

Dwarfed Wolves Stealing Scraps From Our Masters' Tables: Women's Groups and the Funding Process

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THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF TEXTUAL REALITY AT 'WOMEN ACROSS CULTURES'

31

Much has been written in the recent past exploring and documenting the experiences of women working with women's organizations and women's causes (Adamson, 1988; Griffiths, 1993; Iannello, 1992; Ng, 1988; Pal, 1993; Remington, 1991; Ristock, 1990; Ristock, 1991; Vickers et. al, 1993; Walker, 1990). Feminists of many persuasions and ideologies agree that there is an enormous amount of work that must still be done before Canadian society has changed to the extent that women will authentically experience equal access to resources, choices, and opportunities (Anderson, 1992; Backhouse and Flaherty, 1992; *Canadian Women's Studies*, 1989; Maceda-Villanueva, 1990). What do the funding processes mean to these organizations attempting to empower women both within the walls of the feminist organization and within society?

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This article explores how funds are brought into small grass-roots women's organizations and what the funding processes do to the women's relationships with the funders, with each other, with their original goals and with the internal workings of the organization.¹ My belief is that the processes which occur in one organization are occurring in many small women's organizations in Canada today. This is an exploratory paper preparing the foundation for an institutional ethnography of a feminist social service agency.

Funding realities in women's organizations shape who enters, who stays, what they do while inside, how they engage with each other, and when they leave. Funding defines the limits of what is possible in relation to supports such as childcare being provided during events, transportation being offered to women, and educational materials being made available in more than one language. Funders establish wage hierarchies that shape how women interact with each other. For example, one funder will allocate twenty dollars an hour for one woman's wages while another funder will allocate only seven dollars an hour.

32

Women who work in the front lines of organizations that are attempting to resist women's oppression are often poorly paid (if paid at all), have no benefit packages, have crowded and sparsely-resourced working environments, are hired only part-time or on contract, and are expected to accomplish goddess-like feats and deeds. All of the women who are involved with women-centred non-profit groups or agencies are affected in many ways by the funding realities of the agency. The stressful and unattractive features of the work environment are largely a consequence of the funding process. Most of these organizations rely on money from government sources (Sarick, 1992; Walker, 1991:5) or from organizations which are government 'wannabes' such as Trillium or the United Way. These funders irregularly throw us (or benevolently allow us to steal) scraps from their tables. We are like dwarfed wolves, sometimes barking, sometimes cringing, sometimes biting, but always watching the masters for cues.

This paper describes the funding process in one organization, *Women Ethnicity Crossing (WEC)*,² as it has evolved over the past five years. WEC, according to its mission statement, "exists to enhance the lives and expand the options of Immigrant, First Nations, and Visible Minority women." Since I was one of its founding members, I can describe its evolution over time. Originally we were a small group of women with a vague and fuzzy vision. Now we are erratically evolving into an organization that produces specific facts and quantifiable 'programs.' We have a budget of approximately one hundred thousand dollars yearly and help create employment (part-time, contract, and/or full-time) for approximately five women per year. Hundreds of people are touched by this organization through conferences or direct counselling and escorting. Others are touched by our public presentations and seminars, or through our advocacy and community work. This 'agency' is housed in a room measuring twenty feet by twelve feet in which one can find a coffee pot, two computers, a photocopy machine, one phone line, and the many women who week by week and hour by hour make WEC a living entity.

My framework for analyzing the agency I wish to discuss in this paper has been informed by many authors (Adamson, 1988; Ng, 1988; Remington, 1991; Ristock, 1990; Ristock, 1991; Walker, 1990). These authors' descriptions of women's challenges and experiences of resistance within an organizational context give some focus to the funding process. I believe that, as activists, there is more we need to examine and more information we must share regarding the funding process.

I believe that through documenting and sharing this knowledge we can become more effective activists. Simultaneously, I suspect that some of us have hesitated to document and promote our 'insider's knowledge' for fear of backlash from funders. Dorothy Smith's (1990a, 1990b, 1992a, 1992b) methodology will assist my attempt to understand and describe the way I have experienced and participated in the funding process and its consequences for WEC.

My reflections on the funding process have been built up over an eight year period. Preceding WEC, I was involved with another women's organi-

zation in Northern Ontario. In this organization, at various times over a four year period, I was assigned the task of 'fund-raiser,' 'membership co-ordinator,' 'project supervisor,' and 'president.' In retrospect, the funding process and consequences at this women's centre were very similar to those I am witnessing and reading about elsewhere.

More recently I have been involved with WEC where, over a five year period, I have alternatively been the 'co-ordinator,' 'chairperson of the research committee,' 'intern supervisor,' and 'board member at large.' During my eight years of experience with these two organizations (almost exclusively as a volunteer), I have attended approximately eighty face-to-face meetings with representatives of different funding sources. I have been a participant in over ninety-six Board or 'Collective' meetings. I have spent hundreds of additional hours reading the documents produced by these women's organizations as well as those produced by the many potential and actual funding representatives. Hundreds of hours have been invested in reading formal academic papers regarding socialism, feminism, community organization, racism, funding, the state, and public administration. These sources of information have simultaneously filtered through the formal and informal discussions I have had with my kindred activists. These experiences constitute the 'raw data' on which I construct this paper.³

Smith (1990a, 1990b) has a complex and subtle way of re-examining how we describe and think about the world, and a paper of this length cannot do justice to the richness of her work. Smith (1990a:61-80) describes the process through which knowledge becomes objectified and how 'facts' come to be different from women's actual lived experience. Smith suggests there are six components to this process (Smith, 1990a:73). These parts of the process overlap, intermingle and collectively form a loop in which we can become bound up in a taken-for-granted way. There is the "lived actuality" which is reshaped during the "social organization of the production of the factual account." "Lived actuality" is our everyday spontaneously experienced and most authentic or uncensored perceptions and thoughts. A "factual account" is constructed and read by an audience and, through convention,

assumed to be "what actually happened or what is." The "reading/hearing" of the factual account is shaped by "the social organization of the reading of the factual account." In other words, understanding is separated into our everyday experiential understanding and the understanding that becomes formalized, documented and validated as 'knowledge.' For example, when we read something in a newspaper article there are certain unchallenged practices we casually engage in unless we have been explicitly trained to do otherwise. We have been trained, for example, to believe what is said in newspapers. We have been trained, or our minds have been 'formatted,' to slip information into certain categories. These categories have been created and maintained by dominant groups in society. On a day-to-day basis people become participants in the process of creating and maintaining that dominance. For example, more credibility is usually given to information presented in a newspaper article than to a woman 'gossiping' about what she saw while she was on her way to get her hair done.

