each community, and to engage them in a dialogue within or across knowledge paradigms. However as I have shown, these 'acts of translation' were not gender neutral. Participants also needed to be able to challenge and confront gendered power regimes within their organisations; to seek ways of influencing the inhabitants of the worlds they frequented and of enacting gender differently; and to hone their own survival skills.

The extended epistemology developed for co-operative inquiry helped me to make sense of this process. In this extended epistemology, propositional knowledge is concerned with conceptual work, but is only one layer, or one stage, in a cycle of phases of knowing which need to be congruent with each other in order to make a knowledge claim (Heron 1992, 1996; Reason 1988, 1994). The propositional knowing generated by women in my case studies was embedded in their own practical, experiential, and presentational knowing. Similarly, 'the act of 'translation' in which they would need to engage in order to introduce this into their organisational environments would mean engaging with alternative regimes of practical, experiential and presentational knowing in which this propositional knowing was embedded. To address these challenges I have extended the notion of 'epistemological community' to signpost the associated challenges of 'transfer'.

World travelling as loving connection

Post colonialist feminist Lugones describes world travelling as a positive set of skills necessarily developed by those who are outsiders to the white ‘Anglo’ organisation of life in the US:

> The outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where she is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where she is more or less at 'home'. This flexibility is necessary for the outsider but can also be wilfully exercised by those who are at ease in the mainstream.
> Lugones 1992: 275

This concept of world travelling seems aptly to describe the experience and challenges for feminist women as they move between the 'mainstream' organisation of life in the organisations in which they work and the spaces that sustain them as feminists. Lugones refers to this travelling as:

> Skilful, creative, rich, enriching, and given certain circumstances, a loving way of being.
> Lugones 1992: 275

She contrasts this to the compulsory travelling in hostile Anglo worlds which women of colour practice out of necessity, and affirms that:

> We learn to love each other by learning to travel in each other's 'worlds'.
> Lugones 1992: 275

I use the term ‘world travelling’ metaphorically, to refer both to my experience as a feminist consultant and to the experience of women that I describe in my case studies. For participants in my second case study; visiting each other's countries literally for transnational meetings was an essential aspect of coming to understand the contexts in which each was operating, and this contributed to building the shared world of collaboration and learning. At the final evaluation event they affirmed the loving aspects of their collaborative relationships within this world. In contrast, women in the third case study seemed to experience transnational meetings as compulsory travel. Passion was often expressed as negative connection; there was disappointment at the lack of resources to travel and subsequent disinterest in each other's 'worlds' because they perceived the differences to be 'too great'. As a result new knowledge generated between partners was minimal.

Lugones distinguishes between world travelling which is loving and animated by playfulness and travelling with a spirit of arrogance. She describes playfulness as being a creative presence, open to surprise, to self-construction or reconstruction, and to being a fool. Arrogance in contrast is travelling in a spirit of conquest. The difference is not simply in the qualities or mood of the traveller, but in the ethos of the worlds themselves. There are some worlds in which we travel at our peril, that have arrogance and conquest in their ethos, that we enter out of necessity and in which it would be foolish to enter playfully. There are others within which we can be playful. This is illustrated in my third case study, where my relationship with clients was contaminated by the conflictual organisational ethos; or in the first case study, where my relationship was similarly undermined by organisational practice and history.

Women refugee managers in the first case study established loving connection across differences of language, culture, and ethnicity within their own group. Within this case study I could now conceptualise my authorship as an invitation to 'visit' with the worlds of my clients, to make an act of loving connection. The challenge would be to accept this on its own terms, not seeking to 'conquer' or to transgress my status as a vehicle for legitimation of this world within the world they had identified as mainstream. This would offer me a way of naming my research contribution as an act of love, and remove the pain

of not being acknowledged. From this perspective I feel more accepting of the contract offered.

Lugones asserts that it is only when we have travelled to each others worlds that we are fully subjects to each other (Lugones: 289). Being fully subject to each other takes place through exchange at a level of ontology; it is an exchange between women at a level of spirit, of emotion, of practical experience as well as of intellect. It is distinct from conquest, reducing the other to an object, or self image. In this sense it is similar to the concept of connected knowing, in which, in order to access new knowledge, women maintain a sense of themselves as separate alongside a process of identification (chapter 2; Red Thread 2). It may also draw from the multiple ways of knowing elaborated in the extended epistemology of co-operative inquiry (Heron 1992, 1996; Reason 1988, 1994).

In 'The Country of ELP', case study 2, participants developed the term ‘cross fertilisation’ to refer both to the process of exchange between them and to the ontological changes which occurred as a result. This did not conform to the product-orientated discourses predominant in their organisations, within which value had to be demonstrated. Thus ELP partners were moving between worlds which not only had different languages, but different systems of knowledge production. As a result, some knowledge claims were valued and recognised, others were simply ignored, silenced, or 'disappeared'. As ambassadors of the 'country of ELP' they were doubly challenged: to promote gender mainstreaming, in itself a demand to challenge the gendered, but apparently gender-neutral, policy process; but also to promote a way of working which was based on relational methodologies in a organisations which primarily valued product. In my third case study, I described how the regular 'disappearing' of knowledge offered by women was a powerful mechanism for retaining intact the gendered and raced power regimes of their organisation.

In this section I have shown that epistemological challenges to conceptualising collaboration within feminist community of inquiry are embedded in ontological and political challenges. In the next section I conceptualise the skills needed to work with these challenges in order to build feminist collaboration and inquiry.

Section 3
Relational skills for sustaining feminist collaboration and inquiry

Collaboration challenges: women doing gender

Women who wish to create a space for loving, playful exchange must employ specific skills in order to confront ontological and relational challenges, including those associated with recognising each other as subjects. In my case studies I identified 'flashpoints' on the thresholds of these spaces and of their associated organisational worlds, and explored how they were enacted in relationships between women.

In the previous section of this chapter I drew from feminist epistemology to conceptualise some of these challenges. In this section, I draw from feminist organisation theory to conceptualise how I met these challenges in my consultancy practice.

In chapter 8 I introduced research literature on women's experience of gender difference in organisations. This literature, developed during the 80's and 90's, is a comparatively recent arrival to the literature of management and organisation studies. Although it contains only passing references to relationships between women, it provides valuable contextual material for my inquiry. In the following paragraphs, I briefly summarise some of the strands within this research in order to situate my inquiry as a contribution to the feminist project of gendering organisation analysis and practice. As the literature is extensive, my references are intended to be selective rather than comprehensive and to illustrate key themes within the range of approaches relevant to my inquiry.

Over the past decade, the feminist project of 'gendering organisational analysis' has demonstrated both the resilience of male power in the workplace, and the complexity of mechanisms through which it is reproduced and maintained within the fabric of institutional and management practice (Acker 1990; Calas and Smircich 1996; Collinson and Hearn 1996; Izraeli and Adler 1994; Mills and Tancred 1992; Wajcman 1998). However, recent research acknowledges that applications of this research are under-developed and that there has been little research or theory on how to use this work to

change organisations (Meyerson and Kolb 2000).

In another strand of feminist organisation research, competing claims have been made as to whether or not there are gender differences in leadership style (Eagly and Johnson 1995). A significant strand within this research claims that women have specific qualities, which they express in their approaches to leadership (Ferrario 1991; Helgeson 1990; Oseen 1997; Rosener 1990). This literature is reviewed in chapter 8.

