GRASSROOTS FEMINIST ORGANIZING:
A MODEL FOR INFORMAL EDUCATION

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We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Foundations.

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Chapter One—Introduction

feminist solidarity rooted in a commitment to progressive politics must include a space for rigorous critique, for dissent, or we are doomed to reproduce in progressive communities the very forms of domination we seek to oppose—hooks (1994, p. 78).

The Organization[1] is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization based in Honolulu, Hawai`i. Its mission is to "change peer culture in order to prevent increasing violence against women and girls through education, entertainment and positive representation of women" (The Organization, 2005). The Organization is neither a service provider, nor a referral agency. Instead, it works to achieve its mission through a variety of activities, including concerts, legislation, marketing campaigns and festivals. The Organization's main event is an annual multimedia festival—The Festival Hawai`i. There have been festivals in Hawai`i since 2004. For two years, they also created a Bay Area, California festival. The Organization's model for social progress features a multi-pronged approach, using non-traditional methods such as multimedia and community outreach, combined with more traditional approaches such as academic panels and guest lecturers (the

[1] Like all participants, the name of the group in the study has been changed. Because Hawai`i is a small place, including the Organization's name immediately identifies the director and many participants.

Organization, 2005). The Organization believes that we live in a patriarchy in which violence against women has become a standard, unattended issue. The group seeks to continuously challenge the status quo on a "cultural level in terms of its claims to legitimacy" in order to affect change (Mueller, 1994, p. 160). It works to problematize what has become normalized, in this case, violence against women.

Combining social movement theory, feminist theory, and adult educational philosophy, this study examines an organization that encourages engagement and informal learning in its participants. It examines how women learn via participating in grassroots activist organizations, specifically The Organization, and discusses this learning in educational as well as feminist terms. What adult education scholars call "adult learning," feminists have been calling empowerment and consciousness raising. I am treating The Organization Hawai`i as a model case for learning via action.

Pursuant to these ideas, two sets of questions emerge. First, what, if anything, do participants learn via participation in The Organization? When talking about what they learned, how do they learn it and does this knowledge transform them? Second, which characteristics of the Organization help and which hinder learning?

In 2003, one of The Organization's founders was on her Waikiki balcony when she overheard a woman being raped. She was horrified and overwhelmed by her feelings of helplessness. Around the same time, she helped a good friend deal with a violent

partner. Despite a number of organizations in Hawai`i dealing with violence against women, such as the Sex Abuse Treatment Center and the Domestic Violence Clearinghouse, the founder felt there were not enough resources and decided to do something about it. She started the Organization with several of her friends and titled herself the "Non-Executive Director" (hereafter, "the director"). This is the official[2] history of the start of the Organization. She felt victimized by her helplessness, she gathered her friends, and they began to hold fundraising parties and lobby for legislation.

What is the Organization? The best way to understand what the Organization is, is to look at what it does. the Organization's second Hawai`i festival, from September 3—11, 2005, was a nine-day festival featuring films, concerts, workshops and panels. The film festival featured almost 100 films by and about women. The highlighted film was a movie about abuses happening in South Korea, but other films addressed prostitution, drugs, teenage anxiety, relationships, childhood, and many other issues in women's lives. There were several panels, including Women Organizing for Change, featuring University of Hawai'i professors, Jessica Neuwirth of Equality Now, and Elaine Brown, the only female leader of the Black Panther movement. The festival also presented workshops and concerts featuring Hawai'i -based artists and artists from the continental U.S. Each festival event focused on an issue relating to the safety or

[2] The unofficial history is a little different, told over smoky tables in hushed voices, and is about how the Organization was the idea of a few women who involved the director, and she took it over.

well-being of women. Even events that were "fun," such as concerts, contained information about women's rights and sexual assault statistics read by emcees in between performers.

The attendance at these events was substantial. Many poetry performances and concerts were standing-room only and some workshops were full enough that they had to turn people away. the Organization does not have exact attendance data, but during the 2006 festival, an estimated 2,000 men and women attended events during the nine-day festival.

With all of these events, the Organization could be classified in many ways: as a community organization, as a consciousness raising activist group, as a non-profit, and as a lobbying organization. These are accurate, but incomplete, descriptions because they do not account for the motivation involved in the Organization's actions. The best classification for the Organization, then, is one that allows for an expanding pool of actions motivated by its mission statement—preventing violence against women. A new social movement (NSM) framework is a way to look at, within, and around organizations to analyze how they are working and to understand what works and what does not (Melucci, 1989). The word 'movement' is a misnomer; movement does not mean that thousands of people are involved, or that the events are global, national or even statewide (Melucci, 1989). A single organization can be an NSM and the Organization is an example of this.

In “Identities, Grievances and New Social Movements,” Johnson et al (1994) list characteristics of new social movements, focusing on the movement’s ideologies, methods of protest and roles of volunteers. As I discuss what the Organization does, it will become obvious that it fits Johnson’s criteria for a new social movement.

Johnson, et. al (1994), list these characteristics as a way of distinguishing NSMs from other organizations that may have the same size or structure but have neither the same focus nor ideology. The first characteristic of an NSMs is a focus on a weak dimension of identity. In the Organization this focus is on giving women education about their rights in relationships, and about developing a new masculinity, one that does not engage in physical or emotional abuse. The Organization sees this as a form of patriarchal challenge, encouraging all event attendees to reevaluate the power relationships that they may have come to see as normalized. It has also encouraged participants to reevaluate their ability to affect change.

Gender violence issues (like domestic violence and sexual assault) are very intimate issues. This is another characteristic of new social movements—they focus on topics which are personal and often very private. The umbrella of gender concerns can be made as intimate as volunteers and attendees are comfortable with—with topics ranging from safety on campus to personal stories of sexual assault. This is true within the group as well: in 2003, a volunteer created a “safe haven” group for the Organization members to talk about their own histories of sexual assault. This safe sharing provided members a

way of processing their experiences in a space which encouraged questioning. Welton (1993) addresses this directly when he says “By making public issues previously hidden behind closed doors (violence against women, sexual abuse), women have opened up new issues for societal reflection, learning and collective action” (p. 159). This is also an example of what Mezirow (1991) calls propositional construal: “experiencing things in terms of the concepts and categories that come with our mastery of language”; in other words, helping to name the things that we believe so that we are better able to understand and analyze those things (p. 24).

The Organization's protest activities do not fit within a model of traditional (working-class) protest, and this difference is another characteristic of a new social movement. As Welton (1993) notes, this new form of protest tends to be middle-class, and often does exclude working-class women. However, Hunt, Benford, and Snow (1994) describe NSMs as organizations that “transcend traditional class divisions and corresponding struggles for control of state and economic institutions” (p. 188). Part of the Organization's widespread appeal and diverse audience can be explained by the types of protest in which the Organization engages. In 2003, the Organization held a silent protest, in 2004 and 2005 the Radical Cheerleaders led protests and rallies and in 2006, the Organization led a legislative lobbying campaign. Historically, feminist organizations have used different protest activities to achieve their goals. While some of the Organization's activities may not seem like protest, it is the ideology behind the activities

which make them so. When specifically launching a societal challenge, any activity can be seen as a protest to the norm. While the Organization was planning its 2006 multimedia festival, a portion of its effort was devoted to working with the Rape-Free Zone Coalition (RFZ). The Coalition is a separate organization, although an Organization project, with a mission to "prevent men's violence against women on and around University and College Campuses" (Rape Free Zone Coalition, 2005). While the Organization has engaged in campaigns to change legislation to protect women, its focus lies in changing peer culture, and it is only recently, via the Rape-Free Zone Coalition, that the Organization has taken a stance against a public institution, in this case the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UHM).

After a string of sexual assaults on and around the UHM campus, and after observing what she considered to be UHM's ineffectual handling of these assaults, the Organization director formed the RFZ. Coalition members include professors, administrators, graduate and undergraduate students and community members. After much negotiation with McClain, he issued an announcement declaring the entire University of Hawai'i system a Rape-Free Zone. This declaration was a victory for the Coalition and its allies and has encouraged them to continue advocating changes to bring the UHM campus closer to the Rape-Free Zone ideal. The Rape-Free Zone Conference was held in April, 2006. It featured lectures by Jean Kilborne, a leading feminist media

analyst, and Haunani-Kay Trask, a prominent feminist and Hawai'i an leader. It also included a Take Back the Night march, and an all-ages speak out.

Because of these different forms of protest and community engagement, there has been a tradition of characterizing women's organizations as NSMs. It is typical for feminist movements to be categorized as "exemplars of new social movement vision and practice" (Welton, 1993, p153).