In this paper I describe each of these parts of Smith's model to the extent that they relate to government funding of a grassroots ethnocultural minority women's centre in Northern Ontario. Each component (lived reality, the social organization of the production of the factual account, the factual account, the social organization of the reading of the factual account and what actually happened or what is) are somewhat tangled together; they are not distinctly separate and linear and, therefore, it is difficult to talk about them in discreet and consistent ways as they relate to WEC.

At WEC we have received funding from nine different sources since the organization was founded in 1988. Our initial funding came from Canada Employment and Immigration and our second (second both in sequence and in amount of funding) primary source of funding was the Secretary of State. Some sources have funded us repeatedly (Canada Employment and Immigration and Secretary of State Multicultural Division, Citizenship). This means we often have more problems, but also more safety nets than the one-funder organization Ng studied in 1988. The schedules, expectations and consequences of being funded by each specific funding source are somewhat

different, but there are also patterns that are shared in the way funders interact with small funding recipients like WEC and in the way funding recipients like WEC come to interact with funders.

Funding processes shape who we are as an organization, what we can do, and who we may become. Most insidiously, funding processes influence how we (as staff, activists or clients) come to define ourselves and how we interact with each other within the agency of WEC. We often feel and think that these funders or potential funders are our masters and that we must cater to their every whim and demand.⁴

These funding masters seem to us as distant and uninterested. They appear to speak an alien language. These masters demand that we travel to their territory, exhaust ourselves to catch their interest with innovative magic tricks, and learn to speak their language of 'bureaucratese.' Organizations like WEC compete with other women's organizations and charitable groups for scraps from the masters' tables. Funding representatives and their trail of colourful pamphlets frequently remind us that there is a finite amount of money available within any geographical area, in each yearly budget, or for a specific issue. When an organization like WEC has many masters it can be both an advantage and a disadvantage.

36

LIVED REALITY

A multitude of women face a variety of problems and discomforts on a day-to-day basis. These are experienced by women as somewhat random—their causes, sources and consequences appear unrelated. Canada's ethnocultural minority women and/or working-class women, because of socially created barriers which stigmatize them as 'ethnocultural minorities' or 'poor women,' face more irritants on a day-to-day basis than their White anglophone Canadian-born middle-class sisters.⁵ WEC is a group of women in Northern Ontario who "exist to enhance the lives and expand the options of Immigrant, First Nations and Visible Minority women." This mandate is a quotation from our legal mission statement which we had to construct so that we could become incorporated, apply for government funds, and exist as an organiza-

tion. This was explained to us in some of our first meetings with women who had worked for the federal government as project officers. During our evolution, WEC activists have interpreted our mission statement very broadly, openly and creatively. Our mission statement's practical applications are always in flux.

Most of WEC's women's daily-life problems *are not caused* by women's unplanned choices, aversion to hard work or sacrifice, or absence of ambitions. These are the causes of women's problems in the world-view usually presented by funders. In contrast, we believe that women's problems are caused by the social structures and social relationships in which women live: patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and centralism. Women's activities can become distorted and unbalanced because they have their access to resources and opportunities regularly blocked. This 'blockage,' moreover, is intrinsic to the way the social world is run. Our day-to-day lack of access is a necessary prerequisite for someone else's day-to-day opportunity and privilege.

Women's common daily problems are generally loose, sloppy, leaky, and vaguely defined. Women, for example, *do not* walk in to WEC and immediately announce, in the language of the funders, that their "problem is that they are long-term employment disadvantaged affirmative action appropriate women" who require "marketable skills training and employment readiness preparation to integrate fully into Canadian society." Problems become defined and imagined in these bureaucratic formats (categorized and fragmented) as a result of the funders' interactions (pamphlets, reports, cheques, phone-calls, memos, etc.) with our organization's staff and volunteers. This is a detailed and ongoing process that involves active and interactive participants. This process is seen as normal and is unchallenged and taken-for-granted by most participants.

In contrast to a bureaucratically structured label for her or for her problems, a women walking into WEC may say she feels upset today because her rent payment is due, or simply that she is tired and wants to sit down and have a coffee. Further discussion and contemplation may find that a long sequence of events, decisions, people, and meanings have brought her to this

moment of 'feeling upset.' Some of the underlying causes may go back generations and involve larger issues of immigration policy, educational opportunities, and inheritance laws and practices. Only one part of the feelings she expresses is related to the fact that she needs money to make the world stop bothering her and to access the things she must have on a daily basis to survive and be comfortable.

Somehow this visitor (and all the other women who interact with WEC) must have her "lived actuality" translated by WEC staff and volunteers into "factual accounts." Her complicated, intense and contradiction-laden life must be reduced to a few paragraphs or a couple of numbers. A limited number of 'presenting problems' must be identified and documented. This woman must be made into a 'client' rather than a peer or an equal and dynamic participant in the process of survival and resistance. No funders allocate money simply to help vaguely unhappy women become vividly happy women. From the funder's perspective, a woman walking into WEC should become "a client from one of our three target groups," and there must be a documented measurable problem that is definitively solved in measurable ways if our funders are to have their uneasiness subside. (And remember if their uneasiness does not subside we are sent away from the masters' tables with no scraps.)