Another strand suggests that regardless of leadership style and attributes, women continue to be construed as 'different ' or in some way problematic (Marshall 1995; Sinclair 1998; Wajcman 1998). Furthermore, constructing leadership as feminine may confirm gender stereotypes and the traditional gender division of labour and create a misleading impression of women's orientation to leadership (Calas and Smircich 1993). However, it may be of some value as a basis for reconstructing leadership as a concept in contrast to traditional ideas about leadership and management and as a way of affirming the qualities associated with the ‘feminine’ in women and men (Billing and Alvesson 2000).

There is an extensive literature on the experience of individual women in leadership positions (Marshall 1984, 1995; Sinclair 1998; Wajcman 1998). However there is little research documenting how women have organised to collectively remove institutional barriers to women's equality. Some research has documented the effects of equal opportunities policies to remove specific institutional or cultural barriers to women (Maddock and Parkin 1995; Thobani 1995; Itzin 1995). Other studies have documented the resilience of male resistance to these initiatives and their limited effectiveness (Cockburn 1991; Coyle 1989; Webb 1997).

A recent research study identified four ways of formulating the problem of gender inequity in organisations related to four different feminist theoretical approaches, and linked these to organisational interventions and approaches (Meyerson and Kolb 2000: 560-3). The first two of these, ‘liberal individualism’ and ‘liberal structuralism’, aim to remove differences between men and women and to enable women to participate on an equal basis to men. Organisational Interventions associated with these two approaches aim to equip women with skills and remove discriminatory institutional barriers. These approaches were embedded in the equal opportunities policies and practices of the organisations I described in my second and third case studies. In contrast the third approach, valuing difference’ or ‘women’s standpoint/advantage’, aims to celebrate

gender differences rather than to eliminate them, and conceptualises gender difference as embedded in masculine and feminine identities. This was the approach adopted by the women refugee managers in my first case study. However in the fourth approach, 'resisting and re-visiting the dominant discourse', gender difference is not located in identity or in discriminatory practices. Rather, gender is an organising principle that shapes apparently gender neutral organisational practice. According to this approach, sex differences are an active, ongoing social construction, not inherent, or the result of early socialisation.

The latter more complex approach is the terrain within which I attempted to engage in the consultancy interventions described in my case studies. In order to position my inquiry as an action research based contribution to 'gendering organisation analysis', I will briefly discuss a research initiative to which I referred to in chapter 11.

This research project was undertaken collaboratively within a global manufacturing and retailing company and used inquiry as a method. It had a dual agenda of promoting gender equity and organisational objectives. Findings and commentaries were presented at an Academy of Management Symposium. Reading them, I was struck by similarities with my own inquiry in approach, findings and methodological dilemmas (Meyerson and Kolb 2000).

The research set out, as I did in my third case study, to engage organisation members up and down the hierarchy to question their own and others' deeply held assumptions about individual and organisational success. In doing so, it aimed to contest gender neutrality by exposing the often subtle ways in which policies, practices and interactions create gendered distinctions that may serve to justify male privilege (Ely and Meyerson 2000). The approach required participants to work collaboratively, to take a critical stance towards long held beliefs and assumptions, and to interrogate organisational practices through a process of collaborative inquiry. The aim was to enable co-researchers to analyse their experience and bring about change by and for themselves (Coleman and Rippin 2000).

The findings and methodological dilemmas cited in the study clarified for me the scale of the project I had taken on in my third case study and the nature of the organisational resistance I had encountered.

The research set out to enable partners to reflect on their experiences and meaning making processes, in order to understand how they might be contributing to gender inequities in the company. The researchers' primary agenda was gender, however they tended to play this down in order to gain the confidence of their partners, whose primary agenda was business. As in my case study, a space for discussing women's experiences in the organisation opened up and was used to share stories of invisible work that were not rewarded in the organisation. However participants in this research, as in my case studies, experienced difficulty in holding together their gender and business agendas. For example, when participants initiated a self-managed team they framed this as a solution to a business problem, rather than as an intervention by women to shift gendered power relations. As a result participant initiative resulted in a loss of the gender element of the dual agenda.

> The language of gender fell away unless we were there to hold it in place.
> Coleman and Rippin 2000: 588

In my third case study the dual agenda also 'fell away' when women participants took the initiative to assert their own priorities, and I was no longer present to hold it in place. The project was confirmed in its identity as a women's project when participants selected sexual harassment as a priority area for intervention, but at this point inquiry findings which made the link between gender equality and improvements to mainstream management practice were literally lost. In both cases collaborative approaches exposed the research to highjacking by organisational agendas. These agendas were shaped by the position power available to participants and their need to show results, but, as my case studies show, they were also embedded in organisational frameworks for gender equality initiatives (Acker 2000; Coleman and Rippin 2000). In both my case studies and the research, the dual agenda had been lost, and so had the spirit of inquiry:

> The initiatives taken became an advocation of what they wanted to do, rather than a way of letting people know what they and been discovering.
> Coleman and Rippin 2000: 586

The researchers concluded that collaboration both as a principle and as a strategy was central in bringing about generative organisational change. But creating and maintaining the relationship needed to be based not just on agreement but on mutuality and trust. This involved relational work, but this often has different meanings when men or women carry it out. The low status attached to collaborative working in a work environment where reward

and recognition is based on individualised achievement meant that senior managers did not commit the time to build collaborative relationships and delegated to more junior staff. This conflict between individualised achievement and collaborative working posed dilemmas that were experienced by women participants and partners in projects I described in each of my case studies.

The above research emphasises the complexity of the relationship between theory and practice, and the challenges of developing frameworks for change interventions that expose gendered power within 'gender neutral' organisational practices. It is unusual in that it explores the nature of the collaboration between researchers and practitioners and how it developed. Reading it sharpened my awareness of the specificity of what I had set out to achieve, and enabled me to see more clearly that the resistance I encountered may have been related to the framework I was advocating which challenged the limitations set by an equal opportunities frame. Inquiry and collaboration were the means of making this challenge, and in common with the researchers I learned that to be effective this needed to constantly balance challenge and disruption with maintaining and building trust (Coleman and Rippin 2000:587).

Relational practice for feminist collaboration

In this subsection I conceptualise further the challenges associated with sustaining this trust. I draw from research on relational work to conceptualise the skills and processes needed to sustain women's collaborative relationships.

Writing about the production of gendered power and meaning in organisations, Gherardi and others developed the notion of ‘doing gender’ to explore the interactions between women and men at symbolic and discursive levels (Gherardi 1995; West and Zimmerman 1991). Through my review of this literature I became more keenly aware of how women's leadership was represented in my client organisations, and sought ways of drawing participants' attention to how they were representing and enacting gender. In each case study, women confronted sexualised power relations within their organisation and embarked on a cycle of events that engaged them in gender power dynamics in a different way.

In writing this inquiry, I extended this research on how men and women did gender to consider how women 'did gender' in relation to each other in collaborative spaces

described in my case studies. At transnational meetings in both the second and third case studies, identity as well as organisational role and politics came into play. Sharing of personal information was important for building trust; however revealing 'hidden' differences, such as sexuality, was a source of potential vulnerability. Sharing was often based on assumed heterosexuality; lesbian identities, although known, were not always explicitly acknowledged or referred to within the work of the project. In some instances sharing lesbian identity became a way of establishing areas of common ground which could not otherwise be articulated within the project.

As the projects progressed, partners were able to develop more shared meaning where they ‘visited’ and actively engaged with the 'worlds' of project partners. Simply being in the countries of partners did not in itself enable partners to enter into creative exchange, as I have shown in my third case study. In the second case study facilitation enabled more 'personal' sharing to take place, and more exchange out of which shared meaning developed.

