Fleeing from fear:

The changing role of refuges in meeting the needs of women leaving violent partners

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Media driven interpretations of fear and risk have failed to notify the general public that the most likely victims of violence are females who are attacked by a male partner. Domestic violence is pervasive throughout virtually all cultures, occurring across all social classes, all ethnic groups, and all age groups. Yet the true extent of domestic violence is generally agreed to be unknown. Domestic violence is a private fear and as is shown within this paper the search for sanctuary spaces that are offered by refuges is an important component in the acquisition of safe places. However, this paper examines how the 'professionalisation' of some refuges as well as other processes of institutionalisation may have had a negative impact upon the victims of abuse and violence.

Introduction

In the public mind, the geographies of fear centre on the street and on the fear of strangers (Pain, 1997, Valentine, 2001). It is a gendered fear which, despite evidence suggesting that the most likely victims of public violence are young men, focuses on the perceived dangers facing women. It is a fear continually reinforced by the media and through education in the home and at school (Valentine 1996). And yet, as researchers such as Pain and Valentine have argued, statistics show the most common place of violence to be the home, with the perpetrator most likely to be a male known to the (female) victim.

Domestic violence[1] is pervasive throughout virtually all cultures (Heise et al., 1994), occurring across all social classes, all ethnic groups, and all age groups (Hall, 1998). It is the most common violent crime against women in England

and Wales: in any given year approximately one in nine or ten women experiences domestic violence (Stanko et al, 1998), whilst on average two women a week are killed by partners (Stanko, 2000). A survey carried out on 28th September 2000, aiming to provide a snapshot of the impact of domestic violence across the United Kingdom, found that police received a call from the public for assistance with domestic violence every minute (Stanko, 2000). The true extent of domestic violence is generally agreed to be unknown (Mooney, 2000), but such statistics as are available indicate that thousands of women are living in fear, sometimes of their lives.

The fear experienced by women and children whose homes are the sites of male violence is not something that is constructed through media representations, but through the lived experience of their everyday lives. It is a private fear, often not shared even with family or friends, partly because of shame, and partly because of the fear that family or friends might intervene and make the situation worse (Warrington, 2001). Yet although violence occurs within the spaces of the home, and although it is common for women not to talk about such experiences, the fear itself extends through time and space so that even when a woman takes the decision to leave a violent relationship, and move some distance away, the fear never leaves her (Binney et al, 1981, Kirkwood, 1993).

Many women live for years in abusive situations, unable to leave for economic reasons, through a sense of failure, through fear that their violent partner will find them and punish them if they leave, or even through the belief that the violence will stop. Sometimes, however, the fear of further violence, or an extremely violent episode forces women to leave their homes, sometimes just for a few days, sometimes permanently. Some women move in with families or friends, but often these cannot provide safety in the face of women's fear, and so many women each year turn to refuges to meet that need for secure space. Refuges are places where women can feel safe, where fear can be lessened, and where they are empowered to take control of their lives.

Refuges, however, have been changing and evolving, and in this paper, I shall attempt to assess those changes in the light of concerns raised by some authors who imply that the fundamental principles on which refuges were set up are being compromised in the bid for competitive funding, and that this is leading to a new style of refuges, which may be less effective in meeting the needs of those women for whom

Table 1: Background information on interviewees

Name / approx age	Time in refuge movement	Initial involvement	Evolution of feminist thinking/current philosophy
Jenny	26 years (50s)	Labour Party member—volunteer in project to commemorate International Women's Year.	Very committed to feminist principles of collective working in early days—involved in marches, protests—now more constrained by management committee, 'but the fire hasn't gone'.
Mary (60s)	25 years	Worked with domestic violence among travellers then became involved as a volunteer in local refuge movement.	Initially found the women's movement 'too middle class', but then involved in local women's group and took on radical feminist ideas. Became disillusioned with the narrowness of women's movement, but still nostalgic for what it stood for.
Liz (60s)	24 years	Labour Party member—awareness raised through publicity by Erin Pizzey—became a volunteer.	Initially interested in equal opportunities; gradual involvement in feminism through refuge work—never radical. Some re-thinking of position—became less idealistic and more pragmatic.
Jane (50s)	23 years	Through Women's Liberation Movement.	Member of a feminist women's group 1970s—committed to putting feminist ideas into practice. Core philosophy still one of empowerment for women.
Emma (40s)	16 years	Originally a refuge resident—returned as a worker.	Didn't define herself as a feminist: 'I do it because I've been there and I care'.
Helen (40s)	16 years	Applied for job of deputy manager.	Described herself as a feminist, committed to women's empowerment, but 'not anti-men'.
Cathy (50s)	10 years	Was a social worker—asked to sort out management of refuge & stayed.	Overall philosophy of feminism, believing all women are oppressed, but 'not the rampant feminism of Women's Lib'.
Linda (40s)	7 years	Through Labour Party councillor friend.	Didn't define herself as a feminist, but as a volunteer seeking to meet a need.
Karen (40s)	3 years	Applied for job of refuge outreach worker.	Said roots were in 1970s feminism, but described herself as a '1990s feminist', concerned with equal opportunities.
Rosemary (40s)	2 years	Worked in social services—applied for refuge manager job.	Described herself as a feminist wanting equal rights, but distanced herself from radical feminism.

they are a lifeline. The paper draws on empirical research carried out in twelve of the fifteen refuges across the Women's Aid Federation's East Anglia region of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire. All but one of the refuges were linked to the Women's Aid Federation, and at least one day was spent in each refuge, talking to workers, early activists and residents.[2] The words of ten of the sixteen refuge workers I interviewed are used in the discussion that follows, and some information about these women is provided in Table 1. The first section of the paper outlines fairly briefly the emergence and evolution of the refuge movement over the last twenty-five years or so, discussing its characteristics in the early stages, and identifying some of the positive changes that have occurred. The implications of change need to be examined, however, and the next section of the paper moves on to the central question of whether a social movement based on feminist principles, which led to the first refuges being established, is becoming a social service controlled by the state. The paper concludes by assessing the impact of change on the type of service provided for women whose fear forces them to leave their homes.

