Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction
This chapter discusses both the conceptual framework and the practical elements of the research. It explores the research questions in more depth, and discusses what methods are the most appropriate, given the aims and nature of the research. It is important to place the research within an ontological position and to discuss the epistemology as both affect how the research questions are addressed. Different methods of data collection are discussed, focusing on the reasons for choosing particular methods over others. This is followed by a discussion of the practicalities of how the data collection was conducted, and the approaches taken to data analysis. Detailed descriptions of the various women’s libraries visited conclude the chapter.

3.2 Research questions
The principal aim of the research was to explore the nature of women’s libraries in Great Britain, in order to place Wales within a broader context. The relevance and appropriate timing of this investigation is enhanced by recent ambitions of two women’s libraries in Great Britain to become ‘national’ institutions within the countries of England and Scotland (e.g. Anon, 1998, p. 341; Greening, 2000, p. 468.) In terms of regional (national) parity, it is therefore pertinent to question whether it would be appropriate for Wales to establish a women’s library. Furthermore, in 1998 and 1999 both Scotland and Wales were granted (varying) levels of devolution for regional governance, thus Wales has greater opportunities for its own decision making in a broad range of national and local government functions including libraries. This is in conjunction with the recent establishment (in April 2004) of CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales - a policy division of the Welsh Assembly Government which is responsible for implementing policies of the National Assembly for Wales in the museum, archive and library domains. The central research question of the thesis is therefore:
Is there potential for a women’s library in Wales?

Although the key research question is centred specifically on one region, within this there are various related issues that need to be explored across the British Isles before the question can be answered. Further sub-questions are thus:

- What are the roles and nature of current women’s libraries in the British Isles?
- What is the place of women’s libraries within librarianship?
- What is the place of women’s libraries within feminism?
- What models of women’s libraries exist, and which, if any, would be applicable to Wales?

Thus the research is investigating what it is to be a women’s library, and what roles these institutions play in the wider worlds of both librarianship and feminism. In the light of these investigations, the potential and desirability for such an institution in Wales is examined.

3.3 Feminism and feminist research

As noted in the previous chapter, there is little empirical research on women’s libraries, either within Britain or internationally in either library or feminist fields. In the last 15 years or so, there has been a growing body of literature on the topic of women’s information needs (see Chapter 2 Section 2.4), but few authors specifically locate the research within a feminist perspective.

Whilst there is considerable debate about what feminist research is (Harding, 1986; Klein, 1983; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002), early descriptions portrayed it as research conducted by women, for women and about women, and research that would lead to social change. But apart from focusing on women, in what other ways might this and other related studies be considered to be feminist?
Methodologically, feminist research differs from traditional research for three reasons. It actively seeks to remove the power imbalance between research and subject; it is politically motivated and has a major role in changing social inequality; and it begins with the standpoints and experiences of women. (Brayton, 1997, n. p.)

It is also argued that feminist research embraces a perspective:

\[ \text{in which women’s experiences, ideas and needs (different and differing as they may be) are valid in their own right, and androcentricity – man-as-the-norm – stops being the only recognised frame of reference for human beings. (Klein, 1983, p. 89)} \]

Thus, focusing on women’s libraries can be justified in terms of the validity of studying women’s needs or experiences on their own, as opposed to studying the needs of women within say, public libraries.

Klein goes on to say that as well as focusing ‘on’ women, feminist research should embrace the philosophy of the study, as well as the object of the study (Klein, 1983, p. 91). This means specifically locating the research within a feminist perspective, and using this perspective to infuse the entire approach e.g. when considering the research questions, data collection, data analysis and distribution of the findings; in essence, applying a feminist ontology and epistemology. However, it is also argued that “there is no research technique that is distinctly feminist” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 15). Thus, whilst a feminist approach may be adopted, it does not necessarily help define particular methods or techniques that must, or must not, be deployed. Instead,

\[ \text{what is distinctive is the particular political positioning of theory, epistemology and ethics that enables feminist research to question existing ‘truths’ and explore relations between knowledge and power. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 16)} \]