In NSMs, the relationship between the individual and the collectivity is blurred. "The movement is acted out in the individual rather than the group" (Johnson, et. al, 1994, p. 45). This characteristic is best illustrated in the life of the director, who spends the majority of her waking hours supporting the Organization (and subsidiaries). She spends her days attending meetings, recruiting new members, writing grant proposals, creating reports for grantors, writing curriculum, confirming new guests, as well as the myriad of other activities required to run a festival as large as the Organization. However, it is not just the director who illustrates this characteristic in time spent. All coordinators and most volunteers spend the days before and during the events caught up with event activities, sacrificing work and school for the Organization. This is also evident in many volunteers' willingness to discuss the Organization and its mission to anyone who is interested.

To do its work, the Organization is staffed by an all-volunteer group. They are a diverse group of women, and a few men, working to end violence against women. They

are an integrated volunteer community that includes identity categories typically excluded by mainstream feminist or political activism, such as lesbian women of color.

In the Organization, every volunteer plays many roles. During my study, some tended to focus their work in a certain area (I did many technology related things, for example) but most volunteers did whatever was needed for a certain project. This seems to stand in direct contradiction to individuals receiving "coordinator" titles, but those titles do not limit them to only those roles. I discuss the meaning of the the Organization titles in the chapter on methodology. Despite her "Non-Executive Director" title the director helped with things that could be considered more mundane, such as creating hospitality bags for visiting guests or picking up food for an event. While participants discussed the extra power that the director holds, they conceded that she did a lot of the "grunt" work as well. In this way, "the type and structure of the movement bears no relation to the structural roles of the participants" (Johnston, et al, 1994) and the movement's structure is not top-down. It has a flat and wide structure, and with the exception of the director whose role is typically in leadership, all volunteers are equal. When a volunteer becomes a coordinator by taking charge of an event, she may find herself in charge of other volunteers, but this same coordinator is likely to be also volunteering for another coordinator.

The structure of new social movements is not predicated on certain individuals always enacting certain roles. Changes and actions require the work of many committed

individuals. The Organization participants are a diverse group who have little in common other than their belief in the mission statement and their willingness to make it a part of their lives. To prepare for the events, volunteers split into committees to prepare certain areas. For example, there is typically a film committee that screens films, and a performance committee that selects performers, poets and dancers.

With the Organization as a new social movement, it becomes the ideal space for participant learning, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

Chapter Two—Literature Review

"..social movements should be viewed as sites of cognitive praxis" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 73)

Within adult education are many categories, divisions and terms that tend to blend into one another. Often writers use the different terms to discuss the same ideas. I use the terms as they were defined by Knowles (1998). Formal education is the traditional, organized educational system—from elementary school through all varieties of higher education. Like formal education, non-formal education is structured learning with specific objectives. However, it takes place outside the formal learning system. This includes adult literacy programs and voter education programs. Finally, informal education is everything an individual learns through simply living and socializing every day. Included in informal educational experiences are activities like reading books for pleasure, watching documentaries, or volunteering, as is the case with this study. In addition, scholars often use the term radical education. Holst (2002) defines it as "adult education theory and practice dedicated to significant social transformation within left wing traditions" (p. 4). Although radical education can happen outside of "left wing traditions," for Holst, radical education happens best within new social movements because they engage in "fundamentally different and more authentic forms of education"

(p. 81). Using these terms, it is an informal, radical education that this study is examining.

While the types of activities that fall under informal education are often simple activities, they can also be things that are educational but non-structured, like consciousness-raising groups or community support groups. When scholars discuss activities like these, there is again a blurring of terminology. For example, Johnston (1999) uses many terms interchangeably: critical pedagogy, social action education, community education, popular education, and Frerian adult education (p. 176). But they all mean the same thing for the purposes of this review: informal radical education. The education examined in this study is informal education because it is generally not happening within a structured environment or with specific curricular objectives. Although teaching new volunteers to run a soundboard, for example, may have specific objectives, the overall context of the education is informal and non-structured. It does have specific objectives, but those are not the curricular objectives that one might expect when thinking of education. Instead, learning a new skill is a small part of a process of developing a new outlook on the world, what Mezirow calls "transformative learning" and what Freire calls "conscientization." These terms describe the development and refinement of a critical consciousness—the ability to look at how one looks at things—or meta thinking. This critical consciousness is not often developed in traditional classrooms using traditional educational methods.

In traditional education literature, education for adults is structured, instructor-driven, and expected to produce measurable outcomes. Adults enter into adult education programs to improve their quality of life, learn new job skills, or earn more money (Boggs, 1991). The method of education in these programs is usually traditional—focused on giving adults new skills and new knowledge sets, often using "banking." The banking concept involves teachers depositing content in students' heads for regurgitation on tests or quizzes. There is little emphasis on critical thinking or on analyzing information. Teachers simply want students to be able to repeat the information.

Freire (1973) contrasts banking education with what he calls "problem-posing education," which problematizes a part of life and helps students examine it critically. This type of education is superior to a banking education because the banking system automatically places students in a subordinate receiving position. The role of the teacher is one of leader, guider through paths of knowledge, or a tour guide of the skills the students have enlisted to learn. The students can do little but follow along and absorb as much as the teacher sees fit to share. Freire sees the relationship of a knowing teacher depositing information into unknowing students as a kind of power imbalance; it is a re-creation of the kind of oppression that education is capable of subverting (Freire, 1973). In contrast, Freire's method envisions the teacher as a facilitator. In a facilitator's classroom, all are peers seeking a solution to the "problem" that has been posed.

Although one could argue that since it is the teacher that is posing the problem, he or she is still in a position of power over students, it is a less obvious power struggle.

Freire is not alone in his view of traditional education as rife with power imbalances. Taking an extreme position, some scholars (Wilson, 1999; Boggs, 1991) see the student-teacher relationship in many educational institutions and the "capitalist" nature of the "commodification" (Boggs, 1991, p. 85) of adult education as being another manifestation of the patriarchal power imbalance inherent in many institutions. Boggs argues "that cultural identities are always constructed within relations of power: adult educators create power to create identities of dependency" (p. 85). He draws extensively on Foucault and his technologies - surveillance, normalizing and examination - all of which are present in banking classrooms. "Such technologies are structures of knowledge and procedures that professional disciplines (like adult education) use to create relations of dependency between those who have discipline knowledge and those who do not" (p. 86). This agrees with Freire's notions of an egalitarian classroom being the only way for learners to develop critical consciousness. Freire sees this critical consciousness as the only way in which a learner can develop an awareness of her social assumptions and cultural beliefs.

Developing this awareness can occur in many ways, but Mezirow (1991) has developed a "constructivist theory of adult learning" in which "uncritically assimilated habits of expectation or meaning perspectives [that] serve as schemes and as perceptual

and interpretive codes in the construal of meaning" (p. 4) are the focus. The things Mezirow calls meaning perspectives are also called "frames" in psychology and "framing" in sociology. Meaning perspectives "provide a set of operative assumptions that govern action" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 130). Meaning perspectives are the simple reasons we do things. How these meaning perspectives are developed, analyzed and modified is the focus of Mezirow's theory, and learning to question these perspectives is a part of the critical consciousness that Freire and other educators seek to create.

Mezirow's "uncritically assimilated habits of expectation" and meaning perspectives can be anything as common as believing that when there are storm clouds, there will be rain. But they can also be ideas as complicating and life-affecting as believing that women are innately more caring and nurturing than men, and thus should stay home and raise a couple's children. If the meaning perspectives we have are incorrect or are negatively affecting our lives, changing them can be beneficial. But how are they changed? Via learning, and Mezirow (1991) identifies four forms of learning that occur in adulthood (p. 93). The first form, learning through meaning schemes, comes from memorization, rote learning or habitual learning. A meaning scheme consists of "specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments and feelings," which we use to interpret and evaluate our experiences (p. 93). This is often the type of learning that occurs in the banking classrooms discussed earlier. This kind of learning does not involve analysis or interpretation; just the assimilation of new facts, like memorizing multiplication tables or

state capitals. Mezirow views even this kind of learning as part of a meaning scheme, because it is a meaning scheme that says that the information is important in the first place.

The second form, learning new meaning schemes, simply involves accepting new schemes that are compatible with existing schemes. The new schemes do not cause conflict or require revision in order to be accepted. The third form, learning through perspective transformation, is an entire change of worldview, usually as the result of a major crisis. These three methods can result in a new way of thinking, though not necessarily effectively. It is the fourth form of learning—learning via transformation of existing meaning schemes— that is the focus of this study.

Learning via transformation of existing meaning schemes has particular value in linking feminist views of empowerment to this educational theory. In some of the feminist literature (Naples, 1998) women who have experienced transformative learning do so after realizing that women are not inherently subordinate to men. This change in perspective about equality then affects their other meaning schemes, such as their ability to affect change via activism, or their right to earn the same amount of money as men. For men who have been called anti-feminist (hooks, 1995), Freire and Mezirow are describing what feminists call empowerment. Many studies and interviews document the same phenomenon—women learning and thus transforming through the experience (Naples, 1998). This learning happened in groups of all kinds, from a democratic caucus

to women's free clinic, to even the women Mezirow looked at. The feminist foundational belief—that women are equal to men—allows people to adopt new complimentary schemes.