38

These "factual accounts" involve social organization. Such knowledge must be produced so that WEC can continue receiving money for rent, staff's wages, the phone bill and for resources and supplies. We require office space and at least at least one staff so that we can effectively visit, share, talk, feel understand and care about each other. Our "lived reality" has to be made into a factual account that funders recognize. What is the process involved in the production of the factual account? How do we make our many and far away blind masters see us?

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE PRODUCTION OF THE FACTUAL ACCOUNT

Every year governmental and non-governmental funding sources create a multitude of pamphlets that can be defined as 'texts.' Pamphlets can be thought of as textual accounts that 'stand in' for the work of government employees. In Smith's method for exploring and understanding the world around us texts:

...are analyzed to display what the subject knows how to do as reader and what the subject knows how to do in reading, and in so doing also displays the organizing capacity of the text, its capacity to operate as a constituent of social relations (Smith, 1990b:5).

The funders mail pamphlets and request forms to various non-profit organizations yearly, explaining potentially applicable programs, resources and services. Sometimes WEC women find pamphlets and request forms at other agencies, at conferences and rallies, or through friends. On other occasions, one funding agency's representative or project officer will give us the pamphlet of another agency in what we often perceive as a bid to be rid of us. For example, a woman's problems will sometimes be defined as a provincial responsibility by a federally funded organization and a provincially funded organization may define a woman's problems as a federal responsibility.

Each of these pamphlets and forms are passed around from hand to hand by the volunteers and staff in the organization. Individual women may offer some interpretation of what these documents mean. Women who handle the documents attempt to connect that specific pamphlet and request form with 'gossip' she may possess regarding other organizations and what they are applying for this year. Such information is picked up at parties, rallies and gatherings, the news, or from discussions with project officers (note 'project officers' are not called 'funding facilitators') in previous years. The documents may be compared with last year's documents. Each woman attempts to answer the question, "What does the funder specifically *want* to hear and

can we legally say what they want to hear so we can get some money?" At a more sophisticated level, we could say that these women are engaged in the process of organizing the production of a factual account.

As part of this process of producing a factual account, a pamphlet and funding request form with some of its cumulative 'gossip' floats around the office. Eventually the pamphlet and request form lands on one person's mail shelf. This person may never before have interacted with potential funders. She may never before have been involved in these types of formal bureaucratic activities. WEC's philosophy is that all women should have opportunities to develop their skills in all spheres of the organization's work. By involving herself in applying for money, a woman may feel like she is accepting an enormous and frightening responsibility. Every time I have consented to apply for a grant I have felt somewhat like a midget warrior chasing a Goliath.

Sometimes the person in charge of the pamphlet is someone who has done other funding requests for WEC or for other organizations. Occasionally this is a person who has two or three funding proposals in process at the same time. As a result of the available woman-power at WEC, this woman is likely to be alone for most of the duration of the process. This can eventually lead to the resentment or, alternatively, the adoration of the other WEC activists. This person frequently finds both positive and negative feelings become directed toward her. The woman in charge of the pamphlet, rather than the actual potential funder, often becomes the target of WEC women's most intense emotions and scrutiny. Frequently she is silently judged on the cash success or failure of her work, rather than the energy output and personal risks she has taken during the sequence of discovery and negotiation. Many times I have witnessed people displaying and projecting strong emotions on the bearer of good or bad news about funding. These disruptive dynamics can come about because not all women understand all the parts of the process.

The person in charge of the pamphlet is frequently the co-ordinator (she may have been the one to initially receive the pamphlet and decide that it was a 'go'). She may also be a Board member. What every her title, she will

probably make a phone call to the office from which that the pamphlet emerged (Employment and Immigration Canada, Secretary Of State, Citizenship, Ontario Women's Directorate, Northern Mines And Development, etc.). More questions will be asked. Clarification regarding our 'appropriateness' for this funding will be sought. This is a very time consuming and energy draining process. It is my belief, and the belief of many of WEC's funding activists, that this is not accidentally designed this way. Only the tenacious survive this stage of the process.

Eventually the woman in charge of the pamphlet might ascertain that the program advertised is not applicable to WEC. It may be that we have already missed the deadline to apply (application intake deadlines sometimes arbitrarily change from year to year). Deadlines are an interesting component of this process because the pamphlets are usually issued only after the funder's policies, agendas, priorities and plans for the new fiscal year are known.⁶ Whatever criteria existed last year do not necessarily exist this year.

Once the funder has decided on this year's criteria, the pamphlets are then issued and the requests must be completed usually within a month or two of the printing of pamphlets. This means little lead time is allocated to organizations like WEC. We often find out a funding possibility exists only one or two weeks before the deadline for submissions. Rigid and short time frames have consequences for the organization and its activists.

Also, tight time frames encourage women to work as solo individuals in the process because waiting until the next monthly meeting of the collective group of WEC activists could mean missing the funder's designated deadline. Individual work often means that women feel they should get all the recognition when or if the money does arrive, and it means women who do not succeed in securing funding may feel that they are personal failures and could have done more. Further, less knowledge about the funding application process is shared when women work in isolation. These processes can sometimes serve to decrease the group's feelings of harmony and solidarity.

While contemplating the consequences of deadlines and time sequencing, it is important to remember that almost all women in charge of pamphlets and

funding applications are volunteers who hold down full-time jobs, raise children, take night classes, have households to run, and are often unfamiliar with the funding process. Expecting women to organize a whole proposal over the course of a week, or even a few weeks, is imposing very high and often unrealistic expectations. The complexity of women's personal lives is erased from the process.

There are complications other than tight time frames. When a new pamphlet has been received and someone attempts to follow up its implications for WEC, it is possible they will discover that because we are already receiving one type of funding we are ineligible for another. It is often discovered that because we have received a particular type of funding in the past, we will not be 'appropriate' for a potential program this year. For example, our experience with local representatives of the Secretary of State suggests that they prefer that we define ourselves as offering programs *either* for 'women' or 'multicultural' people. We are not supposed to receive funding in any given fiscal year for responding to *both* women's and multicultural people's needs. Given our mission statement and what we do in practice, this is an oddity around which we have felt compelled to navigate. This type of funding suggests that we must 'splinter' women's identities.