Although it may be argued that there are no specific ‘feminist’ methods, it is possible to discern a distinct feminist methodology i.e. the encompassing belief systems around issues such as epistemology and ontology. But a complication is that feminist research, and its specific critique of traditional positivist research, has sometimes tended to be defined by what it is not, rather than what it is (Bryman, 2001, p. 23). Thus, whilst certain approaches or theories are rejected by feminist researchers, they may not always
One of the principle tenets of feminist research rests on the assumption that science is not ‘value-free’ (Eichler, 1991, p. 13). This is in direct contrast to the traditional positivist approach which believes that research and science are neutral, value-free and objective and that processes applied to investigating the natural world can be used for examining the social world. Feminist researchers believe that research is conducted by people, who are shaped by culture, society, politics etc. They argue that knowledge is humanly produced (Cope, 2002, p. 43), and moreover, that humans are active participants in its production. “Knowledge is a construct that bears the marks of its constructors” (Code, 1991, p. 35). If knowledge production is an active process specific to individuals, then people’s experiences, beliefs and contexts will influence what they count as knowledge and how they participate in its production and legitimization (Cope, 2002, p. 45). Social and human contexts will influence the questions we ask, our approach to the questions, and the interpretations from our findings (Du Bois, 1983, p. 105). Thus, from a feminist perspective, there is no research in the social sciences that can be considered to be completely neutral or value-free. Instead, the values, presumptions and context of researchers need to be stated clearly in any research in order for readers to appreciate the context of the research (Bowles & Duelli, 1983, p. 15). Whilst the issue of subjectivity in research may cause some scientists to have concerns, Code argues that the traditional way of viewing objectivity and subjectivity as two polar opposites tends to emphasise exclusions and reinforces many other dichotomies. Rather than seeing either term as pejorative, she argues for more interaction between the two factors within research (Code, 1991, pp. 28-30).

Related to this is the issue of whether there is one single objective reality or truth that science can test and prove. Researchers employing a positivist approach believe that there is only one objective truth, and that only knowledge that can be tested can be considered to be true knowledge. In contrast, relativists believe that the ‘truth’ about the
social world depends upon many factors, including the values of the researcher, and so each truth or contribution to knowledge is only a relative position. Another possible theoretical approach is that of realism, which argues that there is a reality separate from our description of it. Meanwhile, feminist researchers (in general) follow a more interpretivist approach which believes the social world to be different from the natural world, and they seek to understand rather than rationalise society.

Ramazanoglu & Holland argue that feminists cannot logically be relativists as they would need to accept the multiplicity of truths, thus accepting that all stories or knowledge are acceptable. This could mean that one ‘truth’ of domestic violence may be that women are weak and need to be beaten in order to obey their male partners. This truth would have to be one accepted valid position as well as one that argues that domestic violence is inherently wrong and the perpetrators should face prosecution (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 55). However, rejecting positivism and relativism can cause dilemmas with regard to a key concept of feminism, that of universal human rights for women. For if there is not ‘one truth’ how can there be one set of universal human rights?

Many of the women’s liberation campaigns throughout time have been founded on emancipation and human rights e.g. suffrage or equal pay. Indeed, Ramazanoglu & Holland trace elements of feminist research to concepts of humanism (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 33). However, by arguing for common rights for women, feminist researchers inevitably subscribe to the single category of ‘women’ or ‘woman’. Feminists are in danger of re-creating similar assumptions about people and humanity that they themselves had criticised male researchers of doing in the 1970s and 1980s. This position was heavily critiqued during the 1980s and 1990s, as many groups of women felt that the category ‘woman’ applied only to white, educated, heterosexual, middle-class women in the Western world (see hooks, 1981; hooks, 1984). The rise of post-modernism has contributed to this notion of various valid discourses, and the
challenging of the unified concept of ‘women’ or ‘feminism’ (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 84).

Thus, feminist researchers tend to be wary of claiming one single truth or multiple truths. Haraway defines this problem as a ‘greasy pole’ dilemma (Haraway, 1991, p. 188), with feminists trying to cling to both ends of the pole. That is, believing in realism, one truth and positivism at one end (seen in work by feminists such as Harding and her ‘strong objectivity’), or aligning one’s research to relativism (multiple truths) and postmodernism at the other. To overcome this discrepancy Haraway developed the concept of partial visions and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991, pp. 186-192; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 61). This theoretical standpoint argues that there is no one universal truth, but situation-dependent knowledge.