The emergence and evolution of the refuge movement

Back to the 70s
It was early in the 1970s that the reality of women's fear was recognised, and domestic violence, which for so long had lain hidden and unacknowledged, hit the headlines for the first time and refuges began to be set up. The early history of the refuge movement in Britain is well-documented by authors like Dobash and Dobash (1992) and Weir (1977), and so discussion here will be brief, but two key points emerge from this literature. Firstly, after the first refuge opened in Chiswick in 1972, the growth in the number of refuges was very rapid, so that by 1975 there were twenty-five refuges and eighty-two support groups across the country (Rose, 1978). As Hanmer and Leonard (1984: 36) comment, 'It took four years from 1971 to 1975 to bring violence to women out of the shadows and turn it from a private sorrow into a public issue'. Secondly, as Weir (1977) points out, it is difficult to explain the very rapid public acknowledgement of problems and the setting up of new refuges, except in terms of the sensitizing influence of the Women's Liberation

Movement on public opinion, and the infrastructure of women's groups and individual women eager to help other women. Thus a number of authors situate the refuge movement within the context of a social movement. Dobash and Dobash (1988: 52), for example, describe the way in which the Chiswick women's movement exploded into a social movement of national and later international proportions 'with the accompanying struggles for recognition, splits, alliances and metamorphoses that characterise all dynamic social movements'. Rose (1978) similarly characterises the early refuges as the first wave of what was to become a social movement, and Lupton (1994) suggests that British refuges

Table 2: Early Refuges in East Anglia

Location	Date opened	Origins	Type of accommodation
Bury St Edmunds	1974	Labour party activists	Large local authority house awaiting demolition
Norwich	1974	N/a	Small local authority house —very poor condition
Peter-borough	1975	Social workers on maternity leave	3 bedroom local authority house—poor state of repair
Chelmsford	1976	Labour party activists	3 bedroom short-life local authority house
Great Yarmouth	1976	Labour party activist and chair of women's group	Local authority purpose-built house
Ipswich	1976	Labour party activists	6 bedroom local authority house awaiting demolition
Southend -on-Sea	1976	'Practical feminists' with links to Women's Movement	3 bedroom local authority house
Basildon	1977	Local women's group	Short-life 3 bedroom house (owned by the Commission for New Towns)
Cambridge	1977	Women's Liberation Movement— university-based	Privately-owned by 2 of the initial activists.
Colchester	1977	University-based Women's Liberation Group + Labour Party activists formed Women's Information Service	2 linked Victorian cottages provided by the local authority
Harlow	1977	Harlow Council for Voluntary Services + local women's groups	8 bedroom local authority house

are typically identified as an enduring example of the radical social movement model.

The emergence of the refuge movement in Britain in the early 1970s has therefore been closely linked to a revitalised women's movement (Binney, 1981: Clifton 1985), and the development of refuges in East Anglia mirrored what was occurring across the country as a whole: the eleven refuges that opened in the region in the 1970s (Table 2) have similar histories, with groups of local women recognising a need and campaigning for a refuge. Within the broad context of the women's movement, however, there were several strands evident among the initiators of the East Anglian refuges, and it is interesting to find a range of women involved: two groups, for example, had strong links with women's groups in local universities, whilst another woman, Mary[3], described her group as 'practical feminists who wanted to roll their sleeves up' (see Table 1).

As in other areas (Weir, 1977), several of the initiators of East Anglia's refuges had strong links with local Labour politics. As noted by one respondent (Liz):

> I would say that those of us who started off were more of a leftish type—Labour Party stuff, where you wouldn't see it in terms of sex, but much more in terms of certain sectors of society being oppressed and disadvantaged, and being able to help regardless of sex. [Liz].

Raising awareness was a key issue in the early days, and activists often had to prove to local authorities that domestic violence existed in their areas, by setting up a helpline and gathering evidence from various voluntary organizations. The women then lobbied local councillors for a refuge, which would usually be a small, short-life local authority house with poor facilities and secondhand furniture (Table 2).

Accommodation was frequently crowded, with two or more families sharing bedrooms, and sometimes women and children sleeping in communal areas (see also Barr and Carrier, 1978 and Binney *et al.*, 1981). All of the refuges ran on a shoestring and depended on local fund-raising activities such as street collections, jumble sales and market stalls, with highly committed volunteer labour working long and unsociable hours. One activist (Mary) described how she worked as a volunteer in addition to doing a full-time job, going to the refuge in her lunch hours and in the evenings,

and even pretending she was ill and taking afternoons off work to put in more hours at the refuge. These early workers were, however, unencumbered by the bureaucratic rules, policies and practices of traditional helping institutions, with no outside experts or professionals directing or interfering in their work (Dobash and Dobash, 1979).