42

The WEC volunteer trying to decode and assess the meaning of the pamphlet (remember these pamphlets are active texts that 'stand in' for the funders) may find that we can apply for a certain program but that far too much work is required and not enough woman power available. Sometimes the perceived gain for WEC is far outweighed by the potential output of effort. For example, dozens of hours of application and documentation work as well as time setting up a program may be required to receive only five hundred dollars.

It is often discovered that the programs or resources advertised in the pamphlet are actually a 'sham.' A woman in charge of a pamphlet can find out that the money being offered must be matched with equal dollars—dollars which we are 'magically' supposed to generate from membership donations or raise from the community! For example, five thousand dollars might be

available for computer purchases *only* if five thousand dollars are first raised from our clients, the community and volunteers. To raise money means that we are somewhat obliged to engage in activities like fees for services, bake sales, beauty make-over days, fashion shows and dances. It is obvious how these activities have the potential to reshape activist's attitudes and feelings.

If these dead-end outcomes are identified, the pamphlet and funding request form are then filed or thrown away and forgotten. If we 'do not fit' the funder's desires, we almost always forget about the application rather than challenge why the funder's program does not suit us. If the potential funder's program is a 'sham,' we rarely challenge why it is being advertised and promoted. If the program is a mandatory community fund matching program, we sometimes blame ourselves and ponder why we have not been more successful in our community fund-raising efforts and in our efforts to extract fees from our clients.

If we do challenge the process, we inevitably do so only internally (within WEC over coffee and closed meetings) as an intellectual exercise. We are usually afraid to use the media, to phone politicians, or to challenge the process in more overt and radical ways. We are afraid to make our distant masters angry with us. We have been well trained to take the responsibilities for our 'failure' in a world where the rules of the game have been made up by White men who are largely untouched by issues like child-care, poverty, violence, sexual assaults, unemployment, racism, or isolation. Most of us have learned to be polite, silent and grateful. The pamphlets set out most of the limits we must maintain. Project officers set out additional limits. Project officers will say things like "your application was a good first attempt and if you resubmit next year with the appropriate changes (or additions or information) we will give your request serious consideration," or "there were too many requests ahead of yours this time." These responses lead us to feel that if we are 'good and patient girls' nice things might happen to us in the future.

If it does seem that we *might be eligible* for some funding, the agency contact person will continue brain-storming to assess how WEC might

present itself to meet the criteria of the potential funder. We will make ourselves fit and/or *appear* to fit the funder's criteria. Much discussion might take place among WEC women over meetings, lunches and mid-night phone calls. Informants from other organizations may be enlisted to share whatever knowledge they have about this funding source. People will go to lunch together and talk—like sharing 'dirty' secrets. We do not ask why accessing public funds to address women's day-to-day discomforts should make us feel like we are stealing scraps from the master's tables. We do not openly challenge why we must do hundreds of hours of volunteer work to prepare ourselves to ask for funds to provide safety, security, comfort, and basic life resources to ordinary women.

44 WEC has to prove its worth and establish its identity to the representatives of any potential funding body. All new organizations have to go through this stage but WEC is particularly disadvantaged because of its philosophy, legal mission statement, and the group of women that are drawn to it. WEC has had to prove its worth over and over again to the same funders. The first stages of communication are very difficult with some funders because they do not see racism, sexism or classism as real issues in Canadian society. Some of these funders will not even meet with us until we have sent them huge envelopes filled with documents. Some funders will not even mail out application request forms until we have sent them what they define as appropriate documentation. WEC documents will be pulled from the files and photocopied to prepare for the next stage in the application process.

Almost all funders want to see our constitution, by-laws, financial statements, projected budget, and relevant job descriptions. Frequently funders want the resumes of all Board and staff members. In my eight years of experience, I have never witnessed or heard about a project officer volunteering to send their resumes to us. Neither have I witnessed, nor heard about, a women's organization representative demanding to see a funder's resumé.

Funders will require support letters from agencies which are defined as 'relevant' (i.e. defined as relevant through the possibility of sharing clients,

previously addressing these concerns, etc.). Funders decide who is relevant and not relevant in terms of letters of support. Usually the funder requests letters of support from agencies which might in fact be competitors for the scraps from the master's table. It is *against* these competitor agency's own best financial interests to support *our* request. All these documents and interactions help constitute the practices involved in creating "the factual account." These practices are the same for agencies wanting government or government 'wannabe' (United Way, Trillium, etc.) funds. None of the funders have to prove themselves to us. They never have to prove their right to interrogate us.⁷

These forms and processes are designed extra-locally by White, middle-class, university-educated, Canadian-born men. They are administered locally almost exclusively by White, middle-class, Canadian-born, university-educated women. Only once have I interacted with a local funder who was not White and middle-class. The form's designers and administrators always have some background in book-keeping or accounting. WEC's staff, clients, and volunteers are largely Immigrant, First Nations and Visible Minority, working-class, high-school or college-educated women. WEC's women almost never have any previous exposure to formal book-keeping or accounting knowledge. Forms are designed for administrative convenience, for computer compatibility, or other reasons that have nothing to do with the real living struggling women who must fill them in at WEC. These differences in class, ethnic, and educational background are not explicitly recognized by the funders' insidiously dictated process but have an implicit consequence for WEC. We must play by their rules and fill in the blanks they constructed without consultation.

I have had many discussions with women while these forms were filled. If WEC women were designing these forms they would be much simpler, easier to understand, include more qualitative data, and would be designed with the assumption that we are trustworthy beings authentically doing everything we can to help other women with their messy and 'ordinary' day-to-day problems. Funder's forms assume we are not doing the work we

promise we will, that what we are doing is not work, or that it is not something that should be done. If WEC women were designing the forms, we would assume that if last year a number of women wanted to talk about incest, rape, violence, poverty, unemployment, etc., there would also be women this year with the same concerns. If WEC women were designing the forms, there might be one form for all the funders that was done once yearly and updated what we wanted to do next year.