Feminism is therefore, not one theory but consists of many fluid standpoints (Beasley, 1999, p. viii; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 64). Ramazanoglu & Holland state that feminists can have different ontologies, epistemologies, theories of validity and power (p. 15). It is therefore possible for one feminist researcher to align herself within a positivist or empiricist framework, and another feminist research to take a postmodernist stance; an example of the former would be Harding, who has worked towards seeking an end to androcentrism in science, rather than an end to scientific inquiry itself (Harding, 1986, p. 10), whereas Haraway adopts a postmodern pluralist approach that accepts ambiguities and differences (Haraway, 1991).

Whilst there is no single ‘feminist method’ or feminist methodology for applying to feminist research, how the methods are applied, and how the methodology is considered provides scope for a feminist perspective. One aspect of this is that feminist research looks at “facts and feelings… the obvious and the hidden, doing and talking, behaviours and attitudes” (Klein, 1983, p. 98, her emphasis) and it avoids context-stripping i.e. it doesn’t remove the context from the data and findings. This is echoed by Cope who argues that:
Rather than searching for universal statements that apply everywhere to everyone (and therefore really apply nowhere and to no one), it would be better for us to acknowledge the biases, perspectives, and contextual factors such as political systems and cultural values inherent in the research project and move forward from that point. (Cope, 2002, p. 48)

Despite this recognition of a variety of influencing factors in research and the various standpoints of feminist research there are some commonalities which enable the researcher, and the research, to encompass feminist theory. For example, many feminist researchers apply and advocate the use of non-sexist research methodologies (Eichler, 1991; Roberts, 1981). Roberts describes a non-sexist methodology as one that takes gender seriously (Roberts, 1981, p. 3). Eichler argues that sexism can reside in the language, content and conduct of research (Eichler, 1991, p. 3). She divides the potential for sexism in research into seven categories. These are:

- androcentricity – the viewpoint of males only
- overgeneralisation – when a study on one sex presents research as if it were applicable to both
- gender insensitivity – when gender is ignored as a social variable
- double standards – when behaviour etc of different sexes is evaluated with different standards
- sex appropriateness – e.g. what may be considered as ‘appropriate’ sex roles when they could apply equally to men and women
- familism – when the family is seen as the smallest unit of study, rather than the individuals themselves
- sexual dichotomism – when men and women are seen as two entirely discrete groups, rather than as two groups with overlapping characteristics (Eichler, 1991, pp. 5-8)

Other feminist approaches include an appreciation of the possible inherent imbalance of power within various data collection methods e.g. interviewing people. A feminist
approach would attempt to establish more rapport with the participants, and to have an element of two-way dialogue, rather than the respondent giving and the interviewer taking information. The notion of the researcher being disengaged from the respondent has been criticised by Oakley (Oakley, 1981). She argues that it is not possible or desirable to remain completely neutral or detached during an interview, and cites women interviewing women as being particularly problematic (Oakley, 1981). Instead, a degree of two-way interaction and rapport is often sought within a feminist approach, to overcome problems such as hierarchy and unequal power relationships. (See also section 3.5.2.1 for a more detailed discussion of these issues.)

A feminist approach may also seek to address the nature of the dissemination of results i.e. how findings are disseminated and to whom. Feminist approaches often incorporate distribution through non-traditional channels such as newsletters and Internet sites as well as informing participants or key stakeholders who contributed to the research (Cope, 2002, p. 52). Some feminist researchers may also directly contact participants with transcripts of interviews, or summaries of the findings. This is in contrast to the more traditional research process whereby the findings are often only presented in formal academic settings such as conferences, journals and academic monographs. Again, the philosophy behind the approach is to give something back to the participants, to avoid the creation of separate spheres or hierarchies, and to also empower women themselves. As many elements of feminism highlight the desire to empower women and to challenge traditional hierarchies and power structures, Ramazanoglu & Holland argue that these emancipatory approaches lead to a different style of research.

What distinguishes feminist researchers ... is some shared political and ethical commitment that makes them accountable to a community of women with moral and political interests in common. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 16)

The point of producing feminist knowledge is both to understand the realities of gendered lives, and to be able to transform them. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 163)
Given all these positions, it can sometimes be difficult to define precisely what feminist research and knowledge actually is.