The feminist theory I am using here involves the most basic of feminist concepts—that we live in a patriarchy in which (heterosexual white) men receive preferential treatment and others are marginalized. People with identities that are not heterosexual, Caucasian and (at least) middle class are discriminated against and oppressed. It is also possible to be simultaneously oppressed and privileged.

Meaning schemes are most successfully changed by reflecting upon them (Mezirow, 1991, p. 44). This critical reflection is crucial to transformation of schemes, and this reflexivity is a large part of Mezirow's theory. Reflective learning—evaluating one's assumptions and beliefs—becomes transformative learning when those beliefs are found to be inaccurate or invalid and needing change (as opposed to being confirmed as accurate) (Mezirow, 1991). This is a step in Freire's conscientization which he describes as "begin[ing] to single out (problematize) elements from 'background awareness' and to reflect upon them." (Freire, 1973, p. 83). The problematization occurs when things we took for granted or never paid conscious attention to are suddenly moved to the front of our awareness for consideration and action. Psychological "blind spots" are the target of this type of learning (Mezirow, 1991).

Freire advocates this same critical thinking and Mezirow (1991) believes all reflection involves critique. Reflecting involves validating assumptions either by confirming facts or by modifying the assumption (p. 15). This process often involves discussion of these assumptions with others in the group. This creates emancipatory learning, transformation, possibly leading toward a better understanding of self and society. Once this happens, dramatic personal and social change is now possible (Mezirow, 1991, p. 88).

Although the classroom can be a place for dramatic change (hooks, 1994), it is rare for that radical change to be a personally transformative change. So, where is it seen? In new social movements. The flat and wide structure of the movement encourages the dialogue and cyclical validity testing that Mezirow finds so critical and gives a space for Freire's praxis.

That learning occurs outside classrooms is not a new concept. The most common word for "cognitive praxis is consciousness-raising, though comparable terms such as 'sensitization' or 'politicizing' are also used" (Van Der Veen, 2003, p. 589). The tradition of education within activist/grassroots groups is a long one. From the feminist consciousness-raising groups in the seventies, the civil rights rallies in the fifties, even back to prohibition and suffrage—people working toward a common goal learned things in the process.

Perspective transformations can occur individually, of course, but they can also occur when an individual is part of a group, as in this study. Mezirow (1991) concedes that transformation is an interactive cyclical process, and people test meaning schemes by verbalizing them with others in the group as others verbalize their own schemes (p. 185). This group can be any gathering of people which meets the criteria for transformative learning—safe spaces, no power differential between members (and this includes class difference, race difference, or even any perceived difference of power). This space is difficult to achieve, but ideologically, new social movements meet the criteria, which explains why Holst advocates NSMs as the ideal space for transformation. Mezirow considers transformative learning to be 'psychically traumatic,' which is understandable when something as fragile and important as one's entire outlook on the world is being changed.

In their study of organizing for societal change, Ellis and Scott (2003) discuss the main way that people in organizations learn: by action. "The practice of learning to be leaders, to take responsibility and to make decisions . . . must be experienced to be internalized" (p. 256). They echo Mezirow and Freire's emphasis on critical analysis, saying, "[k]nowledge is to be generated in action, assumptions are to be critically analyzed" (p. 258). Again, the emphasis is on learning in action, learning via doing, and examining perspectives via transformation.

Kilgore (1999) combines many sociologists' theories to create a theory of collective learning that takes place explicitly in social movements. Notably, Kilgore echoes Wilson's (1999) and Bogg's (1998) ideas about the commodification of education: "[I]n the historical and social context of late capitalism, the notion of self-directed learning serves to devalue both educator and learner by commodifying the learning process" (Wilson, 1999, p. 192). The implication here is that learning which occurs in a classroom is a capitalist transaction, whereas learning that occurs other places is organic. Wilson conceptualizes the Organization as a learner as well, with phases of development much like a child. In her theory, addressing the learners in the Organization requires components very similar to the identity construction in New Social Movements discussed in chapter one: "identity, consciousness, sense of agency, sense of worthiness, and sense of connectedness" (p. 196).

While Kilgore describes the learners in social movements, Foley discusses the learning and the theory behind it. According to Griff Foley, learning in social movements cannot be separated from Marxism and a critical analysis of capitalism. He defines capitalism as a "system of creative destruction with its central fact the alienation of its workers" (Foley, 1993, p. 73). The ruling class views workers as instruments of production, "objects to whom value for both individual and society is added through education and training" (p. 76). Thus, the purpose of all education, in this view, is to add value to the people objects so that they can produce more. In the Foley framework,

denying that education is another part of the hegemony of patriarchy makes educators part of the problem, and educators must choose to be either a capitalist tool, or a proponent of meaningful education. Wilson (1999) also sees this hegemony as troubling and interprets it as a "central starting place in which dominant cultural relations are maintained through the active participation of social actors" (p. 87). These scholars are critical Marxists, and they acknowledge that education within social movements is not only possible, but is in some ways better than the learning that can happen in other locations. One reason this learning may be better than learning that happens in classrooms is because the learners are free to think and examine ideas outside of traditional institutions of power, such as classrooms.

Foley (1999) provides five characteristics of learning within consciousness raising groups, which echoes Freire's ideas about learning in groups: learning must be sensitive to an oppressed or marginalized group (for Freire these are the proletariat), the experience, assumptions and social position of members of the learning group must be relatively similar (the dialogue and equality that Mezirow and Freire advocate), the group must develop a "structure of equality"; members must have the motivation and the time to reflect critically on their subjective experience; members must gain a "theoretical distance to personal experience" (p. 50).

For other scholars, having a safe space is not enough to promote education. Foley's meaningful education takes place in a society he describes as "post-modernist,

post-socialist, and post-industrialist" (Foley, 1999, p. 23). In other words, a society in which money comes from services and services are performed by fairly-paid laborers. Foley's vision of society is decidedly feminist when he describes the problem with society being the exploitation Third World female immigrants. Education must consider the structure of this society in order to improve the lives of the oppressed. One way this education occurs is via "learning in the struggle," (p. 39). This type of learning can affect people's lives. Like other scholars writing about activism (Naples, 1998; Whittier, 1997), Foley's research contains stories of women transformed by their involvement. This is the kind of education that Freire was working to promote.

Not only is there a long tradition of characterizing feminist organizations as new social movements, there are also several advantages. The first advantage is the fluidity of roles within the Organization. "Traditional dialectics of teacher-student must be transformed into conditions where all participants share those roles. Without it the very act of knowing cannot take place" (Holst, 2002, p. 91). Within a group designed for learning, in order for learning to take place, students must teach and teachers must be students, so that there is no teacher 'giving' knowledge and students 'receiving' it. Instead, they are all working as a team to facilitate advancement (Freire). Within groups, roles must be fluid and dialogue not only possible, but encouraged. This is in line with the NSM framework discussed in Chapter 1.

Another advantage of characterizing the Organization as an NSM is this ability to dialogue. Dialogue, both between teacher-student and student teachers, as well as among student teachers is crucial for this kind of learning. Again, though couched in other terms, this is what feminists have been doing in consciousness-raising groups since the '60s—providing women a space to dialogue and evaluate their ideas. Mezirow also advocates a dialogic community. He views language as the building block of the meaning we make of the world. The things we think and want become real only when we express them, then they become defined by the language we use. The language's meaning is determined through dialogic community, if there is a power difference, "privileged members" need to learn to be silent (Mezirow, 1991, p. 187). The silence of the "privileged members" (these can be the teacher-student, or other members of the group who have race, class or gender privilege) can encourage the speech of those with less privilege. As Freire says, "To glorify democracy and silence the people is a farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate people is a lie." (Freire, 1973, p. 91). The ability to facilitate dialogue is, in large part, contingent on the consciousness of the leader (or, teacher-student as Freire calls it[3]) to model the dialogue that she wishes to see in the group. "To say one thing and do another . . . cannot inspire trust" which is required for true dialogue.

[3] In the Frerian model, everyone is learning from the others in the group, so even the teacher is a student, as the students are also the teachers.

This dialogic environment can theoretically create a space free of oppression. Freire seems to favor a very strong link between "antidialogical action" and oppression, asserting that they do not proceed/follow each other, but happen simultaneously (p. 138). This makes sense when looking at his requirements for dialogue: cooperation, unity for liberation, organization, and cultural synthesis (p. 167). The opposite of these would create an oppressive environment. This explains why he requires such absolute freedom and equality in his spaces, for to not have the freedom would recreate the oppression which group members are trying to combat.