Funders change their priorities and issues year to year. In the funders' realities there has been the 'year of the disabled,' the 'year of the First Nations woman,' the 'year against wife assault,' etc. When WEC representatives attempt to explain that there is no such thing as a problem-of-the-year because a 'problem' does not last only a year, we are not understood. When we express these ideas, the project officers may respond by saying that another funder must pay for any further work that needs to be done on that social problem, that all that can be done has now already been done, or that another agency is doing that work.

46

Sometimes the responsibility will be turned around and projected onto us; why were we unsuccessful in solving that problem last year when we were paid for solving it? WEC women's definition of reality—the problems and the needs of women, what has happened in the past and what should happen in the future—is thereby defined as 'invalid.' Policy is constructed elsewhere by statisticians and accountants in Ottawa and Toronto who define what is knowledge and what is worth recognizing and rewarding.

WEC women who have been the contact person for funding proposals have often commented to me that they felt like they were being judged by project officers as being guilty of a crime of which they never knew they were accused or guilty. Although he does not profess to be describing the funding request process, the feelings of inexplicable guilt and negative judgement are well described by Kafka in his haunting and surrealistic book *The Trial*. In one passage from *The Trial*, the accused describes the system's whimsical contortions and the helplessness of the victim. The accused is thinking about her situation:⁸

It was all very regrettable, but not wholly without justification. K. must remember that the proceedings were not public; they could certainly, if the Court considered it necessary, become public, but the Law did not prescribe that they must be made public. Naturally, therefore, the legal records of the case, and above all the actual charge-sheets, were inaccessible to the accused and her counsel, consequently one did not know in general, or at least did not know with any precision, what charges to meet in the first plea; accordingly it could be only by pure chance that it contained really relevant matter. One could draw up genuinely effective and convincing pleas only later on, when the separate charges and the evidence on which they were based emerged more definitely or could be guessed at from the interrogations. (Kafka, 1968, 115)

An example of these whimsical contortions expected from the funders can be found in the funder's desire that different forms be filled with detailed quantitative data. Their forms focus on financial accountability and on documenting how women's problems can be segmented and time-tracked. The forms come to be experienced by WEC women and project officers as having a life of their own. They come to be extensions of a master's body, somewhat like fingers groping out in the dark to touch us, explore our contours, understand us and reshape us.

THE FACTUAL ACCOUNT

Factual accounts which produce the image (mirage) of financial accountability, problem segmentation, time-tracking, and professionalism must be constructed for potential funders if WEC wants to be recognized. WEC's constitution, by-laws, financial statements, budget projections, minutes of meetings, etc., are added to the actual grant proposal form and the memos from the local project officer with the support letters from other agencies in the community. The WEC contact person will be kept very uneasy and busy collecting, creating and refining documents. This cumulative pile of docu-

ments forms the factual account of who WEC is and what WEC does. This final 'kit' is assessed and assembled with the local project officer. The editing and amending of 'facts' may go on for months. In the end, the request form and supporting documents are 'submitted' to the granting agency. Months may go by before an answer is received from our seemingly unknowable masters who are geographically and philosophically far away.

Sometimes the answer that eventually trickles down to the WEC representative is that some vital piece of information is missing and that if it is produced the application will then be reconsidered. However, the request for missing information is routinely unmanageable. For example, if a funder asked, "What percentage of the women clients seen in the past two years have been full status First Nations women?", we would not be able to provide an answer. We do not ask that kind of information during intake or at any other point in our interactions with each other. "Full Status First Nations" is a legal concept with no real practical meaning for us.

48 Sometimes the application is rejected somewhere between our community, Toronto, or Ottawa. A vague and coded explanation from a master or a master's helper explains the reason for rejection. Rejections have come to us with statements like "this project has inadequate community support." We are not allowed to know those who were contacted in the community and do not support us. The voices that are defined as 'credible' to assess our application do not necessarily include First Nations unemployed cleaning ladies or illiterate Italian immigrant bake store clerks. The women who are activists at WEC are not necessarily defined by project officers or administrators as credible sources of 'support' because they are 'biased.' People who do not use our services or who are not familiar with our organization are defined as 'credible professionals' with a knowledgeable opinion.

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE READING OF THE FACTUAL ACCOUNT

The social organization of reading the factual accounts takes place during different stages of grant proposal applications. The women at WEC have

discovered and stored knowledge about how pamphlets are meant to be read, what should or should not be written into applications, and what should or should not be said during interviews with project officers. For example, a WEC co-ordinator told me that a year after the Oka crisis a project officer told her to downplay the fact that WEC has First Nations women mentioned in our literature and mission statement. To have emphasized First Nations women's significance in our organization would have deprived us of funding during that intake period.

WEC women know to never use words and phrases like 'patriarchy,' 'socialist,' 'feminist,' and 'exploitation of women.' Instead we used words and phrases like 'unassertive women,' 'women with low self-esteem,' 'low income women,' 'concerned about women,' and 'underdeveloped skills of women.' As a consequence of our interactions with representatives of funding sources and through reading the material supplied by funding sources, we have developed a loosely shared body of knowledge which has taught us to openly place the blame on our women participants/clients for their problems. By doing so, we can sell the work of 'fixing' them to different representatives of the federal and provincial government. We can turn them into 'pieces' or 'projects.' WEC becomes represented as a factory in which activists and staff can do 'piece work' on an assembly line. We may be gradually seduced and colluded into blaming the victim. Sometimes, some of us come to believe the 'truths' and 'facts' they have indoctrinated us to produce. In this process, the relations of ruling are obscured. Instead of being the revolutionaries we originally dreamed of becoming, we are in danger of becoming polite and busy agents of the state.