3.4 Conceptual framework
Ontology is concerned with the nature of being and the interaction between social structures and individuals. Bryman distinguishes between two main ontological positions: objectivism and constructionism (2001, p. 16). Objectivism in general asserts that “social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors” (Bryman, 2001, p. 17). That is, structures within the social world are objective entities that are not influenced by humans or other social forces. It is closely linked to positivism and natural science disciplines and seeks to explain situations and link causal variables. In contrast, constructionism believes that people have an active role in constructing social reality and social structures, and these social phenomena are in a constant state of flux as people and their society changes (Bryman, 2001, p. 17-18). This interpretative approach seeks to understand the meaning people ascribe to social entities. Whilst it is possible therefore to discern two distinct belief systems, it is also argued that such a clear dichotomy rarely exists in practice and much research combines elements of both approaches (Silverman, 2001).

This research takes a constructionist approach, believing that human beings can and do influence the social world, and that categories and concepts within society can be considered to be socially constructed e.g. the notion of femininity is created by society and the people within it, and it has changed over time. Likewise, it is argued that the concept of a library has a meaning that is connected to people and society, rather than it having an objective meaning that is not influenced by people or by changes in society. The public library for example, has undergone a variety of changes in the last century and its current functions and role, and the perceptions about a ‘library’ may be quite different from those of 100 years ago.
Epistemology is concerned with what can be regarded as acceptable knowledge. “Epistemology is a theory of knowledge with specific reference to the limits and validity of knowledge” (Cope, 2002, p. 43). It helps answer the questions “how do I know what is true?” (Cope, 2002, p. 43) as well as formulating an approach to looking at how individuals understand the world around them. Some different epistemologies are: positivism, realism and interpretivism. Whilst it is outside the scope of this thesis to provide an extensive critique of each position, the central tenet of each approach is outlined below.

Positivism advocates the application of traditional methods, used to study the natural world, to the study of the social world. Positivists argue that science can be conducted in a value-free, objective manner and a neutral process can discover a single ‘truth’. In general, it is this form of research that feminists disagree with most (see Section 3.3). Realism comes from the position that believes that there is an objective reality that is possible to know, which is separate from our description or understanding of it. It shares some common ground with positivism in that it also adopts the same approach for studying the natural and social worlds and is concerned with uncovering truths or rules about the social world. These two positions relate back to an ontological position that argues that there is an external quantifiable social reality that has a direct impact on individuals, and thus the rules governing such a reality can be discovered.

Interpretivism in contrast, requires a different approach for the study of the social world to that of the natural world. Interpretivists seek to understand human behaviour and the social world, whereas a positivist would seek to explain the situation (Bryman, 2001, p. 13). An appreciation of subjectivity and bias is therefore important to interpretivists. Furthermore, individuals within society are regarded as important actors who can change social structures. Therefore, studying the structures alone, removed from human interpretations or meanings is not applicable. Instead, the interpretations of individuals, what meanings they ascribe to social structures etc, are central to the research process. However, as with ontological assumptions, the barriers between each paradigm are not
necessarily unbreachable, and there may well be a blurring between epistemologies (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 4-5).

This thesis is conducted within the interpretivist approach as I believe that the social world, and the study of it, is fundamentally different from the natural world. Furthermore, I do not consider there to be one single, objective truth that can be found and explained, thus both the positivist and realist approaches are not appropriate. I also am not convinced that it is possible to rigorously test ideas that originate from the social world in order to accept them as knowledge. Instead, I believe that the social world, consisting of humans within changing contexts and situations, can be examined through a variety of methods that seek to understand the structure of the social world and the institutions and human relationships within it. This thesis is, therefore, an interpretation of the situation of women’s libraries, and presents one version of these structures. Whilst I am wary of the danger of fragmentation that a postmodern perspective can bring, the research is framed within an approach that, whilst accepting that there cannot be a single category of ‘woman’ that is applicable to every woman in the world, believes that generalisations are possible within broad categories.

These two approaches, and the application of a feminist perspective, have influenced the theoretical underpinnings of the research, the formation of the research questions and the processes of data production and analysis.

