CHAPTER 1

Doing the Work of the Movement: Feminist Organizations

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Among the most fundamental developments in American society in th past thirty years is the reemergence of feminism as a significant, thoug controversial, force. The political visibility of feminist ideas ranges fror A(nita Hill) to Z(oe Baird). Indeed, Jo Freeman argues that the primar political parties in the United States are engaged in nothing less than polarized culture war over the place of feminism in American society: "Th two political parties have now completely polarized around feminism an the reaction to it. . . . On feminist issues and concerns the parties ar not following the traditional pattern of presenting different versions of th same thing. . . . They are presenting two different and conflicting vision of how Americans should engage in everyday life" (1993, 21). In familie and workplaces around the country, feminism is invoked to explain cor flict and justify change as well as to attack proponents and decry effort to challenge the status quo. The very centrality of feminism to America social and political debates, however, suggests that the women's movemer has successfully called into question many taken-for-granted ideas abou male dominance and institutionalized privilege based on gender.

Feminism's impact is evident on many fronts. When a judge in Ne York scolds attorneys for their attempt to depict a rape victim as a "loos woman," this reflects a change in consciousness, one outcome of twent years of work by rape crisis centers. When the Association of America Colleges makes inclusion of scholarship on women a criterion for accep able liberal arts curricula, credit must be given to the decades of wor by women's studies programs, women's research centers, and women caucuses in the academic disciplines. When citizens by the hundreds thousands take to the streets of Washington to press for a Congression

guarantee of women's reproductive rights, their mobilization represents the grassroots organizing done by hundreds of local chapters of national feminist organizations and community-based programs.

As these examples attest, the movement's impact can be attributed in large part to the activities of feminist organizations that have worked for change—in the law, the courts, universities, corporations, local communities and individual women's lives. Few people have remained untouched, directly or indirectly, by these organizing efforts. The cultural changes they have triggered are one important indicator of their success. A second measure of the effectiveness of feminist organizations is the vehemence of the countermovements they have generated, evident in the mobilization of antifeminist organizations such as Eagle Forum, the National Association of Scholars, and Operation Rescue.

A third measure is the sheer number of feminist groups. Literally thousands of organizations—including rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, women's studies programs, women's health clinics, and women's bookstores, restaurants, theater groups, credit unions, and other profit and nonprofit organizations—were founded during the past three decades. Many have survived, some have prospered, and most have had a profound impact on the lives of women they touched. The women's movement exists because feminists founded and staffed these organizations to do the movement's work. Some are as tentative as volunteer-run hotlines, others as intense as illegal abortion collectives, still others as massive as the nationwide National Organization for Women. All these organizations sustain women and are sustained by them. They are tangible evidence of the movement in many feminists' lives and in the social and political life of the nation. But few of them have been studied in the depth and detail they deserve.

Despite dramatic growth in the number of feminist organizations in this generation, feminism itself is not new. Its roots go back well over a hundred years (Flexner 1959; Buechler 1990b), even though the term "feminist" came into common use only at the turn of the century (Cott 1987). To be sure, when scholars spoke of feminism before the late 1960s, they were referring to the remnant of early twentieth-century feminism that persisted on a small and declining scale through the 1950s (Rupp and Taylor 1987). But in the 1960s a new type of women's movement emerged as a clarion call to millions of women to rethink their priorities and question the social arrangments that defined them as second-class citizens. Many long-

institutionalized organizations of the earlier feminists, such as the National Women's Party, the League of Women Voters, and the American Association of University Women, provided organizational resources and a sense of history to the nascent movement and were themselves revitalized by the new mobilization. The women's liberation groups that grew out of the student left and new women's rights organizations such as the National Organization for Women gradually defined themselves as part of a single larger movement that they came to call feminism. The term feminism thus was expanded and rejuvenated, to cover a multitude of movements: among them, efforts for reproductive rights, employment and pay equity, and the political representation of women at all levels; against battering, rape, and other forms of violence against women, to name a few.

Some of the activists involved claimed to have invented a unique type of organization, a *feminist* organization, which they defined as embracing collectivist decision-making, member empowerment, and a political agenda of ending women's oppression. Working with women, for women, they encountered tensions and problems in their inevitable collisions and collaborations with what they called "the male-stream." For some, the tension between separatist culture and mainstream political change proved unmanageable, but a large number of rape crisis centers, feminist women's health centers, shelters for battered women, women's studies programs and research institutes, bookstores, art galleries, and theater collectives did survive. As chapters in this volume demonstrate, the organizations that did not collapse changed, though not necessarily in the direction of stultifying bureaucracy and displaced goals predicted by Robert Michel's "Iron Law of Oligarchy."[1] Although often classified as a social movement "of the 1960s," the second wave of the women's movement has organizationally outlived many of its contemporaries. This book addresses the fundamental questions of how and why so many feminist organizations managed to endure. What price did they pay? What effects have they had? What promise do they hold?

A Story of Survival and Effectiveness

Feminism is not dead, we believe, largely because of the number and variety of organizations it generated, nurtured, and influenced. Indeed, feminism can no longer be easily classified into bureaucratic or collectivist forms, if it ever could (Ferree and Hess 1985, 1994). Contemporary feminist organi-

zations mix both elements in their structures, practices, and goals as they work to survive and to transform society. We see four aspects to the picture of survival and effectiveness drawn by the essays in this collection.