Project officers know (in a rough and transitional way) what is expected of them by their supervisors and by the signing authorities in Ottawa or Toronto. WEC's money is not decisively allocated locally. Each level of administration, from Northern Ontario to Ottawa and back, has a common language. Each square on each form has an almost consensually recognized meaning and expected response. The parameters are almost always defined, understood and unquestioned. At WEC we learned to put our desires into the

language of these funding masters or they simply will not be aware that we exist or that there are problems to which they must allocate resources. We sometimes ask them for money to use in our process of actively resisting their authority; if this is made too clear, they will obviously not want to fund our work.⁹

“WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED/WHAT IS”

When WEC was created in 1988, a group of women came together to brainstorm about what we thought were the issues and problems confronting ethnocultural minority women in our community. We were all Immigrant, Visible Minority, First Nations, feminists, and/or working-class women with a spontaneous and passionate desire to bring about some changes in our lives and the lives of the women who were our friends and neighbours. I never missed a meeting because they were exciting and stimulating.

As far as the founding mothers of WEC knew in 1988, there were no hard ‘facts’ in our community. There were anecdotal pieces of information, personal testimonies, and the impressions of the activists. Some statistics from Canada Employment and Immigration about how many women might be defined as belonging to this or that ethnocultural group were also available. Finally, there was some historical documentation about which groups of women came to this geographical area during which years and why. For the five years that WEC has been in operation, it has increasingly become a centre in which knowledge about “what actually happened/what is” is created. WEC is in the process of initiating and solidifying a certain knowledge of ‘reality’ that will be the base from which other organizations, activists, individuals, researchers, and funders will begin their work. Almost all the women who founded WEC in 1988 have moved away or moved on. As a consequence of the stresses and strains on their lives, they have usually been unable to regularly volunteer with WEC. New women have come forward who have not shared the same vivid vision. They have arrived and been introduced to our activities through government produced texts and through the literature we have produced at WEC. Their initiation has given them the versions of reality

that the funders receive—the versions of reality that the funders want us to create. New volunteers are vulnerable to believing that this version is the only ‘truth,’ when in fact it has been created for an external and unsympathetic viewer. WEC, it might be said, is now increasingly expanding into the business of fact production.

The textually produced and socially organized ‘facts’ are assumed to be the same as what really happens in the day-to-day lives of women who visit and work at WEC. The many mid-term and final project reports produced for funders supports this continuing telling of the story. Only one version of the story seems possible to each funder. For example, Canada Employment and Immigration can only absorb a story about how women were “employment disadvantaged” before they interacted with WEC “fully employed or unemployed” when then concluded their time with WEC. Canada Employment and Immigration forms are unable to absorb a story that involves rape, incest or anything else that has, in their boundaries of the story, nothing to do with employment issues.

Only one version of one story will be absorbed, recognized and responded to by each funder. No schema exists for multiple and changing possibilities. Eventually the schema that funders and WEC women use may become identical. Some of WEC’s activists not only come to know and reproduce the funder’s story about “what actually happened/what is,” but we often come to believe that it is our “lived actuality.”

For example, in the recent past one of our funders provided thirty thousand dollars to organize a two-part conference about “anti-racism and women working in coalition.” This project became the whole agency’s priority. Thirty thousand dollars is an enormous amount of money for us (our yearly budget has been between thirty-thousand and one-hundred thousand dollars). No paid staff exist for counselling women. No paid staff exist for advocating on behalf of and escorting women to access social services. These activities must be done by volunteers. When the agency was approached to organize the conference, all our volunteers were assigned to the task. Less collective and individual energy was invested in actually encouraging,

counselling and escorting women. The funder underfunded us to produce the conference. Not enough wages were allocated to organize what we were coerced into saying we would. Volunteers were pulled in to accomplish the goal we contracted to finish. Had we not organized this conference we would not have had rent money or a telephone. We had no choice. To remain financially viable, we must exist with at least one master asking us to fill in the blanks and squares that he has decided need to be filled.

For a time—and without any of us explicitly discussing it—it became a ‘fact’ among the women at WEC that we should all pull together to get the conference organized. It became a ‘fact’ that we did not have time for volunteers to do research, counselling, escorting, because they should be working on the conference. This fact comes to be understood, unchallenged, and taken-for-granted. The funders, through their infiltration of our collective mind with their priorities, their definitions of success, of what is work, and what are the problems of ethnocultural minority women in our community are have implicated us in the production of ‘facts.’ These ‘facts’ often come to be what women at WEC know, act in response to, struggle with, and impose on each other.

52

Smith (1990) also plays with imagery of wolves and their subsistence. Smith’s image of wolves and caribou seems to fit my experience as an activist at WEC who tried to understand how we participate in knowing, producing and accepting ‘facts’:

Facts mediate relations not only between knower and known but among knowers and the object known in common. Notice, next time you see that movie of wolves hunting caribou, how they attend to one another through the medium of their object. Each is oriented to that caribou and through that to each other. Thus they coordinate the hunt. A fact is such an object; it is the caribou that coordinates the activities of members of a discourse, a bureaucracy, a management, a profession. A fact is construed to be external to the particular subjectivities of the knowers. It is the same for anyone, external to anyone, and unlike the real caribou

and the real wolves, is fixed, devoid of perspective, in the same relation to anyone. It coordinates the activities of anyone who is positioned to read and has mastered the interpretive procedures it intends and relies on. (Smith, 1990:69)

Smith explains the dynamics through which knowledge becomes objectified and how 'facts' come to be different from our lived experience. Smith's proposed dynamics are clearly relevant to an understanding of the funding process at WEC. WEC activists might be likened to the wolves. The caribou might be seen as the facts (facts related to accessing the money we need to continue our work or something like the work we originally wanted to do). These facts also organize our project officers and each of the administrators above them (our distant disinterested masters).

Smith's six components that comprise the social organization of the textual reality intermingle and tangle. An ideological loop is created that can be breached at any point, but rarely in day-to-day practice. There is the authentic actuality which is gradually rearranged during the social organization of the production of the factual account. A factual account is read by an audience (in the context of WEC the audience is constituted by the funding agency's representatives, WEC volunteers and staff, clients and peer organization's representatives, project officers, etc.) and assumed to be what actually happened or what is. The factual account becomes a taken-for-granted and shared definition of reality. The reading and hearing of the factual account has been shaped by the surrounding social organization. We (the funding representatives, WEC staff and activists) are continually implicated participants in this ongoing process.