Dobash and Dobash (1992) identify three goals within the refuge movement: of assisting victims, of challenging male violence and of changing women's position in society, and in the early days tactics to bring about these goals encompassed marches, rallies, squatting, lobbying, negotiating with local agencies and disseminating information. My conversations with early activists suggest that five out of six identified with these goals (including Liz, Jenny, Jane and Mary—see Table 1), and engaged at a national and local level in direct action to challenge violence against women, as well as lobbying for refuges. One group, for example, protested outside a local cinema against a film that portrayed violence against women in a favourable light. All but one of the women who had been involved in the early stages described themselves as feminists, and from the beginning refuges were seen as operating by women, for women: men were excluded because of the argument that abused women needed an environment in which dependence on men is challenged, not re-created (Hoff, 1990). The women tried to put the principles of the women's movement into practice on a day-to-day basis (Pahl, 1985), and refuges were run on collective, non-hierarchical lines, with an open door policy and workers and residents sharing equally in decision-making through weekly or daily house meetings (see also Pahl 1978). The core philosophy was one of empowerment, of enabling women to see they had choices in their lives, and supporting them in making those choices: it was a form of organisation which involved developing an alliance with women who were worse off than themselves, rather than a traditional charitable relationship in which the person helped feels beholden to the helper.

A growing professionalisation
There have been many changes during the quarter of a century or so since refuges first opened, and most now provide a range of services besides shelter, for women whose fear provokes them to leave a violent relationship. In many instances various professionals such as health visitors,

solicitors, housing officers or social workers hold regular sessions at the refuges. In a few refuges an outreach service has been started, giving advice to women in the community who are experiencing violence; some refuges offer activities such as assertiveness training to residents, and one has set up employment and training links with local colleges. Almost all refuges have at least one child worker who provides sessions for pre-school and after-school children, and activities and outings during school holidays.

Over time, physical conditions in the East Anglian refuges have improved and accommodation is no longer squalid and over-crowded. Families no longer share bedrooms, and in some refuges families have their own cooking facilities and sometimes the exclusive use of a shower and toilet. Most refuges have playrooms, communal areas, a garden and often a laundry. Although some of the refuges appear dingy and scruffy, standards are generally high, and workers in four refuges spoke strongly of the importance of providing good quality accommodation and furnishings, arguing that sub-standard accommodation reinforced residents' feelings of low self worth. The standard of accommodation in the East Anglia region has clearly improved over time[4], partly as the service provided by refuges has become more widely recognised, and partly as a result of a tightening up of environmental health and safety legislation. Although there was only one completely purpose-built refuge, several others had been adapted to specifications laid down by the refuge group, and virtually all had extended or moved into their current buildings within the last decade (although the first refuge building in Ipswich was still occupied, despite being earmarked for demolition in 1976!).

It is not only conditions for residents that have improved: most refuges now have proper office space and equipment, and although there are still volunteers, only two of the refuges in East Anglia had no paid workers at the time of the research. The need to employ paid workers became apparent very quickly, because of the overwhelming demand on refuges and the recognition that women needed not only shelter but, as one worker described it, 'a deeper service' and more consistent support. All workers now undergo some form of training, and some have professional qualifications, and partly because of this, they are recognised by the statutory sector as performing a valuable service and their opinion is sought in discussions concerning domestic violence:

> We have a professional image that we didn't have before. We're most definitely taken more seriously. When we first started we were often viewed as a load of radical knicker-waving feminists, and people were very sceptical. (Respondent Jenny)

In general refuges work much more closely with other agencies than previously, with workers taking part in multi-agency forums, and some helping with police training on domestic violence.

From social movement to social service?
At one level these changes in the range of services, in conditions for workers and residents, and in relationships between refuges and other agencies, can be viewed as positive, and several workers viewed this as so:

> In 22 years we have changed dramatically, but I would say definitely for the best. I think that our kudos out there, and our image and reputation are vastly improved. Other agencies want a figurehead: they want someone they can ask for and deal with. I think we have come a long, long way. (Respondent Jenny)

But despite these improvements, a more critical lens needs to be applied, since the general shift towards professionalisation can have negative implications for the type of service that is provided to women who seek refuge from domestic violence.

Two decades ago, Ferraro (1981) pointed out that shelters in the United States[5] were increasingly operated by professionals with advanced degrees, who did not define themselves as feminists. Founder members had resigned as the service became more professionalised, and there was greater involvement by men. Programmes were structured round a traditional hierarchy of authority, with residents seen as inadequate, and therefore not involved in the operation of the shelters. Funding organisations had a therapeutic orientation, and shelters were expected to conform to a treatment perspective, with counselling and compulsory treatment plans as a central part of shelter life. Similar concerns have been raised by Schechter (1988), who argues that while government funding has brought advantages to shelters, important principles have been undermined as

shelters are increasingly controlled by social service agencies in which feminism plays no part and domestic violence is redefined as a mental health issue. Shelter staff have become more specialised, and have tended to lose touch with the feminist roots of the movement, as the vision is lost through the need to get money to maintain the service.

Other authors have expressed concern about refuges in Britain. Rose (1985: 252), for example, comments on the way in which some local authority support grants have been conditional upon a clear management structure, so that 'the political price of securing even this modest funding appears constantly to threaten the socially innovatory practice the movement is trying to develop'. Lupton (1994), pointing to the trends which have occurred in the United States, argues that the price of financial survival can be high. She highlights two key problems: firstly she argues that greater competition for funding and an enhanced degree of political control over the terms and conditions of funding, may force refuges towards more traditional, masculinist methods and practices. Secondly, as in the United States, she believes that the general backlash against feminism during the 1980s has led to a renewed dominance on individuality and gender-neutral explanations of domestic violence.