First is the issue of *institutionalization*. By institutionalization we mean the development of regular and routinized relationships with other organizations. Many feminist organizations founded in the decade 1965 to 1975 are celebrating their twentieth or twenty-fifth anniversaries. Their survival provides evidence that they became institutionalized in at least some respects. While organizations that would not or could not institutionalize folded, they served an important purpose nevertheless, as chapters in this volume by Strobel, Whittier, and Staggenborg attest. The important, and largely unasked, question about feminist organizations that survived is what their institutionalization means for feminism. Such organizations were surely co-opted in some ways, but did they abandon their feminist goals, practices, and agendas? To invoke a standard of feminist purity, as some have done (Ahrens 1980), obscures awareness of the ways in which organizations continue to seek and sometimes achieve significant change. The articles in this volume illustrate how feminist organizations question authority, produce new elites, call into question dominant societal values, claim resources on behalf of women, and provide space and resources for feminists to live out altered visions of their lives.

A rape crisis counselor, no matter how institutionalized her relationships with the police may become, is unlikely to feel indifferent about rape. Caring deeply about it, in her own life and in the lives of other women, she may work hard and long to combat it. It may be a central issue for her long after she stops working in a center. The personal passage through a feminist organization by feminist activists has been and remains transforming for many (Remington 1990, 1991). Organizational experiences can shape world views, politics, and a sense of self in relation to society, as many women can testify. It is important not merely to see individuals as resources used by organizations (as much social movement theory does) but to consider how individuals use the organizations they found or join, and how they employ the lessons learned in one group when they move to another. The empirical evidence gathered by Spalter-Roth and Schreiber, Reinelt, Eisenstein, Matthews, and Katzenstein challenges the claim that institutionalization necessarily leads to deradicalization. Chapters by Strobel, Barnett, Whittier, and Christiansen-Ruffman raise further questions about the political learning that goes on within movement organizations. In evaluating any feminist organization, we think it appropriate to ask: Were

any of the activists or women on whose behalf they worked transformed? Did society change at all as a result of their efforts? Do the organizations continue to make a difference?

Second is the issue of *the relationship of feminist organizations to the movement*. We argue that the women's movement exists in a dynamic and reciprocal relation with its organizations, giving them their broad purpose, specific agenda, and supply of activists, while drawing from them a set of practices, political and material resources, and a supportive context within which activists can carry on their lives while struggling for change. This is a relationship that Mansbridge's chapter calls "accountability," and it exists as both an individual and a collective tension in the movement (see also Leidner 1993). Although social movements cannot be reduced to their formal organizations, such institutions are vital. The resource mobilization perspective on social movements has often severed the study of social movement organizations from the study of the movement as a fundamental challenge to the status quo, as if survival and institutionalization were the *goals* rather than the *means* of movements. Scholars are only now recognizing what activists have long known: the transformative intent and impact of feminist organizations (see Leidner 1991; Blanchard 1992; Martin et al. 1992). We think it appropriate to ask, as Staggenborg does in this volume: How does organizational survival help or hinder the accomplishment of the movement's broader agenda? What are the short- and long-term effects on policy, mobilization potential, and the surrounding culture?

Third is the issue of the *tensions arising from the multidimensionality of feminist politics*. The feminist movement is not coherent, singular, or unified. It does not and cannot pursue a single strategic course. It is a multifaceted mobilization that has taken different forms at different times, in different areas of the country, in different socioeconomic and political contexts, and among women of diverse racial, ethnic, class, and age groups, as chapters by Christiansen-Ruffman, Whittier, and Arnold particularly demonstrate. It is possible to appreciate this variety most when we look at movement organizations, for they vary in scale, scope, intent, form, and practice in amazingly rich and multiple ways. This diverse movement is constantly engaged in internal political relations: that is, in negotiations among participants that allow decisions to be made and work to be done (see Melucci 1989). This process is evident in women's movement organizations and their practices. The vitality and tensions of these organizations must be seen in the context of the social movement they represent.

Feminist organizations are an amalgam, a blend of institutionalized and

social movement practices. They have changed over time in response to their own needs, the needs of the women they serve, and the demands of their environment (see Schmitt 1994). In the position of *outsider*, they pursue a feminist agenda that has barely begun to alter the social arrangements that disempower and victimize women. Yet as *insiders*, many have achieved a measure of respect and acceptance from the mainstream, becoming so familiar as to be no longer newsworthy, becoming so successful as to arouse resentments, angry reactions, and sometimes violent attacks. A movement organization is not a contradiction in terms, but it is, by definition, in tension. It is always a compromise between the ideals by which it judges itself and the realities of its daily practices, as the essays by Farrell, Morgen, Matthews, Pardo, Tom, Arnold, Spalter-Roth and Schreiber, Mueller, and Acker bear witness. To understand the tensions intrinsic to feminist politics, we need to ask: What compromises are made, and at whose expense? Which groups of women set the agenda for the practical politics done in and by the organization, and on whose behalf? How are the day-to-day negotiations for survival carried out and with what effect?