Women in my case studies experienced being devalued for their association with gender equality work, and ambivalent status in gendered power regimes. In these circumstances mutual affirmation and valuing of each other's gender equality work took on a special significance. In the second case study, participants stated that the process of exchange had helped each of them to see their achievements, in contrast to their experience in environments that did not affirm them. However this happened through facilitation, not spontaneously, and in other case studies not at all. Contributors[ii] to interviews identified the skill of reflecting back the value of work carried out by women who did not 'see 'their achievements and whose work was undervalued by others.

In my case studies I showed that women's collaborative relationships were doubly undermined, by the devaluing of women's equality work and by devaluing of women in their organisations. In each case study, building and sustaining relationships with each other was a core aspect of their work to challenge women's inequality. Similarly I showed that care and repair of my relationships with clients and colleagues was central in each of my case studies, and how I used inquiry to help me to do this work.

In each case study the 'project world' was a temporary staging post, constantly evolving, reflecting difference as well as communality. In generative moments its inhabitants were world travellers, agents of creativity, making new meaning through playful interaction with other inhabitants of this world and the worlds to which they would return. Through this

process, they developed a common language. However this creative mode was constantly threatened by the impact on participants, and their relationships with each other, of externally defined power differences. Sometimes it could not be sustained and degenerative merging, arrogance, or distancing prevailed. Sometimes the necessary repair work to return to creative mode could be done, sometimes not.

In my case studies I called this difficult work of care and repair a form of relational work. In case study three[iii] I used the term 'transversal politics' to discuss the politics of these practices, when used to sustain alliance in conflict zones.

In her research Fletcher uses the term relational practices to refer to practices motivated by a relational belief system, a belief in 'growth in connection' (Fletcher 1998). In relational theory, growth is conceptualised as occurring in a specific kind of interaction, and as requiring specific skills. They are characterised by mutual empathy and empowerment, an expectation that sites of relational interaction will be sites of growth for all parties involved (1998:167). Her research illustrates the devaluing and disappearing of 'relational' work in organisations, and within widely used definitions of work. She claims that this devaluing is an important mechanism for reproducing gendered power relationships in organisations and in organisational theory.

Relational theory provides an epistemology that assigns value to the qualities and attributes which women are socialised to develop, and on this basis challenges dominant organisational discourse. In Red Thread 1, I referred to dangers that this may be used to promote women into gender stereotyped leadership roles (Billing and Alvesson 2000; Calas and Smircich 1993). Here I use the concept for a specific purpose: to name and to assert the value of the inner work and intersubjective practices, which have been central to my inquiry. Through these practices I addressed ontological and political dilemmas which arose within my feminist consultancy practice.

In her research study of women engineers working in a high technology company, Fletcher identified four types of relational practice, each of which was systematically excluded from definitions of work in their working environment. The relational practices that I explored in my case studies related to all four categories that Fletcher identified. These were 'preserving', or activities associated with preserving the well being of the project; mutual empowering, or enabling others' contributions to the project; achieving, or using relational skills to enhance ones own professional development or growth; and

creating team, or working to create the background conditions in which group life can flourish. Fletcher developed sub categories, all which related closely to the consultancy practices I described in detail in my case studies. In her discussion, for example, she identified the following: repairing broken relationships ('achieving'); paying attention to the emotional overlay of situations to understand what was happening and what the most effective response would be ('reconnecting'); assessing others' emotional contexts and modifying ones' own behaviour in response ('reflecting'); and attending to the individual and attending to the collective ('creating team') (Fletcher 1998:168-173).

It is not my primary purpose to compare or develop additional categories of relational practice, but simply to assert similarity of struggle to assert the 'work' value of relational activities carried out within the projects and the undermining effects of this devaluing on collaborative relationships within the projects. At moments when participants were more identified with the 'worlds' of their organisation than the 'world' of the project, they found it hard to assert the value of their relational practices. Thus it was difficult for partners to assert the enriching quality of their experience of the project or the value of project methodologies within their organisations, unless they presented them in 'product' related terms.

Participants could not be relied upon to credit their project for their achievements in their organisational worlds, or to sustain awareness of the connections between these worlds. This became apparent in the second case study when difficult issues arose concerning accreditation of work done in the 'world' of the project. There was then a real risk of invisibilising the relational work and its facilitation in the project world, even thought this had sustained interventions in participating organisations.

In my second case study I developed the concept of 'thresholds' between these different worlds. As consultant responsible for the relational work within the projects, I was dependent on my clients to assert their power of dual citizenship by demanding that recognition and affirmation between women in the project world be represented publicly, in their organisational worlds. This often led to conflict between my clients and me, as asserting the value of relational methods developed within the project sometimes challenged adaptive strategies they had adopted in their organisations. I had to choose how far to accommodate these strategies, and how strongly to assert my need for accreditation. My choices, as were my clients, were based on a political reading of the contexts in which we were operating, as well as subjective and ontological considerations.

As I have shown in my case studies, these choices were not made easily or comfortably. Strong negative as well as positive emotions had to be held and processed in order to sustain collaboration.

I suggest this was a territory within my consultancy in which a special kind of relational work took place: women working across thresholds, transforming power relationships through feminist collaboration. I will now return to relational psychology to conceptualise in greater depth the issues that arise between women who cross these thresholds.

Recognition between women within intersubjective spaces

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced Benjamin's concept of intersubjectivity and stated that it offered a way of understanding the world of passions between women through relational lens. In this section I will use her concepts of intersubjectivity and of 'recognition' (Benjamin 1990; 1995) to conceptualise the relational skills I used to work with blocks to collaboration, exchange and learning between women.

Benjamin describes herself as a psychoanalyst involved from the beginning with feminist thought. She introduces her 'outline of intersubjectivity' with a statement that recently psychoanalytic schools have converged in an effort to formulate relational theories of the self (Eagle 1984; Mitchell 1988). This perspective:

> …must confront the difficulty each subject has in recognising the other as an equivalent centre of experience.
> Benjamin 1990

Benjamin's formulation resonates with Lugones' concept of world travelling as loving connection, introduced earlier in this chapter. In the following quote Lugones describes the quality of this connection in terms very similar to Benjamin:

> Without knowing the other's 'world', one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one.
> Lugones 1992:289

When I came across these formulations they resonated powerfully on a number of levels.

In my life process inquiry, coming into voice as a subject on my own terms enabled me to enter into more dialogic interactions within professional and family relationships. In writing each of my case studies, I described moments where I experienced powerful feelings where a form of subject to subject affirmation was achieved or withheld. Benjamin's development of the term 'recognition' seemed to legitimate my desire, and to describe the moments where it was satisfied - or withheld:

> Recognition is so central to human existence as to often escape notice: or rather, it appears to us in so many guises that is seldom grasped as one overarching concept. There are any number of near- synonyms for it: to recognise is to affirm, validate, acknowledge, know, accept, understand, empathise, take in, tolerate, see, identify with, find familiar.… love
> Benjamin 1990: 15-16

In my case studies, recognition between women was not a straightforward or easy process. As Benjamin asserts, to give recognition the other must be recognised as a person in her own right:

> Recognition is that response from the other that makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self. It allows the self to realise its agency in a tangible way. But such recognition can only come from an other which we in turn recognise as a person in his or her own right.
> Benjamin 1990: 12

Benjamin's notion of ‘intersubjectivity’ specifically addresses the problem of addressing the other as subject. Following Winnicott (1969) Benjamin asserts the dual nature of psychic life. A mode of intersubjective reality, a relationship between two or more subjects sharing certain feelings or perceptions, coexists with a mode of fantasy that belongs to the individual subject and her intersubjective world.