It is pertinent, therefore, in the light of the issues raised by these authors, to examine in more depth the implications of the shift to a more professional approach noted above in the East Anglian context, and to question the extent to which refuges have become simply a social service designed to meet the need for shelter, support and professional advice, or whether they continue to represent an aspect of the political struggle to end violence against women. In order to address this issue, I have taken the Weberian notion of an 'ideal type', and attempted as a starting point, to identify what might constitute an 'ideal type' of both a social movement and a social service in the context of refuges, and then to analyse the position of the East Anglian refuges within this typology. An ideal-type social movement can be defined in Painter's (1995) terms as a group of people acting collectively in opposition to the state in pursuit of shared goals which include, or require, social and/or political change; it operates in areas where the state appears to be absent by providing services not funded or organised by the state. At the other end of the scale, a social service is seen as operating within the formal political arena, with a need being

Table 3: Suggested characteristics of 'Social Movement' and 'Social Service' models of Refuges

Area of activity	Social movement model	Social service model
Refuge provision	Grassroots, small-scale, local, place-specific	Statutory, planned, spatially even distribution.
Revenue funding	Short-term, irregular, dependent on variety of funding sources, especially fund-raising.	Regular, reliable state funding for basic service.
Organisation / Structure	Collective, non-hierarchical, emphasis on volunteers, autonomous	Traditional hierarchy, professionally qualified staff. Management committee
Access to refuge	Open door policy	Referral policy
Ethos	Feminist. Empowerment, mutual support	Professional / therapeutic
Key Goals	Transformation of society	Meeting social needs. Non-reformist
Style	Direct action, protest, lobbying	Formal, official

defined and accepted, and provision made and funded through statutory agencies.

In practice, of course, ideal types are always partial, but they are useful for providing 'yardsticks by means of which empirical reality can be rendered accessible to analysis' (Saunders, 1986: 31). In the case of refuges, the characteristics attributed to each ideal type are posited in Table 3, and I would argue that when the first refuges were established in the 1970s, most bore the characteristics outlined in column 2, as described earlier in this paper. The issue to be addressed is the extent to which there has been a shift towards the characteristics identified in column 3 since the mid-1970s: in other words, has a social movement mutated into a social service?

Refuge provision and funding
In terms of refuge provision, after the initial flurry of activity in the 1970s, there was a gap of fifteen years before another refuge opened in East Anglia in 1992, followed by four more refuges at the end of that decade. Only one (opened in 1998) was initiated and funded through the statutory sector, and this for pragmatic reasons rather than as a result of a coherent

policy of refuge provision. The opening of the other four
1990s refuges followed a pattern not dissimilar to that
experienced two decades earlier, with groups of women
campaigning at grassroots level. Yet despite all the years of
publicity and the apparent recognition of the existence of
domestic violence, these groups of women still have to battle
against local councillors who do not believe there is a need
for a refuge in their area. In one area, planning permission
for a refuge was only obtained when the phrase 'respite care
for families in crisis' was used instead of the word 'refuge'.

Not only is there still the need to counteract such
ignorance, there are also seemingly endless levels of bureau-
cracy to penetrate and many different groups of actors to
take into account as both statutory involvement and control
increase. In the early 1970s, activists dealt mainly with one
organisation—their local housing authority; recent activists,
on the other hand, have found themselves involved with
representatives from the local housing authority, housing
associations, social services, the police and other voluntary
organisations. The problem is, as Linda explained, that

> We just seem to crack it with one particular agency and
> that person gets posted, so you're back to square one
> again. You can certainly see highs and lows correlate with
> who's been in charge and whether they've been supportive
> of our aim or not, or whether they've just come along to
> a meeting because they've been told to. It's incredibly
> frustrating. It takes a lot to keep going when you just
> seem to be hitting brick wall after brick wall.

In this area, once a refuge was opened, it was not considered
appropriate for the volunteers who had initiated the setting
up of the refuge, raised money and operated a helpline, to
be further involved, and certainly not to be employed as
workers. Thus, unlike earlier activists, they were prevented
from playing a part once their campaigning bore fruit.

Beyond an initial capital outlay for the provision of a
building, ongoing revenue funding is needed to cover day-
to-day running costs. Refuges have, throughout their history,
struggled to make ends meet, although there is now, thanks
to persistent campaigning through Women's Aid, a greater
acceptance by statutory bodies that domestic violence is an
issue, and that refuges play an essential role in meeting the
needs of those fleeing from fear. As a result, local authorities

are generally more willing to take some responsibility and provide some level of funding and support for refuges in their areas. At present all revenue funding is on a short-term basis, however, and there is considerable variation in local authority support from place to place. In Essex, all local authorities contribute to a central pool, and the money is allocated to the refuges according to size, while across Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk, there is much more variation in the level of grants, depending on the priorities of the local authorities. The district authority in which the refuge is located tends to provide some core funding for staff, but no refuge takes in women just from the local area, and support from neighbouring authorities is often minimal. Taking figures published by eight of the East Anglian refuges, the proportion of income from local authority grants ranged from 37% to 65%. Furthermore, grant aid can be unreliable and income remains as insecure as ever, with the constant fear of cuts in grants from the statutory sector and the continuous need to seek out and exploit new sources of money. Several refuges told of grant cuts in recent years, with one only able to staff the refuge on a part-time basis as a result:

> We need more money. We're not offering the service as we want to, but there is no more money. We just have to fight for every penny we can get basically. We only get paid part-time, but a lot of us do far more (Respondent Emma).