There are no tyrants or conspiracies, although it has felt like this to me when I sat across from a project officer who explained why WEC could not be funded or when I received a rejection letter from a potential funding source. These processes and dynamics are aspects of modern, textually mediated, large organizations and state practices. WEC's volunteers and participants experience many of the same conflicts and contradictions as volunteers and

participants in hundreds of other small government funded organizations across Canada.

In the first years of WEC's existence, we continually met in ad hoc spontaneously arranged groups and asked each other, 'What do you want to do today?', 'What are we here for?', 'What should we do next?', 'How do you feel?', 'What hurts you and what can I do right here and right now to make you feel better?' Now, we have titles (such as 'staff' versus 'board,' 'President' versus 'member-at-large,' etc.) and usually meet in previously scheduled meetings where we create agendas and ask each other different questions. We ask, 'What do the funders want us to do today?', 'What has each funder scheduled for us and what are the target dates?', 'What report or proposal must be written next?', 'What are the funders granting priority to this year?', 'How much money do we have in our general account?' and 'What will our next fund-raising event be?'

In addition to asking different questions, we no longer have much time to even ask questions. The women are often aware of the tensions and the contradictions, but they proceed because there is little time for reflection, and it seems that everyone else is proceeding. The pace has been set. None of the funders are keen on funding 'consciousness raising sessions for board members so that they can resist all levels of oppressions.'

In summary, I have explored parts of the process of the government funding of a grassroots ethnocultural minority women's centre in Northern Ontario. The women from WEC have now successfully negotiated project funding from five different federal and provincial sources. Among government sources, we have received financial support from (in order of largest contributions) Canada Employment and Immigration, the Secretary of State Multicultural Division, the Secretary of State Women's Division, Citizenship (provincial), and Northern Mines and Development.

We also receive funds from Trillium, the United Way, Oxfam, Nevada sales, Bingos, membership fees, and through community fund-raising activities (T-shirt sales, craft sales, and other events). United Way and Trillium are government 'wannabes.' Their forms and funding processes are experienced

by small agencies like WEC as often being more extensive, intrusive, and controlling than government funding bodies. Trillium, United Way and Oxfam seem to expect us to rely enormously on volunteers and expect us to keep statistics and extensive documentation of our activities. These are the same expectations that government project officers demand. In return, these government 'wannabes' might allocate as little as five hundred to a thousand dollars to per year. Most years, they have had no funds to offer us because they have not reached their year's target or because we had not existed long enough for them to consider us.

Trillium, United Way, and Oxfam application processes and Nevada and Bingo licensing processes are all adapted and shaped by the funding processes of federal and provincial governments either directly or indirectly. Government 'wannabes' seem to have become part of the participants in creating and recreating a taken-for-granted reality. The forms for these different funding processes, the mid-year reports, the accounting procedures that are expected, the legal documenting of how funds are spent, and the ways in which face-to-face mid-term and final assessment meetings are conducted emerge from and reflect the standards set by provincial and federal government funding sources.

At WEC we are fortunate that we have evolved into an organization that can raise a small portion of its resources through non-government sources. These other funding sources allow us to exist. I would *like* to be able to say that because we do raise some non-government controlled money we do not have our every movement controlled by one or another master. I am unsure that this is the case. I believe that we use our community raised funds to subsidize the work that government masters originally underfund us to do. We use these 'discretionary funds' to patch the day-to-day holes and gaps in our activities and programs that the federal and provincial governments refuse to recognize or fund.

Women at WEC can only rarely escape the masters' scrutiny and return to being the people we originally wanted to be. Our masters are gradually making us into dwarfed and crippled wolves, and we are gradually organizing

ourselves to fit around the movements of the caribou herd. We are becoming accidental (from our perspective) representatives of the State. This process was documented by Ng (1988) in her observations of an state-funded organization designed to address immigrant women's employment needs. Eventually, the organization changed its focus and addressed the needs of employers and Canada Employment and Immigration. Ng says:

As a result of its funding arrangement, the employment agency now entered into a sub-contractual relationship with the state. The funding protocol was such that the agency had to produce a 'product' for the state in return for funding. The nature and parameter of this 'product' was defined by a legal contract, signed by a board of directors, who were legally accountable to the state and the 'public' for the agency's financial welfare. As such, they became the internal representatives of the state within the agency. (Ng, 1988:12)

Regrettably Ng's fatalistic summary of the patterns she witnessed seem to be beginning to play themselves out at WEC. Walker (1990) presents her analysis of the battered women's shelter movement with a similarly disenchanting and disenchanting tone. She describes how the funding process, the documentation process, and the resulting 'professionalization' contributed to the de-radicalization of the battered women's movement.

This paper has attempted to explain how funding shapes who we are, what we can do, and who we may become at WEC from my perspective as a fascinated witness. In the way WEC women playing out the consequences of funding, we are not unique. The daily acts, steps, discussions, documentation, and resource allocations that government and government 'wannabe' representatives demand help define how we at WEC come to see ourselves. External funding realities are coming to define how we interact with each other (staff/Board/participant/client) within the organization. It seems to me that we have come to believe that these funders or potential funders are our

masters. We have come to believe that we must cater to all of their overtly and covertly declared desires and demands.

We have, and have had, many seemingly distant, disinterested and foreign-tongued masters. They want us to put our requests into their formats, visit them in their territory, tire ourselves with obscure tricks for their benefit, and learn to speak their language.

When an organization like WEC has many masters it can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is an advantage in that we can continue to exist because one or another master throws us scraps. It is a disadvantage because each of these masters reinforce each other's demands and expectations. Alternatively, if we had only one master we would have to be more obedient and we would be more vulnerable. It is a disadvantage to have many masters because we always have to be vigilant about incurring one master's anger for having been too attendant to another's desires. Having many masters also complicates our lives and our work because there are more documents to produce, competing demands to cater to, and many more meetings to attend. In some ways, it does not matter how many masters we have because they are all training us in the same way—teaching us to cringe and whimper or to march obediently leashed at their sides.