It is not only external oppression that groups must be careful to prevent—it's also internal oppression in the form of conflict, which often involves one member trying to dominate others' with an opinion. Welton (1993) notes that "the learning process within each of these movements is fraught with tension and conflict" (p. 156). Other scholars agree. Recall Kilgore's theory of collective learning in groups like social movements. Central to her definition of social movements is the notion of cognitive praxis. Kilgore (1999) says "social movements should be viewed as sites of cognitive praxis, but praxis is dependent on difference, contradiction, and social conflict. Whatever we choose to call it, conflict is crucial to collective learning" (p. 199). Kilgore's use of the word praxis echoes Freire's (1973) emphasis on praxis as "a combination of action and thought—thought without action is philosophy, action without thought is activism."

Social movements are an ideal place to join action and thought, even though conflict naturally arises.

To create a collectivity that is open and fluid is the goal, and feminist Judith Butler (1990) offers a succinct definition: “An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purpose at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure” (p16).

Chapter Three—Methodology

I was involved in the Organization from October 2003 to July 2006. I came to the Organization accidentally: I saw a flyer, I had extra free time, and I got involved. A few meetings after I joined, the Organization launched their new website. I had been designing websites and doing print production for several years, so I took on more responsibility—eventually hosting the Organization's websites and producing the printed programs for two Hawai'i festivals and the first Bay Area festival. During my time with the Organization, I created printed programs for three festivals, helped lobby for legislation, was involved in key decision-making and volunteer recruitment. I feel like this varied participation has given me a unique and well-rounded view of the Organization.

I had several biases, some of which have changed over the course of this project. In the beginning, I assumed that participation in the Organization was a positive experience in all ways. Until I left, my participation had been wholly positive, and while I knew that others had left under negative circumstances, I had dismissed those situations as departures from a "norm" I believed to exist in the Organization. I spoke to several people informally before I started interviewing. As a result of those conversations, I began to see participation as more complex—a difficult mix of turbulent relationships combined with rich educational opportunities.

Another bias that exists is my personal relationships with many members of the Organization, including the director. Some I have longstanding friendships with, some were just acquaintances. All the Organization volunteers came to know me as a volunteer first, and as a researcher second. This project is a good example of activist community-based research insofar as the "[r]ole of the researcher is blurred when there is no delineation between activist and academic" (Naples, 1998, p. 13). My personal relationships certainly influenced the way that participants responded to questions as well as the way that I have analyzed their answers. El-Or (1992) concludes that "intimacy and working relationships . . . go in opposite directions" the more intimate the relationship, the less functional the working becomes. (p. 71), and it may have been true for her study, but I have found the opposite—renewed friendships with two of my informants and my outside reader as we processed the events of the last three years together. These personal relationships color this project. I believe they have also added depth that would not have been accessible to a naïve or outside researcher.

Participants

Participants were current and former the Organization volunteers who met the following criteria: over 18 years old, participated in the Organization during one of the annual festivals, and worked as a coordinator, director, or committee chair. Because so

many people were involved in the Organization during the three festivals in which I was involved, potential participants were limited to those who were listed in the program as 'coordinators.' When I was selecting individuals, this seemed like an efficient way to ensure that those listed were present for both the preparation and execution of the festival. This method was not perfect as one participant complained that for one festival she was listed as a coordinator but did not fulfill any of the coordinator duties, while other volunteers did a lot of work but were not given coordinator titles. In retrospect, the designation of coordinator is largely a political one, signifying an in-group and out-group status with the director as well as those individuals who had more free time than others had, rather than signifying actual job duties and responsibilities. For example, I am listed as a coordinator for the 2007 the Organization Bay Area festival, for which I did no work.

In 2004, the festival program listed 15 coordinators, in 2005, 10, and, in 2006, 4[4]. Six people were listed twice, leaving 22 potential participants. Of these 22, several left the Organization on very bad terms. Several others were in romantic relationships with the director. Subtracting myself and four other coordinators, who I believed were ineligible due to intimate relationships with key festival members, left 19 potential interviewees. I contacted nine coordinators who I felt would have the most neutral and

[4]While the decrease in numbers may be initially startling, they do not necessarily indicate a systemic issue. Whittier's (1997) discussion of cohorts and political generations could be applied to explain this seeming attrition. Whittier says that organizations have a natural turn-over (political generations) and that some generations will be naturally larger than others.

well-rounded opinions. This was a subjective guess on my part. However, I felt that certain coordinators might tend to hold more negative views about the Organization due to the circumstances under which they left so I did not contact them. In retrospect, these individuals could have added a depth and richness to the data. Six women were willing to participate. Of six, one withdrew for health reasons; five participants were interviewed

Because participants were already involved in the Organization, they were a self-selected group. I would have liked to have been able to vary the demographics of the women with whom I spoke, but with so few potential participants, this was not possible.

All interviews were conducted in September 2006. Two interviews were done in person, and three via email. Those done in person were semi-structured and lasted for about an hour. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. For participants who were not on Oahu, interviews were completed via email. Overall, interviews done in person were far more effective at capturing the nuances of experiences than were interviews done over email. Participants talked more about interpersonal conflicts when I interviewed them in person. Perhaps they felt comfortable sharing because we know the same people, or perhaps for the ones I emailed, seeing their comments written made it more difficult to communicate things that were more personal, instead offering a detached critique of an organization they are no longer part of.

I also examined documents produced by the Organization. For example, I used the staff list in the program as a guide to developing the original list of potential

participants. Other documents included meeting minutes, the mission statement, and organization documents. Intra-organization documents typically provide participant-agreed data (Merriam, 2001); however, in the Organization it seems that the documents are data that represent the voice of the director - she is the main producer of Organization documentation.

While not a primary source of data, my observations from two and a half years of working with the Organization were also included. Merriam (2001) notes that "observation is the best technique to use when an activity, event, or situation can be observed firsthand" (p. 96). I observed all the Organization meetings between October 2003 and May 2006, and attended most festival events during that time. My observations provided another way of analyzing the data participants provided. It has helped me to deconstruct both their positive and negative comments.

The questions in the interview protocol were developed after reviewing Freire and Mezirow's ideas about learning and learning spaces. Their advocacy of 'dialogic community' and lack of power imbalances prompted me to confirm the existence of these characteristics within the Organization. I also asked participants a few questions related to democracy and civic engagement. In meetings, the director often talked about the Organization being a democracy rather than a monarchy. Even though the word has political connotations, I am using it the way the director used it—to signify decision by consensus. Without a way to measure educational success, since according to Mezirow, a

change in consciousness does not always produce a change in action, I chose to follow a more Freirian path of looking at success. His only measure of success is if education causes a revolution. While it is not possible, or necessarily desirable, to start a revolution against the government, I asked participants about personal revolution: a change in their level of involvement with the government and their communities, or any change in civic engagement.

Limitations of the study

Most importantly, this study lacks a thorough race or class analysis. Because I am Caucasian and middle class, and most of the participants are women of color who come from a variety of social classes, there will be inevitably be class issues at play, but those issues are inadequately addressed in my literature and study structure. Additionally, some literature hints that the notion of consciousness itself is a middle-class construction. This class/race disparity is complicated by the racial diversity of Hawai'i. Despite being an insider in the Organization, I am an outsider in the islands: a woman from the continental United States with only a short history in Hawai'i. According to hooks (1994), white women writing about race and justifying it by acknowledging their whiteness does not suffice as race writing. These women should not write about another race until they have a critical understanding of whiteness, their own, and others. Failing

this understanding race is conspicuously absent in my study. (p. 106). Moreover, the Organization is such a small organization that saying, for example, that a coordinator is female, ethnically Japanese, and 30 years old would immediately identify that coordinator. No one talked about race in the interviews. I would attribute it to a shortcoming in the protocol, which I am sure it is, except they brought up other factors not in the questions—sexuality and class, for example. It was naïve of me to trust that they would bring this subject up if it mattered.

My longstanding involvement in the Organization and gradual progression from auxiliary member to core coordinator was also a factor in the analysis of the data. One volunteer described me, only half-jokingly, as the "stability of the Organization." My deep and pervasive involvement with several members of the Organization is addressed in the study if only briefly. I have not examined the complicated nature of over-rapport and the imbedded researcher. Also, many volunteers were unaware that I was researching the Organization as I was participating. Some of my participants did not know I was a researcher until I contacted them about being interviewed.

Ensuring credibility

Initially, credibility was ensured in three ways—member checks, peer review and three data sources. First, each of the participants read their interview transcripts. They

were exchanged via email, or face-to-face meetings, as many times as needed for participants to feel that it accurately represented their experiences. Confirming their transcripts with them ensured that they are comfortable with what they revealed and gave them the chance to revise or complete ideas they shared. Involving participants in it also empowered them by giving them control of their stories. Even with great care to ensure I was sharing only information agreed on by many sources, there was still the sense of breaking a code of silence, a "what happens in the Organization stays in the Organization" sort of vow. This is why enabling them to review their transcripts and modify or even remove themselves from the study entirely was so important.