In another instance, a grant from Social Services was withheld for two years because the refuge refused to work as the Social Services Department dictated. Even where grants are relatively generous, all refuges are under-funded (Frayne and Muir, 1999), and fundraising is essential not just for 'extras' but often for basic necessities such as furniture. The style of fundraising has changed over time, with less emphasis now on small-scale local events, but more time than ever before is spent on researching possible funding sources and preparing applications for grants from national charities such as Children in Need and Comic Relief. Preparing grant applications not only takes time, but also may be unsuccessful, leaving valuable projects unfunded. Little feedback is given if an application is turned down, and unless there are staff who have skills in this area, the refuge may be

disadvantaged in the competition for adequate funding. In one sense, resources are needed to create more resources, and few refuges had the staffing capacity to exploit all available avenues. Over the last few years the national lottery has become a significant source of money, and only a few refuges had resisted the pressure to apply for lottery funding. The question of how much refuges have had to compromise on their fundamental principles in order to secure funding is a pertinent one, and two interviewees said they had lost out on funding by refusing to do so. Rather than actual compromise, some saw the process of acquiring funds as playing the game:

> It's a typical voluntary sector set up: you can't always get the money for what you want so you have to bend yourself a little bit to be what they're offering the money for, and hope that a core of that will be something that you can actually use to do what you've set yourself up to do (Respondent Jane).

Organisation, structure and access

As far as organisation is concerned, the introduction of paid workers saw a shift away from collective practices. At the time of the interviews, one refuge did still run as a collective comprising workers, residents and a small group of elected volunteer supporters; all the workers were equal on paper, with the same salary, though in practice residents rarely exercised their right to attend meetings of the collective. Another refuge claimed to run on collective lines, with no-one in charge and decisions taken at a weekly meeting of workers, though residents were not involved in decision-making. The other refuges however had found it too difficult or inappropriate to maintain a collective structure, partly because funding bodies expected someone to be in charge, and partly because, in practice, it is difficult to involve residents in real decision-making (Clifton, 1985; Hoff 1990; Pahl, 1985). Although almost all refuges had continued the tradition of daily or weekly house meetings at which workers and residents met together to iron out difficulties and to talk about matters of mutual concern, in practice policy and refuge rules tended to be formulated by the management.

Refuges have generally evolved over time into a more hierarchical structure: in several long-established refuges

the first person to become a paid worker had become the refuge manager, director or senior worker, with overall responsibility for the day-to-day running of the refuge. Nevertheless, in all the refuges I visited there was an emphasis on shared decision-making, on working together as equal members of a team, and nowhere was there any evidence of conventional hierarchical organisation. However, as refuges become larger and more professionalised, there *is* a growing division of labour, with an increasing tendency for managers to become more divorced from day-to-day activities and from contact with residents, and to spend their time on administration, grant applications and so on, which is something most managers clearly regretted.

It is also true that some refuges have less autonomy now. For example, in one instance where the refuge had been transferred from the local authority to a housing association as landlord, the housing association operated a system which was described as increasingly authoritarian and bureaucratic, strictly monitoring the refuge to make sure that the rent was collected on time, and that the service charge it imposed was also collected. Another way in which autonomy is reduced is through the growth of formal management committees, which have become the norm. Usually these are composed of representatives of funding bodies and the local community, and whilst sometimes they were said to be extremely supportive, refuge workers often felt that committee members were disinterested in the work of the refuge, or had only become members for reasons of career advancement. Although most refuges had an arm's length relationship with their committee, in one instance the committee had been exceedingly interventionist, to the point of withdrawing the refuge from membership of the National Federation of Women's Aid (because it was felt to be too radical) and even interfering in the day-to-day running of the refuge.

The establishment of formal management structures has also led to men being involved on committees, a situation which would have been almost unheard of a decade or so ago. Although some men were involved in early campaigns, refuges quickly became women-only spaces, following the separatist belief espoused by the radical feminist stance of the National Federation, which disallowed membership of any refuge group where men were involved in any capacity. This led, as Liz recalled, to many practical difficulties, such as the impossibility of finding a female plumber! Whilst some

refuge workers still adhere to the belief that, as the source of women's oppression, no men should be allowed inside the refuge, several interviewees were clearly uncomfortable with this, arguing in particular that children living in refuges need non-violent male role models.

Relationships with outside agencies can mean some conflicts of interest, too. As refuges become more integrated into multi-agency initiatives on domestic violence, differences in philosophy, as Hague (1997) points out, can sometimes result in refuge groups often being marginalised and pushed aside within inter-agency projects.

In terms of access, the refuges I visited were invariably full, and some had to turn away large numbers of women and children each year, though most said they still operated an open door policy, taking in any woman who needed help, if space was available, and one refuge only accepted women who came to them direct, rather than through a referral agency. The others increasingly accepted women referred by the police, housing authorities, social services, other refuges or through centralised helplines, and three refuges only took women from these agencies. The proportions from each source varied considerably, depending on local links: some took more referrals from local authority homelessness officers, whereas others took a high proportion of police referrals. A few workers felt that there was a tendency for them to be used as a 'dumping ground' for women with mental health problems, and they had therefore learnt to ask a number of questions of the agencies concerned before agreeing to accept someone.