The challenge is to hold the tension between the two realities: the intersubjective reality, a world in which we recognise, feel and symbolically represent subjectivity in relation to others; and the intrapsychic register in which the other becomes a part of our individual inner world, and to resist reducing them to an 'either/ or'. It is this holding of the two realities, and enabling clients and colleagues to do so, which is the task of and challenge to the consultant. For the feminist consultant this challenge takes specific form, because

of the gendered reality of power, which she seeks to mobilise and challenge.

In case studies 2 and 3 I illustrated how I held my intrapsychic and intersubjective realities in tension in order to re-work destructive patterns of relating with the project leaders. In each case this re-working meant being able to name and work with a destructive felt reality, triggered by a feeling that recognition had been withheld, and in each case this was possible only through positive self-recognition. In the first case study, in contrast, I was unable to keep hold of the tension between my internal reality, and the reality of my clients. The destructive consequences for myself were in my perception mirrored in the experiences of the women about which I had written in my research report.

Holding the intersubjective space open has been uncomfortable, at times painful, sometimes unsustainable. When I have succeeded it has been an important source of creativity. I have used the tension between my internal ‘vision’ of the project or task in hand and the reality described in discussion with participants to challenge the direction of the project. In case studies two and three, I described how I drew from my reflections on this tension to care for and repair relationships.

In writing up interviews and case studies I struggled to remain in touch with both the meaning and representation of my relationship to 'others' in my inner world, and the meanings we had jointly negotiated, and to represent both realities within my inquiry. In order to find and hold this position of inquiry, I held in mind, explored and recorded both dimensions of awareness and developed a methodology which allowed me to explore their inter–relationship. This approach was rooted in my conviction that ability to hold this tension or not was the key to destructive or creative outcomes.

During my consultancy, and during my inquiry, I moved in and out of writing narrative from my own ‘vision’ and experience, and engaging in joint sense making with others. As I have shown, engaging in joint sense making created challenges associated with vulnerability and power (chapters 19, 10 and 11). Jointly held realities were often fluid, constantly in movement, composed of the intersubjective and intrapsychic worlds of each participant; the shared reality we were weaving, and remnants of the organisational worlds to which participants also belonged and to which they would return. At times these realities merged, at times they clashed, often at moments when leadership was asserted.

In my second and third case studies I showed how differences came to the fore when we

had to negotiate a jointly held narrative to present to the external world outside the project. In the second case study I showed how I was able to provide a holding structure, and a conceptual framework, within which differences could be acknowledged and symbolised (chapter 10). Partners spoke from their different positions and realities, while consultants held open the intersubjective space within which a shared narrative was jointly negotiated. This achievement was not due to my competence alone; it relied on willingness of participants to respond to me in my consultancy role, within the consultancy relationship. This could by no means be relied upon, as I have shown in each of my case studies.

Drawing from Benjamin, I can now conceptualise as intersubjective fields the spaces within which consultants and clients, women in organisational roles, came together. In these spaces women's relationships were sustained on a number of different levels as women spoke alternately in their organisational roles, from their political positions, and from their individual needs and desires. The close association between the substance of our work on gender equality, and our individual desires for equality, lent a quality of passion to our approaches that suffused our interactions. At the same time, differences in our political approaches and strategies for organisational survival lent a messy and often explosive quality to our working relationships which I have described in my case studies. Each individual spoke both from her private inner world representations of the other, and the intersubjective shared world of relating with another person. The needs and desires which came into play may not all have been consciously held, but were expressed directly or indirectly in the intersubjective field.

Relational practices for intersubjective spaces

What then are the relational skills associated with doing consultancy within these intersubjective fields?

Feminist research claims that female leaders often reactivate the conflict between the desire to be nurtured and our drive to be independent; powerful women can be magnets for largely unconscious ambivalence about mothers and the feminine that both men and women feel (Sinclair 1998: 176). I have shown that relationships between women in organisational roles are riven by powerful emotions. In my inquiry these included desires for nurturing, protection, friendship, love, passionate engagement, recognition, legitimation and accreditation. In my case studies I explored how these dynamics were enacted between women at different levels of power in my consultancy projects. I also referred to

psychodynamic organisation research documenting women in Western cultures who experienced this dynamic (Graves Dumas 1985; Hirschorn 1993). In this research the desire to be nurtured, or to be nurturing, often sabotaged women's capacity to perform in their organisational role, and created a double bind or no-win situation.

Ways of working with these demands were also explored in earlier cycles of this inquiry (see for example interviews A, C, D, E, and F in chapter 6). One of the contributors (interview D) to my inquiry described the consultant's task as keeping balance between care for the individual client and care for the task related process. I could now add to this and say that in order to achieve this, the consultant must both be mindful of what she and her clients are likely to bring to the intersubjective field, and mobilise it appropriately for the task in hand.

Speaking of relationship between analysed and analyst, what we find, Benjamin writes, is a *momentary* balance between intrapsychic and intersubjective dimensions; a sustained tension or rapid movement between the patients' experience of us as inner material and as the recognising other. This should not be construed as an adaptation that reduces fantasy to reality; rather *it is a practice in the sustaining of a contradiction.* When the tension of sustaining contradiction breaks down, as it frequently does, mutuality, simultaneity and paradox are subordinated to complementary structures:

> The breakdown of tension between self and other in favour of relating as subject and object is a common fact of mental life. Breakdown is a common factor of intersubjective relatedness; what counts is the ability to restore or repair the relationship.
> Benjamin 1995: 46-7

In his description of creative and destructive group dynamics, Bion (1961) makes a similar point about how to work with group process. A creative group is defined not by the *absence* of destructive dynamics, but by *an ability to recognise and creatively mobilis*e these destructive dynamics in order to achieve a group task. In both his account and Benjamin's, the ability to hold the tension between the two ways of relating is key. It is not the job of the consultant, or analyst, to prevent the breakdown of the tension – as breakdown is inevitable – but to develop in clients the ability to repair the relationship when it does. Repair, and breakdown, are not permanent states, but rather moments of creative or destructive connection, or disconnection.

Important relational skills for the feminist consultant, then, are those associated with creating environments in which the intersubjective field between women is recognised and named as a part of the lived reality of women in organisations, and with challenging attempts to pathologise their intersubjective experience. On the basis of my inquiry findings, I suggest that in using inquiry, consultants encourage women seeking feminist collaboration to draw from their intersubjective worlds in order to enrich their vision of equality within organisations.

The politics of recognition between women

> The paradox of recognition is not solved once and for all but remains an ongoing organising issue throughout life, becoming intense with each fresh struggle for independence, each confrontation with difference.
> Benjamin 1995: 94

In previous research, I described expectations for mutual support that came into play when women work on gender equality in organisations and pain when they were not met. I suggested that a perspective was needed that would address women's inner world and self sense, in addition to political and organisational factors (Page and Pestarini Lorandi 1992).

In my case studies powerful desires for recognition and accreditation came into play when women who had come together to work on women's equality looked to each other to provide what was seldom forthcoming from authority figures in their organisations. These desires were both potentially generative and destructive. Where they could be 'held' within relationships they became a creative force for collaboration; where they could not be acknowledged or worked through by individuals, they became destructive and undermined collaboration. One important key to maintaining generative interactions, was the capacity to distinguish between desire and expectations; a distinction which I worked through in my inquiry into yearning and un/belonging (chapter 7).