Fourth, feminist organizations are the outcome of *situationally and historically specific processes*. In each time and place, feminism reflects its history and prior developments as well as present opportunities and constraints, as shown particularly in chapters by Gelb, Barnett, Pardo, Eisenstein, Simonds, and Christiansen-Ruffman (see also Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Gelb 1989). The global women's movement consists of many diverse movements that coexist and often are quite dissimilar. The specific shape and nature of the women's movements in the United States in the 1990s reflects distinctive features of American history: for example, the relative weakness of a socialist tradition, the continuing significance of race, a decade of an antifeminist national administration. In addition, American feminism has been shaped by distinctive political practices and opportunities such as the prominence of lobbying groups, grassroots voluntary organizations, and a tradition of nonprofit community services to supplement a weak welfare state, as well as by the exceptionally active mobilization from the right, which has both attacked and borrowed from feminism, as we see in the chapters by Marshall, Hyde, and Simonds. These factors contribute to the plenitude of women's movement organizations of all sizes, shapes, and orientations. As Gelb's chapter points out, no other nation-state has as large and diverse a set of feminist organizations as the United States. American feminists work through these organizations to influence organizations of many other types—political,

educational, religious, and commercial. Appreciation of the variety of their forms, practices, goals, ideologies, and effects will increase understanding of second-wave feminism's survival and its varying, albeit partial, successes. In evaluating a feminist organization we should ask: How are its options expanded or limited by the features of the legal, political, or economic situations with which it has to deal? by the specific generational, economic, or racial/ethnic experiences and identities of its members? by its history?

Activists' experiences within feminist organizations provide a rich and largely unmined source of data for the development of social theory. The editors come from two areas of sociology—namely, political sociology (Ferree) and the sociology of organizations (Martin)—that have not taken much theoretical account of these developments. In considering why this is so, we hope to encourage this pattern to change.

Why Have Feminist Organizations Been Ignored?

Despite a quarter-century of successful organization, feminist groups have largely been ignored by organizational scholars. Most sociologists of organizations, and their favored theories, have focused on large corporations, state bureaucracies, and labor unions that presume men to be their primary members and that relegate women, and women's life circumstances and experiences, to the margins (Acker 1990). Concern with big-budget, politically powerful organizations is consistent with the sociopolitical standpoint of men who have many qualities in common with the similarly (or more) privileged men who run large business and state organizations. These sociologists are unlikely to perceive small, grassroots, social movement organizations founded by feminists as interesting or important. If the dominant models and norms that guide organizational theory, research, and publication view such low-budget, high-commitment, women-run organizations as uninteresting, women scholars (who have low status within the discipline, the academy, and the subspeciality of organizational research) may be reluctant or unable to challenge them. Biases toward managerial needs and rational-technical control in large public and private organizations strongly encourage women organizational scholars to attend to similar issues.

To change this situation, a critical mass of feminist scholars in many disciplines must cooperatively develop new theory and discourse about feminist organizations. Such theory should have practical value for femi-

nist activists who work in organizations to produce social transformations that benefit women. The felt need for such study can be seen in efforts of activists themselves to take stock of where they are and where they are going (see esp. Remington 1990, 1991). We have assembled this book as the first scholarly step in that direction.

We intend this volume also to challenge the preconceptions in feminist theory. Until recently, much of the women's studies perspective and research on feminist organizations reflected ideological judgments more than systematic observation of their forms, practices, and effects (as Ryan [1992] argues; see Ferguson 1984). In "Rethinking Feminist Organizations," Martin (1990b) sets an agenda within sociology for research on feminist organizations that focuses on their concrete forms and practices and on the dilemmas and effects their participants experience. Several popular claims are questioned, including the assumption that bureaucracy is inherently antithetical to feminism, and its corollary, that institutionalized feminist organizations cannot be agents of change. Martin calls for a more open-ended approach to the study of feminist organizations and a focus on what they do, how they work, and their transformative impact on members, other women, and all of society. Ferree and Hess (1985, 1994) have also argued against prejudging one type of feminist organizational strategy as more central or effective than another; rather, different organizational forms (such as grassroots and participatory service-delivery, mass-membership mobilization for lobbying or demonstrations, expertise-centered educational efforts, and identity-oriented, culture-building work) all play important and distinctive roles in the movement of which they are a part. Staggenborg (in this volume) proposes that outcomes that count as successes can be found in policy, organizational, and cultural arenas, and that all three are important. This book will, we hope, move the scholarly agenda toward a more balanced accounting of the successes and failures of feminist organizations and of feminist protest, organizing, and activity from within other organizations.

Biases in theories of gender and social change have also led scholars away from the study of feminist organizations. Theoretical models such as the old sex role paradigm led to countless studies of attitude change about women's roles but neglected feminist efforts for structural and political change. For example, although many studies of attitudes about rape were conducted, few asked whether or not changes in rape-processing laws or procedures affected women's experience of sexual assault and, either way, how and why so? On the one hand, within social movement theory, those

who define themselves as working on new social movements (e.g., Melucci 1989; Rucht 1988) have singled out some types of feminist activism for attention (especially the identity-centered small groups) but discounted those organizations that cooperate with the mainstream as co-opted or inconsequential. On the other hand, many political scientists and sociologists who work within the resource mobilization paradigm have focused almost exclusively on mass-membership organizations such as the National Organization for Women, taking institutionalization for granted, and ignoring grassroots organizations where membership is difficult to define and where formal structures and survival dilemmas are difficult to see. The chapters by Barnett, Christiansen-Ruffman, Taylor, and Staggenborg further develop this critique.