Another way of ensuring credibility was peer review. Ideally, peers and advisors read transcripts, field notes and documents as well as findings from the data. By having an outsider read the findings, analysis could be verified and the influence of researcher bias minimized (Merriam, 2001). For this study, I used a reader who was a coordinator for several years but who was not interviewed. She read only the final product as I was concerned that reading raw transcripts would reveal the participant's identities.

The third method of triangulation is the use of multiple data sources. Interviews tell the bulk of the story and were central to answering the research questions. However, they were still only one part of my data on the Organization. In addition to interviews, my observations and the Organization documents were used. These two sources in addition to interviews provided three perspectives of the same events. With three data

sources, each from a different instrument, the chance of one-sided data was greatly reduced (Merriam, 2001), though it was never completely eliminated.

Chapter Four - Interview Results

First, an introduction to the participants and the roles they played in the Organization. All participants are female, in their mid-twenties to early thirties. Two are Caucasian, and three are women of color. Each woman talked generally about her involvement, the Organization and her feelings about both.

Gretchen

"The reason why I came to know [the director], or the whole organization, was because at that time I was going through [personal problems], and I just needed some empowerment, girl power empowerment." Talking about how she feels about her involvement, she said "If you were there from the get go, [you saw] a lot of things that went on that you might or might not agree with . . ." But overall, her experience "was very empowering . . . [and] very educational. You get to know a lot of people. You get to know a lot of information about things that you weren't paying attention to or you didn't know."

Talking about her relationships with other the Organization volunteers, Gretchen focuses on the director: "I think everyone who starts this kind of organization for the . . . betterment of women and girls, [has] really good intentions . . . [The director] is very dedicated, and she's one of the best organizers I've ever encountered . . .Yeah, there were some things that I didn't agree with, but . . . it was really good as far as bringing the

community together and bringing up [domestic violence issues]." She adds, "there were feelings of cliques, within the Organizations . . . but I think [the director] did a really good job in breaking up the tension"

After coordinating two festivals Gretchen left the Organization permanently. "I was empowered . . . but along the way I saw some things that . . . I thought were going against our motto, so I started . . . thinking to myself 'oooh what's going on?' And, you know, I'm not one to judge. And I'm not one to jump to conclusions without any evidence, per se. But, . . . they weren't focused on the mission. It was more about, "oh, who messed with who, and you know, so a certain so and so . . ."

Keala

"[A]t the meeting before the first fundraiser [in 2003], I fell in love with the whole idea and I was like 'Hi, I'm Keala, and I want to know you personally because I want to be as involved as you'll let me be' and I've been volunteering ever since." Keala describes participation in the Organization as "a very personal thing. It's a bunch of women who are friends doing it, so you can't help but make friends, but then relationships are so complicated and working together is so complicated. Sometimes there's been a lot of relationship dramas but I would say all in all, it's been a positive experience."

"I was always just a follower. . . .[What] I've learned is how to do behind the scenes kind of putting things together and tell people . . . where to be and what time. And . . .just the organizing aspect. I don't know that I'm that good at it. But I learned how to do it." The personal relationships she formed with other the Organization members helped her learn; but she also took issue with some things. "What could have been better is . . .letting people actually take the responsibility that's been given to them and own it. Being told 'Hey, this is your job' and then finding out it's not really your job, you're really just supposed to throw in suggestions . . . that's a little counterproductive. . . .Because I made such good friends with the director . . . I have the added advantage of being able to get through to her - which really is to say that she has a vested emotional interest in keeping me happy. So she listens to me a lot. Not everyone else can say this. I know a lot of bridges have been burned."

Keala defines civic engagement as "People doing things to make changes or keep society going." Her civic engagement has "absolutely" increased because of being in the Organization. "[I]t just made me want to get involved with everything that I care about, because I feel like if I get my hands dirty something good might come out of it. I didn't really have that kind of faith in people being able to make a difference before [protesting with the Organization]."

Jill

Jill was involved "to a pretty heavy extent" for two years. When talking about what her participation taught her, Jill offered the longest list of any participant: "I learned about how hard work is necessary in creating a shift in cultural climate. I learned that I over-commit myself and still have fun doing it. I learned that people need to listen to things even if they aren't nice or pretty...and often they do when confronted with truth. I learned that [the director] demands a lot, but gives even more. I learned that I love people who do what they say they will so much more than anything else...I learned . . .that the more right on target you are, the less attractive what you have to say is." She learned all of this via "conversations with participants and other volunteers, films, [and] visual art." Like Gretchen, she also felt that there were cliques in the Organization. "[I want] friendlier first meetings...I almost got scared away my first time."

For Jill, civic engagement means "Seeing a problem and not succumb to 'group think' or the idea that it is simply not your problem. To me, it is important that everyone take responsibility for what goes on (pretty and not so pretty) in their society." Since the Organization, her civic engagement has grown in "the realm of sexual assault and proactively being involved in change. Overall, I grew in my depth of commitment." She has also "done human/child rights training and [is] involved locally with an orphanage."

She left the Organization because she left Hawai'i , but since she has been out of the Organization, she has developed "a growing respect...[I]t's a shitty world where men get away with way, way too much."

Tuvale

"[Being involved with the Organization] was a very rewarding experience. I learned a lot and it was great. . . . Personal relationships definitely made the experience positive. It was a wonderful group of people."

By participating, she learned the "[j]oy of working with those who share the same goal in the society. How events are run. How to do things efficiently and professionally. . . .It was great that each volunteer staff was given responsibility and expected to do a great job. I think it takes a lot of trust. [The director] has great leadership." However, not everything was easy. She could have learned more if she were able to "pay more attention to the contents of each event, and prepare better before the actual events—getting to know delegates better, by reading what they wrote, seeing their performance, etc. Volunteers tend to be too busy trying to get everything done correctly...."

"Involvement in [the Organization] helped me to broaden my understanding of the problems. I also gained the sense of being connected to the community (both the Organization community, and the larger community in Honolulu, as well as feminist

community outside Hawai'i - through interactions with delegates)." Being a part of the Organization didn't immediately increase her political participation or civic engagement, but she feels that "the experiences in [the Organization] made it easy for me to participate in other activities when I want to."

Tuvale left after two years in the Organization because of other obligations. "I had found out I wouldn't be able to volunteer at the festival this year, but I still wanted to do something."

Nzinga

"I coordinated for one year . . . I was one of the core members. [Because of being in the Organization], I learned that one can make a difference fusing the arts with social-political causes. I realized that there are more people in your community that will support a cause when they witness genuine concern and dedication. Moreover, I learned that I was not alone in being frustrated and that empowered me to reach out and share . . ..Organizing events and pounding the pavement for support helped me to not drown myself in self pity . . .Hearing the delegates speak or perform was profoundly empowering." Nzinga says civic engagement "entails being keenly aware of the reality of your surroundings. One can become overwhelmed caring so deeply about social-political issues, so keep it local and empower the people in your community. The effects are like the rippling effect of dropping a pebble in a pond . . ..I've always been civically aware of

the reality of my surroundings and have been known to march in a few protests. However, the Organization has given me the confidence to express my frustrations regarding injustice in the community through art." Her relationships with others both helped and hindered her experience. "If the relationships remained focused on the mission, then the projects ran smoothly. However, there were times when some members allowed drama to consume them and many feelings were hurt. Despite the occasional drama that occurred, most members remained professional."

After one year, Nzinga left the Organization. "I resigned because I was disappointed by [the director's] negative behavior towards me and other members. I feel the same as the day I left. I believe the Organization is a much needed service to the community, but I'm disappointed in the [director]. I'm hopeful that she will one day appreciate the labor of others who support the movement."

Echoing the director's words and discussions about equality and democracy in the Organization, I asked the women to define democracy and talk about how they saw it or, did not see it, in the Organization.

Democracy in action

First, I asked the women to define democracy, then use that definition to talk about the Organization. Keala defined it this way: "Every single person involved in an institution or an establishment having exactly equal say in what's going to happen."

Gretchen compares her ideal democracy to America: “It’s the kind of place where everybody respects other people’s opinions, . . . or appearances or differences and embraces it, although it is really rare and hard today.”

According to Nzinga, “a democracy should be inclusive not exclusive. Everyone has a voice that is heard and respected. Issues are addressed expediently and hateful subversive agendas are not tolerated.” She said democracy existed in the Organization, but that people had a hard time keeping their turmoil out of the process: “Working with the Organization was mostly an inclusive and engaging experience. Sometimes drama set in for some people and the overall positive flow of the group would be compromised.”

But according to Keala, the expectation of democracy or “having an exactly equal say,” was not important: “But I don’t care if democracy is at work here. No one is being forced to be a part of it and no one is promised democracy. It’s not like I was born into it like America and they need to keep me pacified by convincing me I have some sort of say in what happens to me or in my name. I choose the Organization. I know I’m just helping out. I expect to be ‘governed’ in a way.”