3.4.1  **Reliability and validity**
In the natural sciences, reliability and validity are essential to the integrity of research. This is no less necessary or important in the social sciences, but the traditional methods employed for ensuring that the research is reliable and valid are not always the most appropriate for the social sciences (Glazier, 1992, p. 211), especially given that I believe that most research conducted within a social science setting is different from research within the natural world. Many feminist researchers would also argue that it is open to debate whether it is possible to create valid or objective truth, and thus the notions of
validity and reliability are, to some extent, redundant. However, feminists still need criteria of validity if they are to be able to judge knowledge claims and thus present truer or ‘better’ knowledge. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 135). Further, Ramazanoglu & Holland state that

\[ \text{criteria of validity differ according to ontological and epistemological assumptions that shape particular knowledge claims and particular notions of science, research and curiosity. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 135)} \]

Reliability is concerned with consistency. There are three aspects to this: if it was done again, would the same results be found (i.e. stability over time); equivalence (can it be done elsewhere?); and internal consistency (i.e. are answers in one section confirmed by another?) (Bryman, 2001, p. 70; Fink & Kosecoff, 1998, p. 34). However, such measures are awkward to apply to the human or social sciences, partly because there is less stability in their circumstances. For example, in pure sciences, the acceptable percentage of variation in an experiment may be 1%, but in sociology it may be 50% (Glazier, 1992, p. 211).

\[ \text{These differences do not necessarily reflect the rigor of the research in one area versus another; rather, it appears to be endemic to the nature of the phenomena being researched and the researcher’s ability to control the variables impacting such phenomena. (Glazier, 1992, p. 211)} \]

Other problems that occur with the applicability of these measures include reliability of circumstances. With interviews for example, if a participant sees that the line-manager is within ear-shot, they may well say something different from their true feelings. Thus, the respondent’s words cannot be assumed to be totally reliable (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 58). Further, reliability over time may be harder to achieve in the social sciences. For example, libraries and their uses change all the time, and a researcher cannot expect to find the exact same conditions if they returned in a week or a year (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 59). Related to reliability is the notion of whether the
research is replicable, not just by the same researcher, but by other researchers in other times and places (see below).

Validity is concerned with accuracy and the extent to which a method can provide a correct answer (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 57), that is, the integrity of the conclusions (Bryman, 2001, p. 30). Validity is linked to truth and builds upon the foundation of reliability. There are several elements to validity: face validity – does it fit into the expected pattern; criterion validity – establishing the accuracy of the findings by using another method; internal validity – are we sure that any causal relationships found are related to the identified variables (Bryman, 2001, p. 30); external validity – can the results be applied outside of the specific research context; and construct (measurement) validity – at analysis stage, does it have meaning in the conceptual framework (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, pp. 61-62), or, does it measure what it aims to measure i.e. does the IQ test measure intelligence (Bryman, 2001, p. 30).

Some argue that validity is not so relevant for qualitative studies as it is concerned with testing credibility which instead can come from checking with those involved and prolonged engagement in the practical research (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 63). Validity may also be checked by repeating processes a number of times (Glazier, 1992, p. 212), either by the same researcher or subsequent researchers. However, replication occurs more in the natural sciences and less often in the social sciences. In the latter, researchers tend to move on, construct a new model etc, and often do not revisit or replicate their previous work. If someone else replicates their work there is often “a scornful [cry of] ‘That’s already been done by ….. ten years ago’”. (Johnson, 1990, p. 17 quoting Pelto & Pelto 1979, p. 286). There is also the argument that replication is often harder in the social sciences because authors often only give a limited discussion about their methodologies and research design in their publications (Johnson, 1990, p. 17).
However, despite these problems with the notions of reliability and validity, there are few alternative approaches for establishing the credibility of social science research. For some qualitative methods it is possible to apply consistency checks by examining the literature and comparing one’s findings with others. Another method may be to employ triangulation i.e. using several data collection methods to compare results (Glazier, 1992, p. 211) and for the researcher themselves to assess the reliability of the data by consistent note taking, immersion in the context, exposure to multiple situations and referring to other research experiences (see Chatman, referred to in Gorman & Clayton, 1997, pp. 58-59).