In sum, a number of theoretical biases and limitations have contributed to pervasive inattention to feminist organizations. As submerged networks of actual and potential mobilizers, the women's movement is sustained by the organizations it has produced, and these *less than totally institutionalized* organizations may be more challenging and disturbing to the status quo than some critics seem to think (Martin 1994). The police may, for example, think rape crisis staffers are *raving feminists* who demand immediate, profound change; and college administrators may view their *radical* women's studies programs with alarm, with little regard for how conforming and mainstream such organizations try to appear and, indeed, in many ways are (see Martin 1994). What if the police and college administrators are correct, and movement scholars who focus on the failures of rape crisis centers and women's studies programs to be "truly" radical are wrong? Social movement researchers who deplore the ideological and procedural imperfections of feminist organizations may be underappreciating these groups' practical situations and their role in producing fundamental political and social change (as critiques by Marshall, Reinelt, Katzenstein, and Eisenstein in this volume suggest).

Feminist organizations are, we argue, a form of movement mobilization in the present and a resource for feminist mobilization in the future. Indeed, the most important outcome of any wave of social movement mobilization may be the institutionalized resources it provides for future mobilizations (Tarrow 1983; Mueller 1992). Organizations reach across individual life spans, connect generations, and transmit their members' memories, hard-earned wisdom, and unrealized hopes. Organizations define boundaries between insiders and outsiders, establish hierarchies, garner resources, provide a home base for activists, and institutionalize mistakes as well as

successes. Thus the women's movement of the future will, for better or worse, reflect today's feminist organizations, just as these organizations reflect a movement with an extensive, complex, and contradictory past.

In recent years, research on feminist organizations has increased (e.g., Morgen 1986; Sealander and Smith 1986; Tudiver 1986; Gelb 1989; Staggenborg 1989, 1991; Leidner 1991, 1993; Solomon 1991) and an outpouring of case study material on women's protest activities has appeared (e.g., Mansbridge 1986; Bookman and Morgen 1988; Echols 1989; Blumberg and West 1990; Mathews and DeHart 1990). These scholars have begun to ask about what a range of feminist organizations are doing, why they are making the choices they make, and what effects they are having on their members and society. When we learned of the number of individual scholars struggling with these questions, we thought the time was ripe to bring them together into a broader discussion of feminist organizations.

The tie that binds us in this book, and many of the pioneers who studied feminist organizations before us, is feminism, not our disciplines or specialities within disciplines. The scholars confronting these questions are diverse in discipline, and many do not define their specialities as either social movements or formal organizations. Some are interested in women's politics, some in women's history, some in feminist practice, some in social change, and only a few in feminist organizations per se. With this book we collectively attempt to legitimate a new field of interdisciplinary study and to share the insights and questions that we have discovered we hold in common.

The Background of This Book

This volume arose from a form of feminist organization. Martin had organized a session on feminist critiques of bureaucracy at the 1987 American Sociological Association annual meeting. Both Ferree and Martin had found themselves as commentators on panels of papers (at the 1990 Berkshire Conference on the History of Women and at the American Sociological Association) that demonstrated strong interest in this topic but showed little connection to theories of either social movements or social organization. We saw virtually no networking among scholars and little theorizing about the significance of individual feminist organizations for the movement as a whole. To address these concerns, in February 1992 we organized a conference on the topic "Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement" in Washington, D.C., with funding from a Prob-

lems of the Discipline grant (from the National Science Foundation and American Sociological Association) and our home institutions. Where we initially expected a dozen or so researchers to participate, even our limited effort to begin networking turned up more than three times as many. Ultimately, forty-three scholars, a mix of established researchers and recent and pending Ph.D.s from a range of disciplines, reported on their empirical research and discussed theoretical questions about feminist organizations. We aimed for a wide range of participants and a broad perspective to create a basis for the development of comprehensive, useful, and practical theory. Our goal was and is to develop theory not only *of* the women's movement but *for* the movement (a phrase we owe to Steve Buechler, one of the conference participants), ideas that work not only for scholars but for the countless activists and organizations that do feminist work "in the street" (Mansbridge, this volume).

This collection is the result of the conference. We include many essays first presented there as working drafts and others unearthed by the networks formed there. We regretfully excluded some excellent papers that did not quite fit or get finished on time. Grounded in the specifics of concrete cases, our book contributes to theory through analytical essays that will, we hope, help future scholars investigate the richly diverse feminist organizational landscape. The chapters by Mansbridge, Gelb, Acker, Taylor, Mueller, Staggenborg, and Freeman particularly fall in this category. The others focus, variously, on feminist efforts to reshape an organizational context from the inside; on the experiences of members in creating, sustaining, or working within feminist organizations; and on the diversity of organizational practices that produce transformative changes in individuals and society. The authors represent a range of fields within the social sciences: political science, history, anthropology, Chicano studies, American studies, women's studies, social work, education, and sociology.

