

A Living History (1973-1993): How the Experiences of Early Activists Shaped the Violence Against Women (VAW) Movement in Ontario: A Case Study.

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2019 Doctoral thesis provided to the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

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✦ Purposes: How have the experiences of early activists shaped the VAW movement in Ontario from 1973-1993?

- ✦ Early reflections
- ✦ Successes
- ✦ Unanticipated consequences
- ✦ Lessons learned
- ✦ Impact of the work
- ✦ Wisdom for the future

Amnesty International(2003)

It is currently accepted that violence against women is one of the most urgent human rights issues of our time, yet paradoxically, women do not benefit from a level of resources that would Reflect the urgency

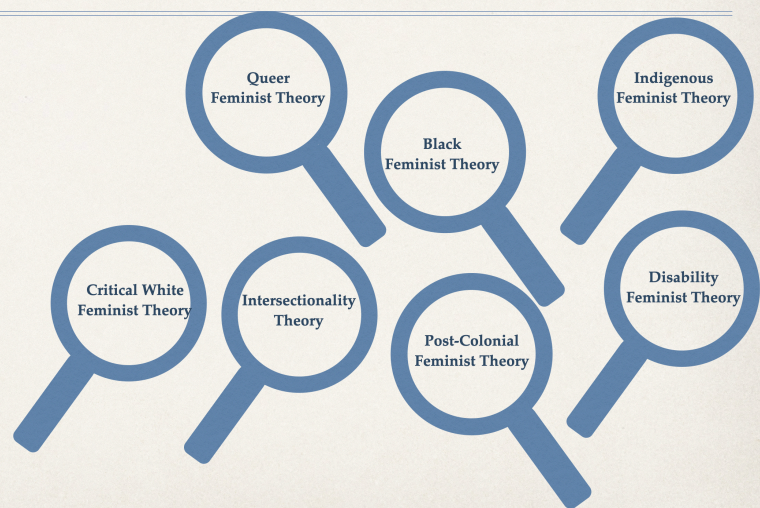
✦ Advancement of profession of social work through local and global social justice initiatives

Qualitative, Case Study METHODOLOGY: In-depth interviews, document review

- ✦ Interrelationship between historical and current context of VAW movement using details of real events
 - ✦ Address how, why and interwoven contextual understandings
 - ✦ Expand on existing theory and contribute to the expansion of theory
- ✦ Recruitment: Purposive, Convenience sampling from a range of sectors (N=22, 21 participants*, 1 key informant)
- ✦ 1973-1993
 - ✦ Minimum of 20 years work as an activist/ feminist
 - ✦ Currently active in Ontario-based work
 - ✦ Local and provincial foci
- ✦ VAW movement in Ontario was the unit of holistic analysis

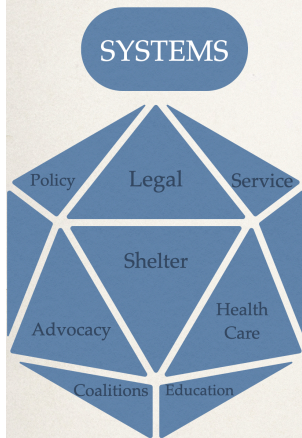
DATA

Analysis



A theory is a set of interrelated ideas that offers a systematic way to organize our thinking...and helps us understand complex topics... guides practice and intervention (Ramazanoglu (2002)