I resist concluding this paper on too cynical a note in spite of what Ng, Walker, Smith and others make visible. Maybe I am resisting out of some Pollyanna-type learning disability. I do not think of myself as a zombie-like agent of the state who is energetically participating in the oppression of women. WEC, by existing at all, is a manifestation of resistance. As our legal mission statement says, we are “enhancing the lives and expanding the options of Immigrant, Visible Minority and First Nations women.” Even if the “enhancement and expansion” is minor and incremental, it is nevertheless an accomplishment. Whatever space and resources we do wrestle from government funders and government ‘wannabes’ is *that much less space or resources* that conservative forces get to keep and utilize. Whatever we can do in a day-to-day way that helps some women feel more comfortable in the world is worth doing. Some of us have our consciousness raised, in spite of

forces that would block that, and we share those special moments of insight and solidarity. Some of us gain the knowledge and leave WEC and apply it elsewhere.

Some of us come to reflect on why the funders structure their relationships with us as they do. My thoughts on this are that women could form a powerful coalition (especially feminist organizations that explicitly work on anti-racist issues), but by dividing us through the funding process funders can conquer us, exhaust us, and can confuse us. At WEC we have been unsuccessful in finding alternative sources of funding that would have 'revolutionary potential.' We have turned to raising funds through bake sales, fashion shows and beauty make-over days. These events have drawn surprisingly large numbers of women to our doors, but they have also had an impact on our identity as a group. In these times when government funding is becoming harder and harder to access, will WEC become freer and freer as it receives less? No, I do not believe we will become freer and bolder with less government support because the pool of women supporters is too few in this geographic community. There are simply not enough ethnocultural minority women with large sums of cash and time to devote to WEC to nourish us adequately. There are not enough White anglophone Canadian-born women who feel that racism is 'their' issue. Their resources are more likely to be committed to other 'sister' organizations. Men have not come forward in large enough numbers to volunteer their resources. Less government funding brings WEC closer to closing its doors.

Lorde (1984:112) states:

...survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish....

This idea is a key theme at WEC. We are learning to make our differences into strengths and we are learning to insist that we be recognized and validated. Lorde (1982:112) continues by saying:

...the masters tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.

Unfortunately, it seems that at this time WEC must look to the many servants and representatives of the master and masters themselves for support. We can strive to maintain and reinvigorate our consciousness of the process we are engaged in so that we may remain alert for opportunities to resist and to take more of our fair share. We can work harder to insure that each woman who comes into the organization is taught how to critically evaluate that in which she is engaged. This seems to be our only terrain of battle over which we can have the possibility of control. Gradually we are discovering alternative ways to survive financially, but at this, our five year anniversary, we must sometimes settle for just scraps. Even in attempting to get the most scraps possible and to use them as effectively as possible, I feel we are trying to be brave wolves. If we were less brave we could settle for nothing and this nothingness would make our masters too comfortable.

NOTES

1. This paper is only an exploratory work-in-progress. My doctoral thesis, which builds on this paper, involves semi-structured interviews with thirty women who have been activists in WEC. A central theme of my thesis is the multiple and layered meaning of funding (how women resist and conform to the expectations of funders).
2. This is a pseudonym.
3. In the thesis I will do a much more extensive analysis of documents. Here I am only presenting my subjective experiences of the whole process. My approach, which developed while being a student of Dorothy Smith in 1992, is that we must always begin our research process from where we actually live, breathe and act in the world. This paper was written for her class and her comments and insights, which are now assimilated into this paper, are gratefully appreciated.

4. I recognize that some women may feel uncomfortable with a white anglophone Canadian born woman using the word 'master' in this way. I have chosen to use this word because it was chosen for the title of the session (Learneds, 1993, Women's Studies) for which this paper was originally adapted, because it is a word that seems to 'fit' the experience we have at WEC, and because I use it in the way Audre Lorde (1984) does.

5. What I am attempting to point out here is that there is nothing intrinsically wrong, different or inadequate about women who find these labels imposed on them. These are women who are as intelligent, as hard-working, as creative and educated as middle-class women and/or White anglophone Canadian-born women (who would not utilize WEC's services). However, the former have not had the privileges of accessing social resources and opportunities. Sometimes women who are disadvantaged are portrayed by funders and social service agencies as having some obvious intrinsic flaw or inadequacy.

6. Financial years are different for different representatives of the government. For example, Canada Employment and Immigration accepts applications for funding in December, considers them in January but does not actually allocate funds until February. The Secretary of State accepts applications in January but does not allocate funds until April. The Secretary of State will not accept an application until the previously funded projects have had their final reports accepted. Therefore, between the spending of the last dollar from the last project and the receipt of the first dollar for the next year's project, there will usually be a time lag of about three months if all has been done efficiently and appropriately. WEC's financial year begins on April 1. Citizenship accepts funding proposals four times a year and seems to be organized on a first come first serve basis. Northern Mines and Development accepts proposals at any time but first the proposal must have been rejected by all other possible sources. So, for example, if WEC wanted to buy a computer first we have to have asked Secretary of State, United Way, and other sources (who these 'other sources' are is defined by Northern Mines and Development).

7. One of WEC's previous Co-ordinator's, Teena Lacoste, commented on this passage in the following way: "An argument could be made to turn the tables here. Why not have the potential funders interrogated? Why not say to them 'We have this program we want to run. We have been looking for a potential funder. We will entertain the possibility of considering your funding. But before we can determine whether it is desirable to us to have you as a funder we want to know what your vision is. What are your goals? Ultimately we at WEC have a sacred responsibility to our women and only the most accountable funder can be associated with the work we do.' We should turn exclusivity on its ear."

8. Here I have taken the liberty of changing the gender of the accused.
9. For example, over the years we have participated in demonstrations like road blocks, sit-ins, and letter writing campaigns against Secretary of State and Canada Employment and Immigration while our rent and wages were being paid by them.

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Alternate Routes, Volume 11, 1994

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