By titling the book "feminist organizations," we direct attention to the intersection of feminism as a social movement with organizations as entities that mobilize and coordinate collective action. We do not view feminist organizations either as organizational subtypes or as ideal types. *We define feminist organizations as the places in which and the means through which the work of the women's movement is done.* Despite the variety of cases examined here, had we included the full range and variety of feminist organizational types and forms, the volume would be still thicker. We direct attention to existing studies of feminist theater groups (Solomon 1991), feminist art galleries (Quinney 1990), women's studies journals (Blanchard

1992), the National Women's Studies Association (Leidner 1991, 1993), and political networks at the international (Tudiver 1986), national (Gelb and Palley 1987), and local (Boles 1991) levels; to additional research on feminist organizations providing health care (Morgen 1986; Thomas 1993), rape crisis services (Burt, Gornick, and Pittman 1984; Gornick, Burt, and Pittman 1985; Matthews 1989; Byington et al. 1991; Koss and Harvey 1991; Martin et al. 1992) and shelter for battered women (Schechter 1982; Rodriguez 1988); to feminist organizing among women of color (Giddings 1984; Chow 1987; Garcia 1989); in unions (Gabin 1990; Blum 1991), and on behalf of specific issues such as the ERA (Mansbridge 1986; Mathews and DeHart 1990). We note the existence of many other types of feminist organizations and issues that cry out for more detailed organizational study: for-profit organizations such as presses, bookstores, and record companies; nonprofit groups with a dual focus on women of color and a specific feminist issue, such as the National Black Women's Health Network; political groups ranging from nonpartisan state Commissions on the Status of Women through the partisan fund raisers (Democratic) EMILY's List or (Republican) WISH List; the organizational forms taken by women's studies programs or departments on different campuses and the variety of resources and objectives they hold; the networks built between informal lesbian communities and formal membership organizations working on feminist issues; the structure of both long-lived organizations such as the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor and ephemeral ones such as R2N2 (Reproductive Rights National Network); the differences among the fifty states in the organizational structures and effectiveness of feminist policy networks.

To what extent does the term *feminist organizations* capture the content in ou book? It works well in most respects but falls short of our ideals in others. For example, we wish we could better capture the *processual* aspect of feminist organizing that is the focus of many chapters. Thus the title may not seem to apply as well to the organizing that consciously expresses feminist resistance from within the mainstream, discussed particularly by Eisenstein, Katzenstein, and Reinelt. Still, no feminist organizations are wholly set apart from male-dominated institutions, and all are engaged in a process of organizational change. We do not wish to suggest that feminist organizations are a static outcome of mobilization efforts rather than a continuing process of organizing to produce social transformations that benefit women (see Acker, this volume).

Broad as it is, our book is limited in other ways also, particularly in

regard to country, race, and time. Whereas our title may suggest a universal claim, our accomplishment is intentionally more modest. Our chapters chiefly concern feminist organizations in the United States, although we do include some offerings from Canada and Australia as sister nations, to help us reflect on issues in feminist organizing across societies. Our selections focus primarily on those organizations staffed mostly by White middle-class feminists, although chapters on organizing women of color deliberately challenge conventional thinking about the boundaries and meanings of feminist organizations in general. Our collection concentrates on issues and organizations mostly from the 1980s, but some selections reach back to the 1960s and 1970s to provide historical points of reference against which these current concerns and patterns can be assessed.

We think it crucial for the book to include non-U.S., non-White, and non-1980s organizations, because these studies draw attention to feminism of different types and forms and prevent an overly parochial definition of feminism. Yet we do no see it as a shortcoming that this volume focuses on the efforts and situations of predominantly White women in the United States in the 1980s who were struggling to practice feminism in organizational contexts, because their experiences are still seriously underresearched. The contrasts provided by our wider comparisons highlight the invisible background of their self-described feminist practice. Moreover, several studies address common misconceptions. Strobel, for example, notes the struggles to be race- and class-inclusive that formed the practice of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union in the early 1970s, and Barnett notes that mainstream White women's organizations saw race as more important than gender in the 1950s. Such studies raise the important question of how (some) White feminists learn to recognize and critique racial (and class and ethnic) bias. Chapters by Katzenstein, Tom, Eisenstein, and Mueller offer insights on this question.

The Current Context of Feminist Activism

The largely invisible field of action in which the women's movement was, and is, moving and developing has fed the claims of some that the feminist movement is declining if not dead already (cf. Faludi 1991). These widely circulating and frequently accepted claims are given credence, even in feminist circles, because the localized efforts of grassroots feminists have been undocumented, unanalyzed, and unacknowledged. How, in the presence of the tremendous variety and impact of feminist organizations that this

book documents, is it possible for activists to believe that the women's movement is dead or that a postfeminist period has arrived?

We think there are many reasons. The very ubiquity of some types of feminist organizations has tended to make them unremarkable. Many people, ourselves included, take them for granted. Feminist organizations are no longer news; thus they rarely draw media attention. Or, if the media do report on them, they rarely acknowledge the organizations' feminism. A newspaper may feature a story on battered women's shelters, focusing on the women and the shelter's efforts to help them, but never mention that this organizational response to violence against women arose from and remains rooted in feminism as a social movement, or that activists continue to critique battering as a form of male domination. Younger women are often shocked to realize how recently the many organizations where they study, work, volunteer, or turn for services were founded; they assume that women's studies programs, rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, abortion providers and birthing centers, feminist bookstores, women's concerts, and the like have always been available.