Participants seemed to feel conflicted over whether a democracy could exist when majority decisions were overruled by the director. Gretchen said, “Even though [the director] uses ‘non-executive director’ title, she still makes most of decisions regarding the festival, who will be invited etc. (exception—film committee decides whose film gets

played during the Organization)." The issue of veto power will be dealt with again when individual responses to the democracy criteria are examined.

Keala seemed to struggled with the conflict. Talking about whether her definition of democracy exists in the Organization: "Well . . . yeah, I guess so. In the sense that everyone gets a say, but . . . there does tend to be the one person at the top who can veto everything. And if that's . . . I don't know if that's included in my definition of democracy. I guess there has to be somebody in charge, but . . . I would say for the most part, yeah." She finally decided that she didn't come to the Organization for democracy anyway, so it did not matter.

Everyone is Equal

I asked about equality within the Organization. Did they feel that everyone's opinion counted? For Gretchen, the Organization was very unequal. "[The director] used to say, 'This is not just my organization, this is our organization.' But to me, it was rhetoric. I felt like it was OUR organization so long as we didn't do anything to get on her shit list. Equal? No." [emphasis in original]

Jill also did feel a sense of equality in the Organization, but she wasn't bothered by it: "It is difficult in this kind of organization where many people come and go. Of course, those who put more time and have been doing so are higher in the pecking order.

That is not entirely bad, however. Please don't read it as a judgment call BECAUSE I have also been involved in projects/organizations where the discussions are arduous and downright painful because every person has long and drawn out explanations and gets so pissed when THEIR idea is not voted for. [The director]'s system is actually quite effective."

Like many other participants, Keala addressed the semantics of the director's title and her veto power over group decisions: "Well, the director calls herself a "non-executive director" which could be true or could not be true because the veto factor that she holds, but I think that if you come to a meeting, and you've never even been to one, people are still going to listen to what you have to say and take your suggestions into consideration, so I think that that's equality."

There is no majority

Gretchen spoke a few times of the director's personal relationships affecting the way in which decisions were made: "I felt like it was either decided by consensus (on rare occasion), or by [the director]. the Organization may seem to have a consensus decision-making structure, but if [the director] didn't agree, the end result will be HER decision. I guess you could say there were times when minority opinions could have potentially been ignored by majorities—whether or not majority decision prevailed

depended on where [the director] stood. If there were a majority/minority relationship within the Organization, sometimes I felt like she put her girlfriend's opinion ahead of the majority decision." [emphasis in original]

Keala took the question more literally: "Yeah, there's definitely a majority, gender speaking. There's definitely mostly women, mostly liberal women, I would say. There's not as many men involved. I don't know racially or religiously or anything. But yeah, there's definitely those kind of factors

Safe spaces

Again, evaluating the Organization against the NSM characteristics discussed in Chapter 1, I asked the women if they felt that the Organization provided a safe space to dialogue and contribute. According to Gretchen, only favorable opinions were heard. "It just seemed our opinions were respected when it agreed with [the opinions of the director]. I felt like I couldn't give her constructive criticism because she would take it personally and think that I was against her and her cause." She added that she only felt it was safe to share her ideas "if the opinions/thoughts didn't offend [the director] or her girlfriend." But Tuvale disagreed "I saw a couple of discussions where members had conflicting opinions, and were expressing them. There is no stigma for doing so."

There seemed to be a distinction between having a safe space to voice your opinion and feeling like your opinion was actually heard. Jill said, "I only remember voting a few times and I DISTINCTLY remember having opinions/ideas that (of course) I thought were brilliant, but were brushed over and not 'respected.' But I did feel a sense that I could have made it happen if I did it completely on my own. In that sense, I guess I just needed more support in figuring out the 'how' part of it."

According to Keala, everyone's opinions were respected at "any meeting. And further the meetings set aside for after the festival to discuss feedback from every single volunteer. [That] meeting is FOR sharing your opinions."

Diversity is welcome

All participants made a reference at one point to the diversity of the Organization. Additionally, all answered positively when talking about diversity. Gretchen said "If diversity means our sexual orientation, ethnic background, education levels, careers etc.—Yes, I do feel that diversity was welcomed and respected by everyone who partook in the Organization." According to Tuvale, diversity was "Very much [welcomed]. Reflecting the population in Hawai'i , I thought the group had members from diverse background. The theme and approach in the Organization events were very diverse too,

and I think that helped the group to be inclusive and attractive to people with different interests (with the same goal in their minds) as well."

Consensus-based decision making

When talking about democracy, all participants seemed to value consensus decision making. However, they had trouble applying that to their experiences within the Organization. According to Gretchen, "On rare occasion when [the director] would ask our opinion on a matter regarding the Organization, we were given the opportunity to voice our opinion and come to a decision made by consensus. However, it seemed majority of decisions regarding the Organization were made by [the director]."

But Keala did not see things as so clear cut: "It's a tough question because everything is not put up for votes. The majority rules when it's asked to. Within committees we vote. Sometimes we were vetoed and sometimes not. We present our final decisions by deadlines and they are taken into careful consideration and sometimes accepted as is and sometimes morphed into something more acceptable to the director. The longer you're part of the Organization the more you know this. And if you can't handle it, you quit."

“I can say it was not dictatorship,” said Tuvale. “But I can't think of the moment of important decision making. I think that means I wasn't there. But I feel if I wanted, I could have been more involved in the process, too.”

A sense of openness

Tuvale said, “I think important information flowed freely. The only thing I didn't hear unless I asked was the ‘touchy’ issues, like membership. It is understandable, but because many members were friends. When there was tension or when someone had to leave because of that, it wasn't openly announced or discussed. I don't know if these kinds of things need to be open to all the members though. I didn't really care, but I think this has the danger of creating the sense of inclusion and exclusion.” Jill agreed that there were some things that weren’t discussed.

”There were times I felt slightly in the dark . . .[which is] necessary for the nature of the events... For example, there is sensitive information about events/performers/etc. that can not be leaked. That said, however, I think it might have had a more honest and clear vibe if all had been more out in the open.”

Keala saw lack of information circulating as a structural issue. “People are left out of the loop sometimes but I never feel like that’s an intentional thing. It caused problems, but I think that’s just a flaw that can be remedied with more regular meetings and people

being more devoted to what they're doing." However, Gretchen felt that more vital information was not being shared. "A few people, including myself, questioned the Organization's financial status. Where money is coming from, how it's distributed to our beneficiaries . . . When it came to money, [the director] never disclosed any information, at least to the volunteers. During the time I volunteered for the Organization, I never saw a single financial statement."

Abuse of power

Keala and Gretchen shared the same example when talking about abuse of power in the Organization.

Gretchen told this story: "During the time when [the] Zineletter committee was deciding on whose work to [publish], [the director] went through the list of artists' work and made her executive decision. There was a time when she submitted her mother's article to the committee and it was apparent she wanted it on the Zine. Several people mentioned their opposition because there were more interesting articles and [poems] to consider. However, she got offended and got grouchy. Needless to say, her mother's article was published on the Zine as a result."

Keala said "I was there for [Gretchen's example]. And [the director] put it in anyway . . ..It is [an abuse of power] unless veto power is excepted. But it's not [and]

that makes it not a democracy. . . . There is abuse of power all the time. I have been the head coordinator [and done work for the committee/event] and then later found out after the program was already printed, that it wasn't really that way.[5]" Keala emphasized that her personal relationships helped to resolve this conflict. She balances what she sees as an abuse of power with the benefit of being able to discuss these abuses with those at fault. "But the upside of that is that I could talk openly to the person [with whom I had a conflict] and be like 'You fucked up. You didn't handle that well, and we should try to do better next time.' But [. . .] that's an abuse of power, for sure. Overruling the majority always is, but it's [the director's] idea and it's her thing and we're all volunteers [. . .] just helping her do what she wants to do. So maybe she doesn't even really want it to be a democracy. But that she's carrying the whole 'non-executive director' thing is a farce, there's no such thing. So don't give me responsibilities if you don't want me to carry them out or if you don't trust me to handle them well. I think that's the abuse. If you want to do it yourself, do it yourself. If you don't then let people handle what you've given them to handle. Veto power is never good."

However, Tuvale and Jill had opposite experiences. "There was no abuse of power. I think the fact everyone was a volunteer helped the Organization to be democratic and maintain the horizontal relationship," Tuvale said. Jill agreed: "I never

[5] Keala is referring to a time in which she had chosen several performers for an event, only to find out upon reading the program that the director had changed the event lineup.

saw any abuse of power or unfairness. There were no power plays or times that I felt like any person was being controlling."

Chapter Five - Data Analysis

"In the process of struggling against all forms of gender oppression, many women have experienced a profound perspective transformation and acquired a new self-understanding . . ." (Welton, 1993, p. 159).

The interviews I did with my five participants answered all of my research questions. However, there was a theme that emerged which was not part of the original research questions, but which I feel is important enough to be addressed before the data is discussed. That theme is personal relationships.