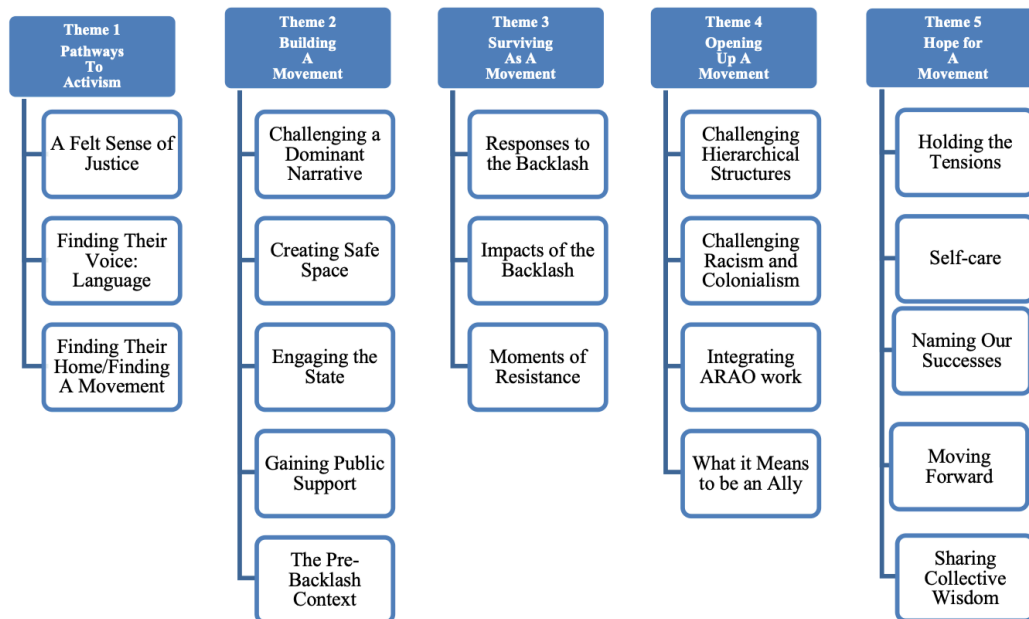
Demographic information of study participants



Activist Characteristics of Participants	
Age	
40–49	5
50–59	8
60–69	8
70–79	1
Race/Ethnicity (self-identified)	
Black (Black Woman; Caribbean Ancestry; African Caribbean)	4
Indigenous (Aboriginal; First Nation—Blackfoot Descent)	3
Bi-racial	1
White (White European—fifth generation; Canadian-Irish-Scottish; White European; Lebanese American-Canadian; Caucasian; Slavian/Croatian, Canadian—first generation immigrant; Ukrainian-Irish—third generation; Italian; Irish French (Anglo-Saxon); Jewish; German-Irish—fifth generation.	14
Education	
College degree	5
Bachelor's degree (included 1 BSW)	11
Graduate degree (included 2 MSWs)	5
Law degree	1
Honorary degree (included in Bachelor's degree)	1
Began and continued working as an activist/feminist	
1970s	8
1980s	12
1990s	2

Current Work-setting Characteristics of Participants	
Worksite	
Shelter residential services	6
Universities and colleges	6
VAW non-residential agencies	3
Independent consultants	3
Legal service	1
Community health centre	1
Provincial immigrant-serving association	1
Government	1
Geography	
Rural	5
Urban	17
Provincial location	
Southern Ontario (Toronto area)	11
Northern Ontario	2
Eastern Ontario	6
Western Ontario	3

STUDY FINDINGS



Thematic Findings

Pathways to Activism

I have found my people

Creating spaces for women within the existing structure...a new structure was needed

...I just became intolerant of intolerance

...women were not getting the same air time

...I never wavered in my beliefs because Simone (de Beauvoir) was on my side...

...It came from my sense of what was fair and unfair...

Building a Movement

...we knew we had to change the world...we had to undo patriarchy.

...we criticize our sisters for being at the table and we always wonder if we are going to be co-opted by being at that table...

...the conversations around issues of race and class were beginning to happen...

...I got interested in the (social) response...blaming the women if they don't leave

...there was fairly open warfare between the feminists and the boys at the back of the room

Surviving as a Movement

...discourse about equality... refusal to identify and accept sexism.

...we started to become fragments of groups in our sector...

...we've lost that piece of our (delivered) services that are political by nature...

...I felt as if we ducked and there was no push back...we cannot afford to duck this time.

Pilot projects are a good way to study an issue, but they have no power if they just get pulled back...

Opening up a Movement

A lot of shelters started out as collectives because it was grounded in feminist organizing...we need to live our values.

Intersectionality means a bunch of sections...Native people don't think in those sections...

...where was their commitment to dealing with racism?

...sometimes ego takes over...I continue to be frustrated when the needs of women and children come second to an organization, maintaining funding...

...It came from my sense of what was fair and unfair...

...parallels around other oppressions-making connections around the ways racism parallels with sexism and heterosexism...

Hope for a Movement

...I think the positive impact is feeling like you are part of something big.

...It takes a thousand years for things to change...

...very firmly committed to having VAW publicly acknowledged, understood and to have institutions held accountable...

We have to somehow hear those voices and ask what they want...

Women need a navigator through these systems...

How do we have these critical conversations, these courageous conversations where everyone leaves all their shit at the door?