However in the conflicts I described in my case studies between women in positions of power and women in less powerful positions it was not possible to distinguish between desires - or yearning - and legitimate expectations. In my commentary on these dynamics I suggested that the term 'tempered radical', (Meyerson and Scully 1995), might be useful for understanding some of the conflicts experienced by women and by myself in my

consultancy (Red Threads 2 and 3). Women in the position of ‘tempered radical’ may make their own judgements about when and how to advocate for the collective interests with which they are identified or have been identified in the past. These judgements may take into account their social identity, ethnicity, sexuality or class, and how this interacts with their organisational position, and authority. However enacting tempered radicalism may undermine trust and limit scope for joint activity. This was illustrated in my third case study, where senior woman manager Jodi described a contingent view of the basis for coalition, in contrast to the unconditional approach desired from her by women looking to her for support.

Feminist epistemologists describe conflicts experienced by women carrying contradictory expectations and predisposition as arising from their occupying two contradictory subject positions in organisational discourse (Gherardi 1995; Harding 1987). In my case studies women identified 'women' and 'manager' as conflicting subject positions. In my interviews, contributor A described women expressing feelings of betrayal towards female colleagues who had achieved public recognition, even where this was directly beneficial to their group objectives. Women in each of my case studies described similar dynamics, in which women experienced conflict between subject positions associated with gender based group identity and organisation roles and tasks.

When senior women did not find a way of bridging the inherent conflict in subject positions, women associated with doing gender equality work seemed to experience a double devaluing. At these moments women who were perceived to hold the power to provide public recognition were positioned at a threshold between the ‘shared’ world of women fighting for equality, and the organisational world in which they had won some power and influence. In order to maintain their position in the organisation, they may have wanted to keep a distance from an equalities lobby. But if they did not support the lobby in the way that was expected, the lobby often experienced this as a betrayal. From the point of view of the women who felt betrayed, this experience was distressing, but relatively straight forward: one of their former members had benefited individually from their collective advocacy work to increase opportunities for women, and had 'pulled up the ladder'. Yet viewed from the perspective of senior women, a different set of issues emerged. These concerned her need to hold in tension her individual career interests, to work to her new responsibilities, peer group and accountabilities, and to own previous allegiances.

Using Benjamin's intersubjective theory, I return to the 'moments' of crisis illustrated in my case studies. At these moments, there was a breakdown in the tension between intersubjective and intrapsychic worlds, a moment when powerful destructive forces from the intrapsychic world threatened to take over, overlaid with negative stereotypes from the social and organisational cultures. Repair work was needed to restore balance, but this required political skills and resilience. Cultural stereotypes had to be resisted as well as internal pitfalls. Under these pressures, and without external support, collaboration between women sometimes broke down:

> When the tension between complementarity and mutuality break down, individually or culturally, the absence of a real other creates a kind of paranoid free for all. The cycle of destroying the reality of the other and filling the void with a fantasy of a feared and denigrated object, one who might be controlled for fear of retaliation, characterises all relations of domination.
> Benjamin 1995: 94

In my case studies, and at the beginning of this section, I illustrated these pitfalls and my use of first and second person inquiry to restore mutuality: In my third case study I showed how this required being politically astute, aware of complex gender stereotypes at play, as well as the yearning for support. In this case I showed it was necessary to recognise the meaning of acts of resistance to these stereotypes by the project leader as well the legitimacy of desires projected into her.

Separated and merged attachment

In their work on ‘merged’ and ‘separated’ attachment, Orbach and Eichenbaum explored similar dynamics to those described above between women in organisations and social networks (Orbach and Eichenbaum 1994). Drawing on relational psychology their research illustrates the pitfalls as well as the positive aspects of the relational psyche into which women are socialised, in a political environment that devalues them. Writing in the 80’s, they located these dilemmas historically: contemporary women’s friendships had been forged at a time when women’s role was changing and women were demanding that they get out of the home and fulfil themselves. Their research drew from the experience of women clients at Women’s Therapy Centres in New York and London. The authors assert that these women came from a wide range of backgrounds: differing political persuasions and sexual orientations. They were mainly white, with some black and Asian, between the

ages of 16 and 60, differing levels of formal education, family circumstances and incomes. Their findings illustrate how there had been a post-feminist self-imposed censorship on feelings which women had determined were unacceptable within the context of friendships with women, feelings of anger, betrayal, envy and competition. These negative feelings seemed to have been triggered by the very successes for which feminists fought. As women entered the professional world, where the ethos of competition was frequently at odds with the ethos of emotional connection, the bonds between women seemed to break; the old support systems to be undermined (Orbach and Eichenbaum 1994: 29). Women in positions of power became the isolated recipients of a bewildering range of projections and fantasies from other women, as well as from men:

> It is as if, in being a position of authority, she is no longer a woman
> 1994:31

In order to make sense of this situation, Orbach and Eichenbaum developed the work of Baker Miller (1984), who argued that since women's identity is formed within a nexus of relationships, concepts of individuation and separation are not useful in describing their psychological development. They explored the problems as well as the positive consequences that this poses for women, in order to understand some of the difficulties in woman to woman relationships:

> …….women's adult relationships are woven with the threads of merged attachments. Women are able to care for each other in the most exquisitely sensitive ways. Yet women unwittingly hold themselves and each other back; as fear of separation leads them to sabotage their own efforts and unknowingly restrain their friends.
> 1994: 54

Orbach and Eichenbaum provide abundant empirical illustrations of how these dynamics are enacted between women in the context of women's increasing presence and success in the public sphere. These are organised under the headings of abandonment, envy, competition, and anger. Within each one they introduce narratives of women struggling to break free of merged attachment, a paradigm of connectedness which no longer serves them, but which is nevertheless intricately interwoven with their identity. They assert women are drawing on their skills in maintaining relationships to repair these painful aspects of their relationships, to alleviate the pain and disappointments which they carry,

and to create relationships which give them love while allowing them to be separate (1994:55):

> When such disturbances occur in groups, then we face a challenge; the challenge of supporting one another…not to collapse under envy or guilt, but to meet the longings that had been, up to now, only fantasies. In accepting our longings, we can begin to be active in relation to them, bearing in mind that there will be conflicts and uncertainties to face in this new and foreign emotional territory. 1994:97

Orbach and Eichenbaum's account captured the range and quality of emotion of my experience in the case studies, as consultant and as conductor of this inquiry. This account helped me to make sense of the pain and joys in asserting a need for accreditation, and of the 'healing moment' of recognition which I described in case study 2 (chapter 10). In this case study I asked what the wound might be from which I felt was being healed. Orbach and Eichenbaum suggested a possible answer: In deciding to name me as author, the lead partner healed the wound caused by my fear that claiming accreditation would somehow wound her, or our collaboration:

> The unconscious equation that fulfilling oneself, succeeding in one's career, or achieving a personally satisfying love relationship, is a betrayal of another woman (mother) is extremely common.
> 194: 97

A similar range of emotion was described by contributors to my interviews: fear of damaging relationships by asserting individual needs; hostility enacted by women towards group members who asserted their independence.

Orbach and Eichenbaum's research focussed on friendships outside work settings, and did not address the complex political and organisational dynamics described by women in my case studies and interviews. However, precisely because its focus was one to one, it identified a strand that disappears in accounts concerned with political or organisational dynamics. My conceptual framework draws these strands together, providing a dynamic conceptual base that enables women working together across subject positions to disentangle and to negotiate conflicting sets of expectations, establishing coalition in environments of flux and change.