Everything the participants shared during their interviews was influenced by their personal relationships, both with other volunteers and with the director. People would talk about the Organization and then begin talking about "who said what and then she . . . and so I . . . don't you remember?" In talking with participants in person, they were often seeking validation that I remembered events the same way. In many cases, I was not present for the conflict they were remembering, or I had not heard the gossip, especially not from their side. They shared how the personal relationships strengthened their commitment to the Organization, and my personal relationships did the same, but often we were relating to different sides of a long-ago battle. They alternated between detached commentary on the Organization and passionate talk about the people and situations they

were involved with. The participants whom I interviewed via email were less unclear. They had either wholly positive or negative experiences (though it seemed that they were much more careful with their words via email than those who talked about the Organization in person).

Two volunteers, Jill and Tuvale, had mostly positive experiences. They left the Organization on good terms and expressed regret that they could no longer be involved. Keala was the moderate volunteer—she had criticisms, but was also still very happy to be a part of the Organization. Nzinga and Gretchen had less positive experiences and while they believed that the Organization is good for the community, they did not believe that participation in the Organization is a positive experience. For every woman that I talked to, the polarizing factor was the director: women who had good relationships with her had good experiences in the Organization; women who did not, did not have good experiences. This is complicated, however, because the two volunteers who spoke with the most candor about their problems with the director were the two who were the least familiar with my friendship with her. It is possible that if Jill and Tuvale did not know about my relationships and (perhaps perceived) alliances, they would have given different answers.

But largely, their problems with the Organization were problems with the director. They ranged from circumstantial—not having enough time to do their work, for example—to very severe personal problems—believing that the director favors the

opinion of her partner over the opinions of other coordinators. In NSM literature, the director is characterized as a movement intellectual. Movement intellectuals are "those individuals who through their activities articulate the knowledge interest and cognitive identity of social movements. They . . . create their individual role at the same time as they create the movement, as new individual identities and a new collective identity take form in the same interactive practice." (Holst, 2002, p. 82). Accordingly, the Organization's director fits into the NSM framework as the movement intellectual. This explains how she redefined her role even as she was redefining and focusing the Organization[6]. This change in roles is what Keala, and Gretchen seem to be frustrated with when they discuss her inaccurate "non-executive director" title.

What helped and what hindered your learning?

When I asked the women what helped them learn and what hindered learning, participants gave a variety of answers. Initially, I placed the Organization within the NSM framework because it seemed like a good way to create a measurable framework within which to examine education as an un-measurable experience. However, while the Organization certainly meets the criteria on paper, the reality of the participant's experiences demonstrate that an organization's presentation and actual operation can be very different things.

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[6] As the director's focus changed from domestic violence to preventing sex trafficking, The Organization's focus did as well.

Recall the characteristics of an NSM that describe the Organization, including freedom to dialogue, and lack of power imbalances. Much of the frustration that participants expressed seemed to be coming from a misrepresentation of the Organization's identity. Participants believed that the Organization in fact possessed these characteristics and were disappointed to find that it did not. For example, their roles were never clearly defined, and they considered the non-executive director's title to be a misnomer. As Keala said, "[T]he whole Non-Executive Director thing is a farce, there's no such thing." Blurry roles can often lead to this kind of frustration (Kilgore, 1999), and those participants who had personal problems with the director acknowledged that her veto power would have been more palatable if they had known about it from the start. It seemed that the NSM characteristic of fluidity of roles applied to everyone except the director, and it was this exception that made everyone else's role harder to embrace.

While the Organization's structure not being based on roles of participants is useful to the Organization, it was an obstacle for these participants. The 'fluidity' of roles made work frustrating—like Keala's struggle with the zine or Jill's frustration with a lack of time. This is one example of a facet of new social movement structure not working for participants, despite working for the Organization. What is good for the Organization is not always good for the individual. What is interesting is that even though this characteristic "hindered learning" for some women, it was still educational.

They learned what did not work for them and they learned what they needed specifically because they did not receive it.

During meetings that had new volunteers, the director would remind the group that the Organization is a democracy, that everyone is welcome, and that everyone's vote counts. Participants seemed to want to believe that the Organization was a democracy. They offered their own definitions of democracy without a problem, but struggled when the Organization did not meet their own criteria. The women all believed when the director said "We are in a democracy here" and looked for characteristics to support that. Had expectations been set differently, I think the participants would have been more accepting of the director's authority and how, in the end, the Organization was less of a democracy than a monarchy that accepted suggestions.

"Power is a regular reality in our lived experience, yet we seem unable to make much sense of it past a visceral appreciation of its effects or as a sort of Machiavellian practicality" (Wilson, 1999, p. 86). I believe that the power struggles that happened within the Organization, and the ways in which the participants framed those were real and valid. Women entered the Organization because they wanted community, because they struggled with their roles in a patriarchal society. They all agreed that they joined looking for a respite from society—from feeling oppressed, unheard or marginalized. Entering a group looking for solace, only to find in the group the things you were looking to escape, is frustrating and ideal-shattering.

While some aspects of the Organization hurt learning, another aspect of NSMs—focus on intimate issues—helped the women problematize via participation. One volunteer encouraged other volunteers to talk about their own experiences with sexual abuse—helping them link their personal experiences to the causes they were fighting for. (Freire, 1973, p. 81).

The reality of the women's positive experiences is contradictory to Mezirow's assertion that group members must be similar for learning to take place, because in a diverse group "it is often much more difficult to reach the mutual sense of trust necessary to permit intimate self-disclosure. (Mezirow, 1991, p 187). But the Organization did create space, at least for some, where they felt safe enough to disclose information.

What did you learn?

Everyone I talked to considered their participation educational. The question about what and how women learned was answered clearly. The learning that the participants experienced was both factual and skill based. When discussing her experience overall, Gretchen said "First of all, it's very educational." The common thread is that they learned via experience. It was the experience of organizing, of researching, of actually doing, that was most beneficial for them.

Freire and Mezirow were correct in believing that learning in action is an effective way to teach individuals. The director has often said that she hopes her volunteers leave

with not only new skills but with a sense of power—that they can be more effective and more active if they choose. All participants agreed with this, and many volunteers who were not part of this study left the Organization and engaged in other political and social causes. Advocating for sex trafficking victims, lobbying on political campaigns, volunteering at international orphanages, speaking as a voice for children of domestic violence—there is a long list of causes that past and present volunteers have embraced. Many of these women were politically active before joining the Organization, of course, but many others left the Organization with a new found sense of agency, and took that feeling into causes they felt closer to.

Every woman talked about feeling empowered. Participants talked about how the experience of doing, how obtaining the knowledge that they could affect change, changed them. Participants learned new skills—how to lead a group, how to organize an event, how to contact the media. They learned these skills only via doing, as there was no teacher and no handbook although the director has always joked that someone should write one. Regardless of how they viewed the director or the Organization, their involvement made them reevaluate the way that they participate in civic society and politics. For some, their participation increased or was refocused on a certain issue, like sexual assault. For others, they saw new ways to affect change that were more efficient.

The commonality in how the women learned was by doing. Their views were changed gradually, over the course of their participation. The transformation of schemes

which they experienced in the end was the result of varied factors, different for each woman. In Nzinga's case it was through the rough conflict and dissent (also a form of dialogue [Mezirow, 1991]) that she learned of her ability to affect change. For Jill, it was talking to speakers and performers that taught her. This dialogue with women she viewed as more knowledgeable than her helped her to see the feasibility of making change.

The transformational aspect of the participants' learning came mainly from their feelings of empowerment. The meaning schemes that were changed were of the form of "I can't make a difference" or "I don't know how I can help" to a scheme of "I see now what one person can do." Nzinga especially was struck by the power of an individual's actions. The women went from feeling powerless to feeling as though they can create change in an area that is important to them. This transformation of their perspective on their own efficacy is a perfect example of Mezirow's learning.

Their experience was an educational success based on Mezirow's criteria, although measuring the success of participants' learning is difficult and scholars disagree on what results are required for education to be considered successful. Freire (1973, p. 50) argues that only objectively verifiable results can be used to evaluate educational success. For Freire, this means a measurable change in environment or behavior. But, according to Mezirow, a change in action is not necessarily the result of perspective transformation (p. 175). For some of my participants, there were objectively verifiable results, but for others there was no change in behavior.

Several women stated that they were more aware of options for change, opportunities to volunteer, or ways to make things happen, but they did not necessarily have time to take action. Other volunteers continued to stay engaged and volunteer whether with the Organization or with other organizations that were closer to their primary focus. Keala experienced perspective transformation that changed her behavior. She said, "Something huge happened, and it just made me want to get involved with everything that I care about, because I feel like if I get my hands dirty something good might come out of it. I didn't really have that kind of faith in people being able to make a difference before that. . . . And it makes me more engaged in my little community, whatever that might be. And that's the whole point."