If the women's movement disappears from the pages of the press, we should not be surprised if readers infer that the movement is "gone," especially if some elements of the media are actively telling them so. This is, we believe, a pernicious myth. In quantitative terms, the number of women who participate in feminist organizations—whether as occasional volunteers, committed contributors, employees, advocates, or students—is surely much greater today than it was in the heyday of the consciousness-raising group. While the public may be aware of local feminist organizations, such as health clinics, bookstores, hotlines, or shelters, the radical challenges such groups pose may be obscured by their pervasiveness and taken-for-granted nature. In Washington the women's policy network, including such obviously feminist organizations as the National Organization for Women, continues to raise fundamental issues as well as negotiating for more modest but essential short-term victories. These feminist organizations are *seen but unseen* and rarely acknowledged as successful mobilizations of a movement that continues to press for change (Spalter-Roth and Schreiber, this volume).

A more accurate measure of the health of the contemporary women's movement can be made by taking stock of feminist organizations. We believe the strengths and weaknesses of the movement are revealed in feminist organizational dynamics. This includes the ability to withstand an onslaught of antifeminist mobilization, actively encouraged by the federal

administration in the 1980s. The chapters by Marshall, Simonds, and Hyde portray this countermobilization most graphically. Not only are abortion providers under physical siege (as Hyde and Simonds show), but other feminist organizations too have become targets of the New Right's fury. Women's studies programs are under attack from right-wing ideologues (see the statement of principles of the National Association of Scholars); battered women's shelters are denounced as feminist enclaves set on destroying the family and male authority (see testimony in the *Congressional Record* by opponents of federal funding).

This paradoxical situation, in which feminist organizations are invisible to many yet vehemently attacked by the New Right, is a consequence of feminist institutionalization. Implications of institutionalization on internal movement dynamics also cry out for study. Judy Remington, a feminist activist and journalist in Minneapolis, suggests that feminist organizations have struggled to survive but have rarely considered what it would take to achieve more than the minimum, to prosper rather than just hang on (1991). While acknowledging the tremendous obstacles to mere survival, she challenges feminists to imagine more than this, to think through what a more mature and institutionalized movement might seek, and to have the courage to consider the limits feminists have placed on their own organizations. Remington argues, for example, that the concept of empowerment is self-limiting: What can feminist organizations do for women who are already powerful and strong besides make them feel guilty about the power they hold and punish them for their strength and leadership? She recounts the example of one leader who minimized her authority by writing her title as small as possible ("Exec. Dir.") and describes many cases where the drive for egalitarianism drove out the best and the brightest. If we do not acknowledge the power women have, how can powerful women exercise it responsibly? Chapters by Reinelt and Eisenstein argue for an expanded and more constructive understanding of power, including ways to avoid what Remington (1990) calls "running with the brakes on" by limiting women's willingness to be powerful.

Harnessing the abilities of all and encouraging women to work to the fullest extent of their potential requires feminist organizations and activists to confront the issues of institutionalization more squarely. In the 1990s we are discovering that being a social movement and being an organization with social and political power are not mutually contradictory alternatives but complexly interrelated processes, which we have barely begun to study.

In sum, we submit that the U.S. women's movement of the 1990s is mani-

fested in many issue-focused movements and diverse feminist organizations. The movements for reproductive rights, against battering, and so on have produced innovative organizations that continue to offer feminist critique and organizational resources for political change, with or without the echo of protest activities on the streets. Neither ignorance of their origins nor counterattack by their opponents has extinguished their spark. Many so-called institutionalized organizations continue to engage in protest and pursue a radical social change agenda from within the mainstream. Activists wander back and forth between organizational expressions of feminism: They attend a women's studies class in the morning, volunteer in a clinic defense group in the afternoon, attend a women's music concert in the evening. In its penetration of and connection with the realities of women's daily lives, the contemporary women's movement differs from the feminist movements that preceded it and from many other late twentieth-century social movements (students' rights, antinuclear, peace) as well. It is to the specifics of its organizations that we now turn.

Overview of the Parts and Chapters

We have grouped the selections to represent the particular challenges that feminist organizational practice poses to established social theory and to the political status quo. Following this introduction (Part I), we have placed in Part II those essays that particularly explore the implications of doing feminist work from within a mainstream context. Jane Mansbridge (Chapter 2) offers a guide for such work: Does it represent accountability to a feminist community or constituency? Such accountability can rarely be exercised by formal political mechanisms but is commonly felt by activists as a moral demand, sometimes as the call of an individual conscience formed by feminist principles, sometimes as a collective critique by groups that legitimately express feminist concerns. This "feminist community" to which, Mansbridge argues, activists feel accountable is constituted through processes of writing and discussion, activities she combines in the term "discourse." Mary Fainsod Katzenstein (Chapter 3) also looks at the power of discourse, examining what she calls "discursive politics" within a specific institutional arena, the Catholic Church. She surveys the myriad feminist organizations that have sprung up within its borders and points out that in this case the inability of feminist organizations to produce changes in formal policies has gone hand in hand with an increasingly radical critique of the institution's practices.