In their research study, Neumann and Noumair develop a systemic model for understanding women's experiences of envy in organisational life (Neumann and Noumair 1997). Their model makes the link between the internal experience of women in work settings and the external world of work. They explore how women's thought and feeling based responses of envy relate to objective threats to their career, position, or work based relationships. They find that, for reasons that relate to gender socialisation, women are unlikely to find it easy to see the links between their emotional response and the external threat to their position, leading to collusion with pathologising approaches to women's experiences of envy:

> The emotionally compelling quality of these incidents makes it difficult for those involved to see the strategic or systemic element of envy in the incident. …but this stance keeps the individual woman captured by the emotions and not able to work them through. Women therefore collude with the idea that the envious emotions are inside them, and everyone else in the organisation thinks that the woman is behaving unreasonably or unprofessionally. In this way women get locked into carrying these strong emotions, believing that they are the problem and undermining their confidence, and thus their role performance.
> Neumann and Noumair 1997:18

To break the collusion, they argue, both systemic and intersubjective approaches are necessary. For women working together in organisational settings, the dynamics have to be approached and negotiated in relation to organisational agendas – as well as in relation to the issues that arise in relationships between women.

In my case studies I illustrated my use of first and second person inquiry (Torbert 2000) to engage with this interface between intersubjective and organisational issues, within consultancy and client relationships. As I have shown the work demanded a high degree of trust, and this was extremely difficult to sustain in competitive organisational environments. On the basis of my inquiry findings I have identified three important factors in sustaining this work: an appropriate conceptual framework; an appropriate working environment for women's collaboration; and an appropriate support system for the feminist consultant. An appropriate conceptual framework will address the intersubjective field between women, and challenge the tendency to pathologise strong emotion in women in organisational roles. An appropriate environment will enable women to explore the basis for building coalition, bringing the intersubjective into the equation. Appropriate support will enable the feminist consultant to work at the interface of her intrapsychic and

intersubjective worlds, working with strong emotion that is likely to be triggered to enhance her sense making. Without these, unrealistic expectations fuelled by powerful desires will continue to be an unresolved, and ongoing, destructive and explosive force between women working towards women's equality in organisations.

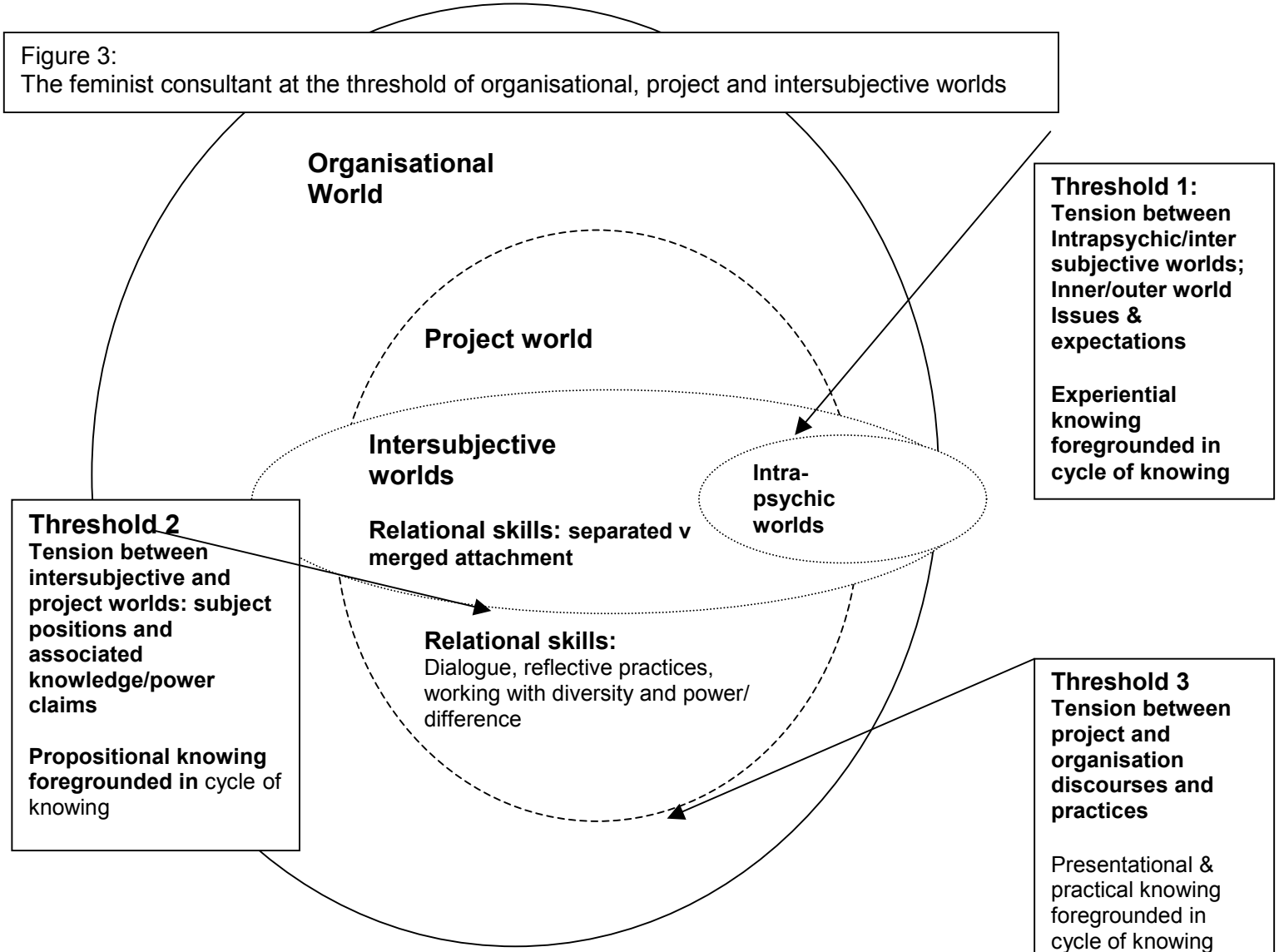
Section 4
Working across thresholds

Between project and organisational worlds

In this section I return to the thresholds held by feminist women who are working across subject positions. I explore the skills needed by feminist consultants working across these thresholds.

In figure 3 below I show three thresholds between intrapsychic, intersubjective, project and organisational worlds. Boundaries between them are permeable; individuals inhabit them simultaneously. Travelling between worlds involves an ability to operate skilfully with different systems of representation and meaning, and to 'translate' knowledge across thresholds, into different languages and cultures. These skills are political, in the sense that they require making strategic assessments of how to operate within, and challenge, gendered power regimes. They are relational in the sense that they involve an ability to manage subject to subject relationships, in the context of political and organisational tasks and goals. I indicate in figure 3 the epistemological tensions associated with threshold work between worlds, and the associated relational skills, drawing from an adapted version of the extended epistemology developed for co-operative inquiry (chapter 2). In each world experiential, practical, propositional and representational knowing are used. On the basis of analysis in my case studies, on each threshold one of these ways of knowing is foregrounded as the primary means for sustaining relationship across these thresholds.

Figure 3:
The feminist consultant at the threshold of organisational, project and intersubjective worlds



Threshold 1 concerns managing the interface between intrapsychic and intersubjective worlds. These are the tensions I explored above, using Benjamin's and Lugones' notions of subject to subject and subject to object interactions to explore breakdowns in dialogue and collaboration. To sustain subject to subject interactions with women clients and colleagues I foreground embodied, emotional and experiential knowing.