Ethos, goals and style

As discussed earlier, the emergence of the refuge movement in Britain was strongly associated with the women's movement, and early refuges were invariably structured around feminist principles. It is probably true to say that there is much greater diversity now. Workers in two refuges explicitly rejected the adjective 'feminist' in describing their approach, with one believing they would never get support from statutory and voluntary bodies in their town had they taken 'a feminist line'. In two others there was a clear denial of a feminist explanation of male violence as part of a wider system of male power and control within society (Bograd, 1988; Yllö, 1993), and more of an emphasis, as Binney (1981)

puts it, on disturbed individuals needing help. In most refuges, however, there was some commitment to feminist thinking, although some of the workers were ambivalent about whether they were feminists or not, clearly wanting to distance themselves from 'extreme' positions, and taking a more liberal feminist view. For example,

> I'm not a feminist where, you know, some extreme feminists, they hate men, don't they? I'm not like that. I believe everyone should have equal opportunities and they should have the support they need to take advantage of those opportunities. If that makes me a feminist, then yes I am. But I'm not a shaven-headed, dungaree-wearing, banner-waving feminist (Respondent Rosemary).

It was clear in talking to refuge workers that their feminism had evolved. Some groups that been closely associated with radical feminism in the past said that there was less discussion of such issues now, although the influence of feminist thinking was still strong. Others talked of being 1990s feminists:

> We're realistic feminists. We've still got our roots based in the 1970s, but we've evolved, which is good: it's a growing, progressive position (Respondent Karen).

These links to feminism are apparent in the commitment, as some women explained, to do more than apply sticking plaster to the problem of domestic violence. Workers talked frequently in the interviews about empowerment and choice, and some also saw campaigning at a wider level as essential. All but one of the refuges I visited also strongly supported the campaigns waged by the national Women's Aid Federation, but whereas older refuge workers said they would not have hesitated to take to the streets at one time, the need to ensure credibility in the eyes of grant-givers and statutory authorities would prevent them from doing so now. One refuge had recently refused money from a university rag collection because the rag magazine was full, they said, of sick chauvinist jokes, but although they had wanted to make this gesture of refusal high profile, their management committee had put pressure on them to back down, which they agreed to do on the basis that they could not afford to jeopardise local authority funding by appearing to be too radical. Nevertheless, workers do constantly challenge other

agencies—police who refuse to take women seriously, housing departments who try to fob women off with poor quality housing or move them on to temporary, rather than permanent accommodation, schools who are reluctant to take children from refuges, health centres unwilling to treat women in refuges, solicitors who try and tell women what they should do, or NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) neighbours who express antipathy towards the women living next door to them and so on.

The views on feminism expressed by the refuge workers are in some respects a reflection of the generation to which they belong, as well as changes both within the theory and practice of feminism itself, and within the broader cultural and political climate of Britain. Segal (1999) suggests that it is possible to discern the successive dominance of three distinct styles and viewpoints in the three decades of second-wave feminism. Firstly, the 1970s emphasised women's shared needs, with struggles to end gender inequalities and cultural subordination. This turned during the 1980s into a prioritizing of women's distinct 'difference', alongside recognition of the multiple differences between women. Then, in the 1990s, feminist theory found a home in the post-structuralist academy. From the 1980s onwards, divisions within feminism became more entrenched. Furthermore, the links between the theory and practice of feminism became considerably weaker: 'Women's Liberation in its heyday was a theory and practice of social transformation, full of all the embroiled and messy actions, hostilities and compromises of collective political engagement' (Segal, 1999:15). By the 1990s, Segal argues, feminist theory had shifted from broadly social concerns to the more abstractly cultural, with intellectual feminism more concerned with 'reading' the representations of women in culture and its texts and artifacts, rather than involvement in oppositional politics.

There has, too, been a popular backlash against feminism, which as Oakley and Mitchell (1998) point out, is as much against the threat of a change as it is a marker of transformations actually accomplished. The term 'post-feminism' is often used, implying, as these authors suggest, that feminism is a passé label and that everything women could reasonably want has already been accomplished. Indeed, feminism is often blamed in the media for disempowering men, leading for calls for 'men's rights', or, at a more extreme level, the return to the basic values of patriarchal social structures

and traditional sexual relations (Lingard and Douglas, 1999). The critique against radical feminism pursued by the media in the 1980s and 1990s, can be used to explain the way in which some of the interviewees (for example, Cathy, Rosemary and Karen) were keen to distance themselves from the more extreme manifestations that caricature feminist practice. There was also evidence in the interviews of a more inclusive 'new' popular feminism described by journalist Natasha Walter (1998, 1999), celebrating feminism's many achievements, while still acknowledging there was some way to go towards a more equal society.

Not only has feminism itself, and the cultural environment in which it operates changed, but also the political climate, and so it is not simply the dislocation between the theory and practice of feminism that has led to a reduced emphasis on collective political engagement.. The 1970s were a time of political upheaval, where the refuge movement was only one of a diversity of 'new' social movements which emerged in opposition to formal political structures (Dalton and Kuechler, 1990). It was a period of intensity, excitement and 'restless energy' (Brownmiller, 2000), of planned protests and direct action, in which early refuge workers played their part. There are dimensions of the political environment that discourage or encourage people to use collective action (Tarrow, 1998), and the political climate of the 1980s was 'harsh and unyielding' (Segal, 1999), where trying to pursue goals requiring a more egalitarian and caring world came up against a ferocious political opponent. Thus, as Segal explains, the frustrations and defeats of the 1980s gradually exhausted not only the political hopes, but also even the dreams of many. It is also true, however, that social movements themselves can become incorporated into formal politics: the Women's Aid Federation, which, as noted above, provides the focus for campaigns supported by many refuge workers, now works closely with government, and is an important partner in the consultation and drafting of new legislation on domestic violence. As Freedman (2002) points out, formal politics have had to take account of once-private issues such as domestic violence and abortion, and so the line between legitimate force and unacceptable violence has slowly, but perceptibly shifted, not only in terms of the law, but within contemporary society as a whole.