Amy Farrell (Chapter 4) offers a concrete example of accountability:

the balancing act that the editors of *Ms.* magazine performed between the demands of the readership, perceived as the legitimate expression of a feminist community, and the demands of the advertisers, who wielded institutional power in the form of money. Eventually, advertiser pressure killed the magazine. Yet *Ms.* was almost immediately reborn in a new form—without advertising, and accountable to its readership directly. To categorize this outcome as either the "death" or the "continuity" of the magazine emphasizes only one side of what could be understood as a victory both for the commitment of the readers and for the control of the advertisers. Hester Eisenstein (Chapter 5) examines the case of Australian "femocrats," their perceptions of feminist accountability, and their responses to it in practice. While they are formally responsible to the government in power and take this responsibility seriously, they balance these demands against their sense of obligation to women as a constituency. Whether they are as uncorrupted by power as they believe matters less than the insights they offer into the tensions of dual loyalties and the practical experience of being both "mandarins" and "missionaries."

Claire Reinelt (Chapter 6) analyzes the search for and exercise of institutional power by a feminist coalition of battered women's shelters in Texas. This group had to mediate between the government agency that funded it and the local shelters that it in turn funded. Reinelt indicates that the coalition used its power to increase feminist perspectives in the individual shelters as well as to stabilize their funding, thus radicalizing and institutionalizing them simultaneously. Roberta Spalter-Roth and Ronnee Schreiber (Chapter 7) pursue this problem of bringing radically feminist ideas (outsider issues) into the established political system (insider tactics) by examining the policies and practices of multiple groups in the Washington, D.C., women's policy network. They find that tensions between the issues and the tactics may lead to recasting concerns in more palatable language, seeking to expand diversity but in limited ways, and muting criticism while working to change policies. They conclude that accommodation to the establishment was not equivalent to co-optation of feminist principles, and point to limited but significant successes in swimming against the conservative tide. Joyce Gelb (Chapter 8) concludes the section by pointing out how this sort of organizing is a particularly American phenomenon. She notes that feminist lobbying draws upon features of both American political systems and American political expectations for its considerable effectiveness and suggests the need for more comparative research.

In Part III we focus on the internal dynamics of feminist organizations,

in particular, the transformations brought about in the course of activist struggles. Joan Acker (Chapter 9) presents a theoretical overview of these issues, stressing the ongoing processes that organizing entails and the dynamics of race and class. Her essay highlights the incredible difficulties any feminist organization faces in seeking to survive. Margaret Strobel (Chapter 10) provides a concrete illustration of organizing as process in the history of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU). She describes the means that the CWLU developed for learning from the mistakes of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and other organizations in the New Left with which its activists had experience, and from its own successes and mistakes. She stresses the lessons that its members carried forward into their future roles as leaders and members of other feminist groups, long after the CWLU fell apart. Allison Tom (Chapter 11) explores the learning process that was structured into a training program in a Canadian feminist bank in the early 1980s. Like many American feminist service providers that relied on CETA-funded staff in the 1970s (see also Matthews), this bank struggled with the issues of difference arising from using paid trainees who came with class-specific experiences and expectations into an organization they did not control. When trainers defined the trainees as "like them" but "not as developed," their identification with the women they were "helping" created obstacles to less hierarchical and more effective learning processes on both sides.

These learning processes transformed both organizations and their individual members. Nancy Whittier (Chapter 12) demonstrates that experiences in grassroots feminist organizations depend on the broader political context in which they are situated. She identifies shifts in the identities and practices of feminists in a midwestern city over a twenty-five-year period and provides a framework within which to understand broader shifts in movement organizations as reflecting generational changes. The transition she examines throws new light on the stronger role that lesbian identity played in defining the feminist politics of later cohorts. Bernice McNair Barnett (Chapter 13) argues for the significance of individual and collective learning processes as part of feminist transformative politics. She looks at African American women's organizing in the 1950s as part of both the feminist movement and the civil rights movement, and points out that White feminist organizations owe an unacknowledged debt to the collectivist innovations of Black women's organizing practices. Her broader definition of leadership as innovation and strategic example, as much as formal position and speechmaking, shows how both class and gender dynamics shaped the contributions of African American women's groups.

In Part IV we address the emotional aspects of work in feminist organizations. Verta Taylor (Chapter 14) argues that conventional understandings of social movements have severed reason from emotion in a dualistic model; even when the values attached to each extreme are reversed, the separation is maintained. She shows that no movement, the women's movement particularly, can be understood unless the interplay of reason and emotion are acknowledged. Sandra Morgen (Chapter 15) demonstrates this approach in her study of four feminist health care providers. In the struggle for feminist change, organizational conditions are intertwined with participants' subjective experience of both the joys of self-realization and transformation and the crushing force of burnout. Morgen points particularly to the emotional hazards that personalizing structural conflict may pose, and the influence of emotions on the specific ways in which organizational issues are framed. Wendy Simonds (Chapter 16) analyzes the emotions of abortion clinic workers engaged in defending themselves, and their clients, from the attacks of Operation Rescue. Members' internal negotiations around allowing themselves to feel shame or anger, and to speak out or remain silent about aspects of the abortion process, illustrate graphically Taylor's point that reasoning and emotion are intertwined.