Threshold 2 refers to maintaining relationships from different subject positions which may be perceived to be in conflict, and to holding the tension between the epistemological communities of organisational and project worlds. In my case studies I showed how these conflicting claims were enacted through claims based on propositional knowing embedded in specific communities of practice.

At threshold 3 these conflicts are played out through the politics of representational knowing: how to 'translate' knowledge produced in and embedded in relationships within one epistemic community in a form that will be understood, and can effectively challenge power relationships in another.

The feminist consultant requires specific skills to work across these thresholds. She must not only create 'project world' environments in which women can develop knowledge and work practices which support their political collaboration; but also equip her clients to assert the value of the working practices in which they are engaged, in relation to their sponsoring organisations' objectives. As I have shown in section 2 above, this transfer of knowledge across a threshold between worlds is complex and involves political and epistemological challenges.

As my case studies demonstrate, the feminist consultant may find her work is 'disappeared' by women with whom she is working. In some work environments relational methods may be characterised by women and men alike as to do with friendship: nice, but not real work (Fletcher 1998). She must be prepared to recognise this as a manifestation of dominant systems of power/knowledge, and their reproduction. In order to build credibility she must demonstrate bicultural skills: ability to perform and to enable her clients to perform, within the dominant discourses of their organisations, without losing the ethos of the project values and approach.

In my second case study, I described the struggle to find a way of representing the project 'methodology' which translated between the worlds of the project and of the organisations

to which participants belonged. Project participants were positioned at thresholds between the relational work ethos of the project, and the product orientated competency models in which they had to perform as members of their organisations.

In each of my case studies there were 'flashpoints' where sets of values associated with different worlds came into conflict; these flashpoints occurred on the thresholds indicated on figure 3. In each case study, strong emotions associated with these flashpoints had to be 'held' within the consultancy relationship or in relationships with co-consultants. They were tackled as crises on two levels. On a practical level, a form had to be found for representing our work as valuable within the dominant discourses of sponsoring organisations. On a 'relational' level the crises were lived out within my consultancy relationships as crises of legitimation and self-valuing.

Between intersubjective and project worlds

Orbach and Eichenbaum recognised that ‘moving from merged to separated attachments is an enormous task’ and acknowledged that difficulties in relationships between women continue to cause distress. Benjamin points to resolution in struggles for mutual recognition between women through distinguishing fantasy from what can be achieved in the real world, and through accepting loss of the illusion that the fantasy represented. To illustrate this she summarises Lazarre (1991):

> She realises [instead] that her obstacle is the dream of perfect symmetry, her own wish to be perfectly recognised, completely responded to – her fantasy of perfect self-expression in a perfect world. Her challenge was to continue writing, loving, seeking recognition in the absence of the prefect mother-redeemer who would constitute that world…she has to find a way to contain, through writing, the loss of an illusion…
> Benjamin 1995: 112

The point was, not to give up the desire for recognition but, in owning the longing, to mourn the loss. Mourning opened up a space for acts of reparation, that accepting imperfection can lead to restoration of expressive space of resonance with that other:

> Within the space between survival and loss, acknowledging our own propensity for adoration and dread, fantasy can become the medium for the self at play. That

> space of creative interchange offers consolation for the inevitable experience of leaving and losing the other, of not being, or having, everything.
> Benjamin 1995:113

The role of the feminist consultant, then, might be to attempt to hold open these spaces in which fantasy and reality can both be owned, the loss of the fantasy of perfect recognition mourned, and the tension between fantasy and reality held open as a source of creativity. Of course she cannot do so single handed but must seek to encourage a culture within the spaces she creates, in which women in organisations are able to own and experience these distinctions, and to enable them to become sources of creativity. To achieve this she must step outside existing pathologising cultures, and be explicit about her epistemological and ontological base. From this base, she must be prepared to challenge dominant discourses of knowledge and gendered power, and enable her clients to disentangle the conflicts arising from their dual subject positions as members of different 'worlds' and their associated epistemological communities.

Between inner and organisational worlds

The model developed by Neumann and Noumair (1997) offers a systemic approach to understanding the links between the intrapsychic world of women and tangible change in organisational and social environments. Their ability to illumine these links and to enable women to see emotion as a valid response to a tangible external reality, will be essential for the feminist consultant. This will require her to engage with the gendered meanings assigned by actors who are differently positioned in the organisation. In the next section I will turn to concepts which enable her to identify some of the ontological, epistemological and ethical issues which this may raise.

To conclude this section, I have explored in some detail two approaches to understanding the dynamics of separation and recognition in women to women dynamics from different psychoanalytic perspectives. Both accounts resonate with the issues to which I had previously referred in my case studies and interviews. Although neither address directly how these dynamics might relate to organisational issues, I am suggesting that both offer conceptual tools for understanding and working with the emotional underpinnings of work based relationships between women. In particular, the dynamic and fluid quality of the intersubjective field in which fantasy and ‘real’ objects are held in tension offers a way out of binary approaches. It acknowledges that we are likely to continue to move between

intrapsychic, intersubjective, project and organisational worlds. These worlds are not mutually exclusive, but may be inhabited simultaneously.

Section 5
Feminist Consultancy in the Borderlands

In this section, I return to the metaphor of 'Borderlands' introduced in my discussion of feminist learning community at the beginning of this chapter, to explore the quality of my experience as a feminist consultant and the ontological and political challenges at stake. The section picks up themes developed in my earlier writing 'On Un/Belonging' (chapter 7).

Anzaldua's 'borderlands' are inhabited by refugees who leave the familiar and safe homeland to make a living in unknown and possibly dangerous terrain. Stanley (1997) developed this concept of borderlands to explore the transitory and 'passing' status of women in relation to the academy. Like Anzaldua she used the concept as a metaphor for an ontological state and an epistemology; a literal *frontera*, but also a state of mind. In her analysis and commentary on Anzaldua, the borderlands create people whose everyday ontological condition is one of constant liminality, of constant 'crossing over', between two states of being. At the same time, her concept of borderlands signified that there is a state of 'being in between', and a 'territory between', a kind of space which is social as well as physical or geographical. People of different races, ethnicities, cultures, languages, classes, religions, sexualities, genders and politics (Stanley 1997: 1-2) inhabit this space.

The idea of borderlands 'as a liminal state', resonates with my experience as a consultant moving between worlds and across thresholds. A borderland is a contested zone; relationships between women which I have described in this inquiry were zones of contested claims to recognise, legitimate and accredit their work in organisations. Stanley' s borderlands are also epistemological frontiers, sites of interface between different knowledge claims in which difference is spoken through the conjunction knowledge/power. She asks:

> Who are those who 'get heard' and whose experience passes for knowledge?*'* (Stanley 1997: 2*)*

As I have shown, women were silenced in gendered power regimes, but kept silent as a strategy of resistance. Women mobilised each other to 'break silence', but could not be relied upon to credit each other for speaking out. Women desired but did not always receive recognition from each as makers of new knowledge, or challengers of knowledge / power regimes.

In the organisations which are described in my inquiry, women's positioning within the dominant culture necessitated careful self-monitoring. Accreditation was played out between women, where some held the power to accredit the work of others within dominant cultures and others were dependent on accreditation. Issues of identity also came into play, as project partners shared or chose not to share their positioning within family relationships, their heterosexual or lesbian identity, and current life issues.