In summary, the perspective transformation they experienced had little to do with the structure of the Organization, but their own willingness to examine and dialogue about their preconceptions and ideals. However, the Organization did not necessarily create the safe space that Mezirow insists is crucial for perspective transformation. This is contrary to Frerian ideas of conscientization, as well. Three participants said they did not feel safe to speak, they did not feel heard or feel like their contribution mattered. They felt that the space exhibited a power imbalance and that it was not any safer than other spaces.

Chapter Six—Conclusions & Implications for Further Research

One of the initial goals of this study was to generalize characteristics of an organization in order to facilitate optimal informal civic education experiences for volunteers. However, after completing the interviews, I realized that this was unrealistic because the data showed that it was not the Organization that most affected learning, it was the director.

Participants agreed on the personally transformative value of participation, and on the community benefits of the Organization. But when asked what helped them to learn, or what about the Organization could have been better for learning, there was no commonality. In the end, it seems that participants offered not the ideal characteristics of an organization, but the ideal characteristics of a director. They struggled with separating her actions from the Organization itself. While it is not always possible to separate an organization from its leaders, it is particularly challenging in this case. Because of the Organization's small size and the intimate relationships that developed, the line was blurred between the Organization and its director.

The director is an upper-class lesbian woman who is able to run the Organization in part because she has a trust fund created for her by her family. Her family includes prominent lawyers, judges and property owners, and they currently own a hotel in

Waikiki. The director tries to hide her family history, while at the same time benefitting from it. Her trust fund enables her to work on the Organization full-time and dedicate her energy to an organization that is the only one of its kind on Oahu. For people who want a grassroots activist experience, the Organization is their only option.

This activist monopoly has made conflict with the Organization especially difficult. Volunteers were dedicated to a meaningful cause and stayed in the Organization because they knew that they would have no alternative if they left. Their dedication and lack of options allowed the director to act in ways that probably would not have been tolerated had competing organizations existed.

Simply put, the director's behavior was abusive[7]. Volunteers, as they had more interactions with her, began to realize the ways in which she was abusing her power and her volunteers. The most significant problems volunteers witnessed were the director's romantic involvement with coordinators, and the repercussions of disagreeing with the director.

During the lifetime of the Organization, the director has dated four head coordinators. Some of the women were coordinators first and her partners later, others were promoted after she began dating them. These four coordinators plus several[8] former

[7] This statement comes from many off-the-record conversations with past volunteers who used many words to describe the director, the most common being "abusive."

[8] In addition to the four coordinators, approximately five of the director's former partners have volunteered with The Organization.

partners who volunteered contributed to an us-and-them mentality that a few of the participants, especially Gretchen, discussed. The director, naturally, populated the Organization with people who were old friends and people whom she saw socially outside the Organization. However, attending meetings only to find that everyone was out together last night except a few can feel alienating and cliquish. During conflicts, the director often took the advice of her partner/coordinator over the voice of the majority. Gretchen, especially, was bothered by the director's favoring of her partners, and Nzinga felt so unheard she believed that the director harbors a "bias against heterosexuals."

A sense of exclusion and favoritism was not the only issue that came from the director's involvement with coordinators. During one festival, rumors of escalating partner violence also caused problems. Obviously, a woman working to prevent violence against women is expected to not *commit* violence against women and several stories about very public and very physical altercations between the director and her partner caused many volunteers to reexamine their involvement with the Organization.

Another cause for volunteer concern was watching other volunteers disagree with the director. When the director had a conflict with one of her friends, the conflict was often resolved. However, if the conflict involved someone with whom the director did not socialize, the conflict sometimes ended very poorly. Despite her stated ideal of maintaining equality and openness, the director asked several volunteers to leave the Organization. Like her espousal of democracy but action of autocracy, this volunteer

excommunication is another way in which the director's contradictions and hypocrisy have colored volunteer experiences. The director made an example of a few volunteers in order to demonstrate what happens after conflict that is not resolved to her liking. In one instance, she stripped a coordinator of her title and badge, excluded her from the Organization and actively worked to make her feel unwelcome at even public Organization events. In essence, she created a hostile environment in which she made examples out of a few to foster obligation and obedience in many.

Obligation and obedience only last for a time, and the Organization has lost many volunteers, including a few of my participants, because of the director's behavior. This is also true for my own participation. I joined the Organization looking for community and like-minded women. That is exactly what I found and for two and a half years, I went to every meeting and attended every event. I left the Organization not because I stopped believing in preventing violence against women. I left because I had a conflict with the director and chose my sanity over my activism. I think other participants did the same.

Despite what sounds like a mass exodus of volunteers, the Organization has been able to sustain itself because it has a constant stream of new volunteers in the form of new students at O'ahu colleges and schools. There is always another cohort of students ready to volunteer for a cause that is easy to sell. Of course students want to address partner violence, date rape and campus safety. Students, especially those new to activism, are eager to work and learn for a cause that is important to them. As a result, the

director can afford to lose volunteers because there will always be another group waiting to get involved.

The experience is not all bad, of course. Had I interviewed women who were romantically involved with the director, and women whom the director actually kicked out of the Organization, I suspect I would have gotten even more data on the director's perceived shortcomings and leadership failures. However, I also think that they would have offered a deeper look into the mixed benefit that is the Organization. As was true for me, most of the people who left the Organization did so not because they lost dedication to the cause or decided that the Organization's methods were ineffective. They left because they could not handle the director's abusive behavior or romantic involvement with volunteers. While it is certainly hard to separate the Organization from its leader, participants were quick to acknowledge that the Organization can have a positive impact on the community while having a negative impact on the participants and that participants can have positive educational experiences while also having negative personal experiences.

Although I did not address this specifically with my participants, I think that, for those that had negative experiences, their main problem was disappointment and a shattering of their idealism. For women who live in, like Tuvale says "a shitty, shitty world where men get away with too much," joining the Organization was supposed to give them community, support and a break from that world. Finding that within feminist,

liberal organizations there is still marginalization, “a bias against heterosexuals,” favoring of lovers, and silencing of the minority is disappointing. They discovered that a group of women can behave as badly, if not worse, than a group of men. Are we recreating the external world within the Organization because oppression, biases, and favoritism are not necessarily 'male' qualities, but human qualities, or do we simply re-enact the models that patriarchal society has shown us?

Certainly groups exist with leaders who place themselves in roles that are not dominant or oppressive. Leaders should trust and believe in their volunteers and distrust the “oppressor within themselves” (Freire, 1973, p. 169). From a feminist standpoint, would the “oppressor” in a female leader be a result of experiencing male oppression in society, or the natural instinct within each of us to seek control?

Why are there the same power struggles and unheard voices in a group of people who feel, outside the group, marginalized and unheard? Why is there a reproduction “of the very forms of domination we seek to oppose” (hooks, 1994, p. 78)?

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. Talk about your involvement in the Organization.
    1.1. What years were you involved?
    1.2. To what extent (per year)
        1.2.1. Which festivals did you co-ordinate?
        1.2.2. Which events did you volunteer for?
        1.2.3. Do you (or did you?) identify yourself as a member of the Organization?
2. Overall, how do you feel about this involvement?
    2.1. Do you feel that personal relationships made this more or less positive?
3. What did you learn from this involvement?

    (anything the participants feel is relevant can be included here)
4. What characteristics of the Organization helped you learn?

    (structure, people, activities, delegates, etc.)
5. What aspects of the Organization could have been more conducive to learning?

Theorists have said that within social movements true democracy can be felt.

6. How do you define democracy?
7. Using that definition, have you seen democracy at work here?

8. Looking at the following aspects of democracy, can you share examples of how you have (or have not) seen them in the Organization
    8.1. Everyone is equal
    8.2. There is no sense of a majority/minority relationship
    8.3. It is safe to share opinions/thoughts
    8.4. Everyone's opinion is respected equally
    8.5. Diversity is welcomed and respected
    8.6. Decisions are made by consensus (It is not a dictatorship)
    8.7. Information flows freely within the Organization (There is not a sense of secrecy)
    8.8. Participants feel that operations are fair (aka, there is no abuse of power or position)
9. I'm also looking at civic engagement/civil awareness, what does that mean to you?
10. Has being involved in the Organization made you more civically aware? Civically engaged?
11. Has your political participation increased as a result in participation?

For those out of the Organization

12. When did you leave?

    (abrupt or phase out)
13. Why did you leave?

14. Do you feel that you have more perspective on GF now that you have been gone for a while?
15. Have your opinions on the Organization changed since you left?
16. Has your participation lead to more civic engagement since you've left the Organization?
17. What do you think can make GF better?
18. Do you think GF has remained true to it's purpose?
19. Any preference for a pseudonym?

Quantitative Demographical Questions (for statistical purposes)

1. ethnicity
2. zip code
3. current residence
4. childhood residence
5. parents occupations
6. level of education
7. age

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