Next, we focus in Part V on the diversity of strategies that social movement organizations can and do use. Whether resolving internal conflicts, challenging the state, reacting to attacks, or setting goals and priorities, organizations have multiple paths to follow, each of which carries costs and benefits. Carol Mueller (Chapter 17) highlights the differences between organizational types in the strengths and weaknesses of their characteristic responses to internal and external conflict. She particularly points to the challenges facing movements that are flooded with new members, which, she reminds us, has frequently been an issue for feminist groups. Gretchen Arnold (Chapter 18) studies coalition formation among battered women's advocacy groups in St. Louis. Symbolic issues regularly threatened to wreck their coalition despite a consensus on practical political goals. Arnold uses this example to show the possibilities and limits of the coalition form, where deep commitment to ideological principles is not assumed. Nancy Matthews (Chapter 19) explores the different tactics adopted by six rape crisis centers (RCCs) in California to deal with the impact of state funding on their internal practices, goals, and structures. She argues that in addition to straightforward confrontation or accommodation, a third path of engagement with the state was sometimes chosen as groups struggled to make the state more responsive to their wishes. Cheryl Hyde (Chapter 20) analyzes the diverse responses of nine feminist organizations across the United

States to attacks by the New Right during the 1980s. The strength of the attacks as well as the previous self-conception and social networks of each group contributed to the variety of transformations that the organizations underwent. While feminist organizations responded to the New Right, the New Right also responded to feminism, as Susan Marshall (Chapter 21) shows. She demonstrates that although on some issues they chose to argue directly against feminism, antifeminist groups selectively appropriated elements of feminist discourse for nonfeminist ends. The antifeminists she studied paid close attention to feminist groups and activities in search of co-optable themes and for signs of weakness and vulnerability. As a group, the papers in Part V demonstrate the variety of strategies available to feminist organizations for addressing both their internal conflicts about identities, goals, and priorities and their external conflicts with their publics, communities, and funders. These essays also indicate the significance of ideological commitments in shaping the range of strategies and resources that are actually utilized in any particular situation.

Part VI provides a range of challenges to conventional thinking about feminist organizing and its accomplishments. By pushing the boundaries of what is defined as political or feminist, these authors encourage a reexamination of conventional concepts of social change. Suzanne Staggenborg (Chapter 22) draws from her extensive work on the reproductive rights movement to argue that social movement successes take the form of organization building and cultural transformation as well as more familiar changes in law and policy. Her framework allows us to see interconnections between different types of organizing activities, including those that are sometimes dismissed as "mere" organizational maintenance or community building rather than political change. Mary Pardo (Chapter 23) highlights the significance of organization building as a personally transformative experience with feminist meaning by studying social class differences in two Chicana women's organizations, one in the inner city and one in a middle-class suburb. The community organizing she examines in the 1980s—like that which Strobel recounted for White feminist organizers in the 1960s and Barnett described for African American community organizers in the 1950s—suggests a basis for an emergent feminist consciousness among Chicana women in the 1990s. Linda Christiansen-Ruffman (Chapter 24) provides a theoretical framework for seeing all these experiences as part of what Staggenborg would call a cultural success of feminism: namely, the emergence of a specific women's political consciousness from the "closet" of male definitions of what counts as politics. On the basis of three quite different examples (a working-class mothers' housing coalition, an ethni-

cally based women's group, and a self-consciously feminist newspaper), she argues that practical feminism guides women's community-building activities and transforms their thinking about politics. The empowerment of women, a central goal of much feminist organizing, occurs not apart from women's race and class experiences but in close interaction with them, as Christiansen-Ruffman demonstrates.

We close with Part VII, a commentary by Jo Freeman, who is arguably the founding mother of the study of feminist organizations. Her pioneering work on the differences between the feminist organizations of the "older" and "younger" branches of the movement (1975) and her daring critique of the internal dynamics of feminist collectives, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" (1972), guided many feminist researchers over the years. In her afterword (Chapter 25) Freeman shows how the content and context of research on feminist organizations have changed over the course of twenty-five years.

In collecting the recent work that moves forward from Freeman's original insights, we pay tribute to the commitment she showed to rigorous intellectual examination of the movement, with all its flaws, as well as to the ultimate good of the movement that such critique advances. With a similar dedication to the proposition that honest self-examination is a tonic and stimulus to healthy growth and continued vitality, we offer these studies of feminist organizations to the scholars and activists of the women's movement. We hope to spur scholars and activists to reflect on their experiences, expand their vision of feminist organization, develop and support effective strategies, and discard practices that are ineffective. We encourage the millions of women and girls for whom feminist organizations and organizing are an enduring and unquestioned presence in their lives to consider the energies and struggles that sustain these groups and the potential for social change that they offer. This book is dedicated to the prospect of their ultimate success.

Note

1. Robert Michels (1959) in his classic study of the Social Democratic Party in Germany (first published in 1915) argued that social movements that institutionalize gradually replace their goal of changing society with a desire to survive organizationally, as the leaders find it more important to preserve the positions they have won than to represent their constituents' interests. Michels thought it absolutely inevitable that leaders would look out first for themselves and sacrifice their members' interests to that end: hence the name "Iron Law."