In the short time available within limited time and budget, the ability to work effectively depended on finding ways of building relationships that were inclusive, without losing or avoiding differences of power. Participants emphasised the importance of their experience of being cared for and the sense of being valued; in this sense the desire to be cared for was part of the currency of communication and relationship building between partners and consultants. The project relationships that were built enabled or disabled partners to create a shared consciousness, which was informed by and cross-fertilised the context-specific interventions which they each initiated within their organisations. The development of this consciousness was neither comfortable, nor an even or stable process, as partners struggled to understand the different organisational as well as national cultures in which they were each working. In Anzaldua's words:

> The coming together of two self consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference creates un choque, a cultural collision.
> Anzaldua 1999: 100

Situating her writing in a historical and political context of discrimination and oppression, Anzaldua speaks as a lesbian, Mestiza Chicana, affirming Indian, Spanish, Mexican and US identities. She describes this as a state of multiple personality, a clash of voices and internal strife, a psychic restlessness. Out of this she creates the concept of Mestiza consciousness, (Forbes 1973: Wolf 1959) a consciousness of the borderlands, which is pluralistic, tolerant of ambiguity, and able to sustain contradictions:

As a feminist consultant and inquirer this state of tolerance of ambiguity and contradiction, the pain as well as strength that can result from being at a crossroads of cultures, resonates for me as an ontological state. In my professional practice I am mindful of my positioning in relation to clients and colleagues. I seek to mediate the cultural collisions experienced by women with whom I work and enable them to negotiate the multiple messages associated with them. I move between worlds of which my clients are a part. I transform myself into a person who is on the outside, yet able to take up a position within. I am mindful of how I represent my identity, of how it might be perceived as a block or an aid to alliance making. I try to hold to my values as I traverse these territories. This is more than a moving between cultures; it necessitates the development of a new consciousness, and a new epistemology. Anzaldua describes this as an embodied process, necessitating moving through emotional conflict in order to resist stasis, and identification with one, partial view of 'reality'.

> …and though it is a source of intense pain, an energy comes from continuous creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. By creating a new mythos, that is a change in the way we perceive reality, ourselves, and the ways we behave, la Mestiza creates a new consciousness.
> Anzaldua 1987: 102

The challenge she throws down to feminists, to all who find themselves to be ontological 'outsiders', unidentified with or excluded from dominant cultures, is one of moving out of opposition towards a new consciousness able to straddle cultures and take elements from each. She writes in the context of life and death struggles for survival of the Chicano peoples in the US and Mexico. I write as a feminist 'passing' in hetero-patriarchal organisation cultures, in order to make a livelihood, and seeking to open spaces in which other women can sustain themselves as agents of change:

> The struggle has always been inner and is played out in the outer terrains…….Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.
> Anzaldua 1999: 109

Anzaldua and Stanley write from an explicitly feminist stance, powerfully illustrating how epistemology is grounded in ontology. The metaphor of 'borderlands' resonates powerfully

with the state of being I experienced as a feminist consultant in organisational and ‘women’s’ worlds that did not welcome me in this identity; where heterosexuality was often assumed, and bonding on the basis of similarity can and did sometimes exclude specificity:

> An interface in which some voices sound, resound, more than others, and in which echo connotes power.
> Stanley 1997: 1

Stanley asserts that feminists are ontologically outsiders, ‘other’ to the academy: like George Simmel’s ‘stranger’, they travel between, and in this way bring the ontological borderland with them, wear it almost like a visible marker which sets them apart in their difference (Stanley 1997:6). This metaphor of the stranger is particularly apt for the feminist consultant, doubly outsider through her politics, her sexuality, and her consultancy role and practices.

Section 6
Conclusions

In setting out to write this chapter I aimed to unpack some of the methodological dilemmas arising from the tensions I experienced in writing the case studies. I was preoccupied with finding the right balance in my writing inquiry between inner and outer world voices; between exploring issues relating to my own identity and positioning as a feminist consultant, and with conceptualising the dynamics between women in organisations. I set out to articulate more clearly the methods I had developed to enable women to collaborate in order to make a difference in their organisational worlds; and to show myself as a reflective practitioner in the gendered and hetero-sexualised organisational environments in which I worked. I wanted to maintain a creative tension between my feminist ontology, and the 'masks' I wore as an organisation consultant. I was aware that I needed a conceptual framework which would allow me to engage with political and ethical issues of re-presentation and positioning, in relation to dominant gendered discourses of power / knowledge.

In writing the chapter I took the concept of 'borderlands' to develop the metaphor of the

feminist consultant and her clients as 'world travellers', moving between a variety of different epistemological and intersubjective worlds. In my Red Threads, I began to collect alternatives to the images constructed through the 'feminine in management' literature to describe the qualities and approaches of the feminist consultant. From the position at which I have arrived through this inquiry I offer the following to add these images:

> The feminist consultant, more than a traveller, is a political actor who uses inquiry to challenge gendered power / knowledge regimes, to envision and bring into being new epistemological and intersubjective worlds. To do so she needs to develop a repertoire of relational and political skills. She tries to hold open intersubjective spaces between women, naming the tension between inner and outer worlds, fantasy and reality, concerning women's expectations and desires of each other. She holds the tension between yearning to find refuge in each other and her political assessment of what common ground it is possible to build. To do so she will explore the links between women's inner world response to organisational outer world realities; and draw upon feminist theory to legitimate and validate women's contributions to organisations. She will need to be aware of the dangerous and seductive appeal of merged attachment between women - and of how this might be played out in her consultancy relationships with women who are her clients. She will draw on all these skills to remain grounded in her own ontology, and from this position, seek to create and sustain her own 'secure enough' base. From this base she will make political assessments of how to position and present herself, in order to assert the value of her work. In Stanley's words, she works at:
>
> 'An interface between different knowledges, different knowledge claims, in which difference is spoken through the conjunction knowledge/power'.
> Stanley 1997:2

In the process of writing this chapter, of engaging with feminist epistemology and psychoanalytic writing, I have discovered communities of inquiry to which I feel affiliated. In the process, I have developed a clearer sense of the standpoints from which I have been conducting my inquiry and of how these informed the consultancy relationships I developed. I have been aware of pressures and desires to speak for different audiences and acknowledged earlier in my inquiry how at times this was a burden, at times an inspiration (chapter 2). I am making knowledge claims that draw from a variety of epistemological, political and practice based communities. As a feminist action inquirer,

my criteria for quality must lie in my method rather than in shared ontological and political or epistemological stance.

In writing this inquiry I have taken up subject positions which may conflict with the positions I had taken up in my consultancy relationships. These have been matters for political decision, and concern my livelihood. They are a timely reminder of the dangers of the *frontera,* the borderlands, which I inhabit as a feminist who is dependent for a livelihood on strategic positioning:

> And what should not be forgotten is the intensely emotional character of much of the reaction and resistance to dissenting feminist ideas, including reactions by incorporated feminisms to those other Others, the feminists who are not like 'us', who are too extreme, or too different…*we* are not like *that*!
> Stanley 1997: 8

These divisions, and the intensely emotional character of resistance to feminist ideas, characterise the borderlands that I inhabit as a feminist consultant, working with women who are differently positioned in organisations and who take up different standpoints. These women 'do gender' differently, according to their strategies for survival, for self-progression, for self-promotion. It is in relation to these passions, these resistances, that I arm myself, in order to pass, in order to work, in order to build sites of individual and collective resistance and change.

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i The theme of what is lost in translation between languages and cultures was explored by Eva Hoffman in describing her experiences of dislocation as a polish Jewish emigrant to the US (Hoffman 1990).

ii Interviewees C and E.

ii Border Crossing Skills for Coalition and Consultancy