A changing model?

On the basis of empirical work carried out in East Anglia, and within a context of changes within the feminist movement and its cultural and political context, there does seem to have been some shift from a social movement model towards a social service model, with elements of both currently identifiable in an intermediate model. As Table 4 shows, at present, the social movement model is still most apparent in terms of refuge provision and funding, where the provision of new refuges still mainly relies on small-scale, place-specific grassroots activity, and refuges are still dependent to a greater or lesser extent on a variety of short-term funding sources and charitable donations. The shift towards

Table 4: The current model of refuge activity in East Anglia
[based on research undertaken in refuges in WAFE's East Anglia region 1999]

Area	Social movement model	Intermediate model	Social service model
Refuge provision	Grassroots, small-scale, local, place-specific	More statutory control, involvement and bureaucracy.	
Revenue funding	Short-term, dependent on variety of funding sources, especially fund-raising.	Some reliable core funding, though considerable spatial variation	
Organisation / Structure		Emphasis on equality within a team. Some shared decision-making.	Professionally qualified staff. Management committee
Access to refuge		Most referrals by statutory organisations	
Ethos	Empowerment, mutual support	Feminist ethos less explicit. More professionalised.	Professional/ therapeutic
Key Goals		Raising awareness of domestic violence	Meeting a social need.
Style		Campaigning through national body (WAFE)	Formal, official

a social service model is more evident in terms of the organi-
sation and goals of refuges, with a move away from collective,
non-hierarchical structures towards a more professionalised
model, with trained staff and management committees,
although there is still an emphasis on equality within a team
and often some shared decision-making. There is still, too,
a commitment to the concept of empowerment, but a feminist
ethos is now much less explicit, and sometimes rejected,
and there is some movement towards a professional thera-
peutic model, with greater involvement of counsellors and
social workers. Recognition that domestic violence serves
to create and maintain the imbalance of power within society
(Adams, 1988) was a fundamental part of the philosophy of
most of the early refuges, and the overt goal was the transfor-
mation of society. This no longer appears to be explicit in
the groups studied, with goals most usually seen in terms of
raising awareness of domestic violence locally and providing
shelter to meet a social need. There appears to be no direct
action or protest, although local groups do challenge some
statutory practice, and register complaints through formal
channels; they also add support to the national Women's Aid
Federation.

A further change is under way, however, which could lead
to a much greater shift in all areas of refuge activity, and
have considerable effects on those women seeking shelter
from domestic violence. In April 2003 new funding arrange-
ments for refuges are due to be implemented under the
government's Supporting People programme. This aims to
promote housing related support services 'which are both
cost effective, robustly funded and planned using a co-
coordinated approach' (DETR, 2001: 8), and thus will shift
the provision and funding aspects of the typology firmly into
the social service category. There are certainly positive aspects
to this change, since for the first time there will be a coherent
system of statutory funding for refuges which will be the
same across all local authority areas. That does not mean,
however, that all refuges will be funded at similar levels:
because the new system will be run on a local authority
basis, and will encompass a whole variety of user groups
such as people with learning difficulties or longterm mental
health problems, people leaving prison, and so on, it will be
up to local authorities to determine priorities in allocating
the pot of money. It seems quite possible that some refuges
could actually be worse off than at present.

Assessing the impact of change

If changes have taken place in the way in which refuges are
run and funded, and if more changes are afoot, there needs
to be an assessment of the implications for women whose
fear forces them to move to a refuge as the only safe place
available. If the service is to be better funded over all, if
refuges are less isolated and more integrated into decision-
making structures, and if the government and more people
in general take the issue of domestic violence seriously, does
it matter whether shelter is provided by professional social
service agencies or that refuges are structured around a
feminist ethos? I would argue that it does, because of the
type of service provided. While both social service providers
and refuges act in the short-term to provide shelter and access
to help and support, the ideology of women's refuges stands
in marked contrast to that of social work departments (Smith,
1989). The crucial difference is that in refuges linked to
Women's Aid, help comes through empowerment:

> I think it's very important that women see what their
> choices are, and whatever those choices are, we will
> support them, even if we won't always agree with the
> choices they make. We don't judge women; we're here to
> enable them. [Rosemary]
> We work to empower women, to help them change things
> for themselves. [Helen]
> We work by an empowerment philosophy, based on
> feminism because we recognise here that all women are
> oppressed. Women here are far more oppressed than we
> are, and we need to stand alongside them, providing them
> with the information to be able to regain the sense of
> where they are, and to help them get the best out of their
> lives. [Cathy]

For Kirkwood (1993) it is the erosion of women's power
that binds them into a web of abuse leading to loss of self-
esteem and identity; empowerment is therefore the power to
overcome the restriction of freedom created by patriarchal
culture. Thus the type of service provided within the current
refuge system is structured around self-help and mutual
support: women are seen as active rather than passive, they
are fully involved in decision-making and their autonomy is
central. Linked to this is the fact that refuges which have

developed from a feminist base exclude male workers, because it is felt that abused women need an environment in which dependence on men is challenged, rather than being re-created.

Probably the most important function of refuges is the provision of space where women's fear can recede into the background, allowing them to share experiences and gain support from other women. As one resident explained:

> Everyone's been through a similar situation. They understand more. Most people who haven't actually been through it, they can't understand why you've put up with it, why you got into that situation. You get more real friendship here because people have been through similar circumstances. You think you're the only one—you don't realise there are other people going through it, and you are so isolated. The men have all got the same sort of patterns of behaviour, and it is really all control. Here you can be open about things. It makes you that bit stronger; it gives you that bit of strength back, and self-esteem (Respondent Kate).

Few of those now working in East Anglia's refuges espouse the radical feminist perspectives which inspired the refuge movement from its beginnings, seeing the ultimate longterm goal as the overthrow of the patriarchal social order (Mooney, 2000), and some would deny a feminist label. They do, nevertheless, challenge existing social norms and values and, as Pahl's (1985) study showed, make a contribution to strengthening the position of women individually and collectively. If, as Delmar (1986) argues, feminism is a concern with issues affecting women and a concern to advance women's interests, then anyone sharing this is a feminist, whether or not acknowledged. Local groups may no longer have the freedom to campaign overtly, but the 'drip, drip approach' of constantly challenging, together with the more formal lobbying through the Women's Aid Federation, has undoubtedly led to changes, both in the way statutory agencies view domestic violence, and in the judicial process. Feminist involvement has had a key influence on changes of attitude within the police (Radford and Stanko, 1996), and multi-agency forums, as Malos (2000) points out, represent a valuable arena for debate about the social meaning of domestic violence. Similarly, involvement in state

provision of counselling has the potential to contribute towards the long-term goal of preventing violence against women (Skinner, 2000).

There is concern, though, that the continuation of the shift towards a social service model already noted, will gradually move refuges further away from the feminist goals and ethos which underpins them. Once the new system of refuge funding is up and running, local authorities will be required to undertake a comprehensive review to establish the level of need in their area and the extent to which existing provision is the best way of meeting that need. In doing this, local authorities are expected to monitor, inspect and review the quality and effectiveness of services, taking into account effective decision-making and administrative processes, as well as performance and value for money. The government document *Supporting People: Policy into Practice* (DETR, 2001) refers to quality assurance being determined by 'a range of measures', with good practice guides issued by the government. But what criteria will be used, how will 'performance' be measured, and what will happen if refuges fail to live up to such measures? In addition, what if local councillors see little need for refuge provision in their area?

Conclusion

There are many uncertainties to be clarified. What does seem certain, though, is that the demand for refuges will continue. While many changes have taken place within refuges and within the refuge movement as a whole over the last quarter of a century or so, it is depressing to realise that the kinds of experiences that brought women to the very first refuges have not changed. As one worker said:

> That's the really sad thing. I think those of us who started it up in the 70s had no idea that in 25 years time we'd still be doing it, and we'd still be saying, 'sorry, we're full', even though we've got more places now (Respondent Liz).

There is no evidence whatsoever that there is any less of a need for refuges now than there was thirty years ago. In fact, the demand for refuge space has grown rather than diminished, with refuges unable to accommodate all those seeking space. The haphazard network of services (Kelly,

1989) is inadequate, with a report by the London Housing Unit (Frayne and Muir, 1999) suggesting that refuges currently provide only a third of the necessary supply of accommodation, yet when fear, as well as the actuality of violence, drives women from their homes, they need somewhere to go that is both accessible and safe. There are some who argue that changes in the law will reduce the need for refuges, that the more frequent use of injunctions, together with a greater commitment from the police, will mean that women can remain in their own homes, rather than fleeing to a refuge. However, whilst this is certainly desirable, it fails to take into account that the nature of domestic violence is fear and threat of violence, as much as the actual violence itself. Even when a court serves an injunction ordering a man to stay from his partner, women are still frightened that it will not be adhered to.

Thus refuges will continue to be needed to provide shelter and practical help, to give women time to think things through, to gain mutual support from other women who have been through similar experiences, to regain strength, confidence and self-esteem, and to try to put fear behind them. For some women, refuges provide the only opportunity they have ever had to develop real and lasting friendships, and even to relax and have some fun. Refuges are centrally concerned with standing beside women, and whilst many of the earlier feminist ways of working have changed, even the most institutionalised feminist organisation helps to perpetuate the women's movement (Martin 1990) and the core value evident in all the refuges visited was to empower women to make choices. It is essential to preserve this core in the face of the proposed changes. As another one worker said, 'what we give women is incredibly unique'; if we lose it, the women are the losers.'

Notes

1. The term 'domestic violence' is used to encompass verbal abuse, intimidation and physical harassment and assault. Although there are incidents of violence initiated by women, the overwhelming majority of perpetrators are men (Dobash and Dobash, 1998; Mirlees-Black and Byron, 1999). When used in this paper, therefore, the term domestic violence refers to violence perpetrated men on their wives, partners or other close relatives. See Mooney (2000: 141-3) for a discussion of the problems of definition.

2. For a full discussion of the methodology used, see Warrington, 2001.
3. Names have been changed in order to respect confidentiality.
4. Several residents who had stayed in refuges in other regions suggested that conditions were more variable elsewhere, particularly in London.
5. The term 'shelter', rather than refuge, is used in the United States.

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