Some researchers go further and argue that these controls or measures are not necessary at all outside quantitative circles. Wolcott argues that the language of qualitative research is different and thus different concepts are relevant (see Henry Wolcott referred to in Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 58). Ramazanoglu & Holland argue that validity can be applied by the researcher within the context of reflexivity and they present a list of 10 criteria for consideration such as: considering the background of the feminist researcher making the knowledge claim; whether the knowledge claim is confined to local truth or is more general; and how the evidence/grounding is constituted and assessed (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 138).

For this research, the concept of reliability applies in the sense that it is replicable by other researchers in other times and spaces, in the rest of the British Isles, or across the world. I have attempted to set out my approach, methods and methodology clearly and stated the procedures followed. Whilst triangulation has not been deployed, the findings can still be considered to be internally consistent in that the words of the participants correspond with observational findings and information in documents, including research findings from the only other comparable study (Ilett, 2003). However, I do not believe that in the social sciences it is possible to conduct the study again and to produce exactly the same findings. For example, this research relies heavily on peoples’ words and quotes to illuminate a point. If the study was conducted again, it would be
during a different point in time, when different issues are of concern to the participant being interviewed. It might not even be possible to interview the same individuals. (Indeed, this study cannot be repeated as one of the libraries closed during the research process, and some members of staff have left other libraries.)

In terms of validity, the approach by Ramazanoglu & Holland has been adopted as being most suited to this qualitative, social science, feminist research. Thus the forms of reasoning that this knowledge claim depend upon have been clearly stated, and along with their other criteria, my reflectivity has enabled the validity of the research to be continuously checked (see Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 138).

Whilst most scientific research has not concerned itself with who the researcher is, feminism believes that the researcher does have an impact on the research, thus it is useful to know who and what they are. Previously, and in much positivist empiricist research, the researcher is not an issue, principally because to accept otherwise could undermine key assumptions of science, such as neutrality, the existence of a single truth, and the tacit assumption that man (as a sex) equates to all of humanity. A prime motivator for much feminist research is the opportunity to correct the imbalance of who conducts research, and on what subject areas, thus diluting the prominence of white, middle-class male researchers (Brayton, 1997, n. p.). In addition, women have, during various historical periods, been seen as incapable of rational thought, and their knowledge has been dismissed or belittled (Code, 1991, p. 233). At its most extreme, their knowledge has been feared so much that the women themselves have been persecuted (e.g. the ‘witches’ and wise women persecuted across America and Britain c.1400-1800 (Pavlac, 2005, n. p.)). Code argues that even today some professional women are still only able to claim a limited cognitive authority (Code, 1991, p. 222). Taken together, these issues have led to a distinct field of feminist knowledge, which places some emphasis on the role of the researcher in the research process. Feminists believe a range of subjective factors are epistemologically significant within the research process e.g. culture, language, sex and location (Code, 1991, p. 4 & p. 56).
How these factors have had an influence on this thesis can be seen in Section 1.4 of Chapter 1.

3.5 Methods

3.5.1 A qualitative approach
The data production approaches used in this research were qualitative in their design, influenced by the stated epistemological and ontological positions. Glazier argues that: “[t]he strength of qualitative data is its rich description … The richness of the data is ensured by the breadth of the context captured with the data” (Glazier, 1992, pp. 6-7). This thesis was seeking an understanding of the role and status of women’s libraries in Britain and through that, an understanding of the position of women’s information and archives within Wales, thus placing Wales within the larger context of the British Isles.

Although there has been a recent reappraisal of the qualities of quantitative research by some feminist researchers (Bryman, 2001, p. 286; Harding, 1987), some of the key components of a quantitative approach are at odds with feminist perspectives. These contra-indications are that quantification often suppresses people’s voices by submerging them below facts and figures. This is in direct opposition to the basis of feminism which aims to draw attention to women’s concerns, generating conclusions based on women’s own words e.g. from interviews. Further, the pre-determined categories often used in quantitative research frequently result in an emphasis on what is already known, thus potentially furthering the silencing of women’s voices. Also, quantitative research can turn people into passive objects, with no two-way processes; feminism strives to avoid this in society as well as within research. Further, the nature of the investigation, that of examining a selection of institutions and considering their nature and applicability to Wales does not facilitate the collection of quantitative data or a quantitative approach and is more suited to a qualitative approach. Gorman & Clayton state that “[t]he ultimate goal of qualitative research is to understand those being studied
from their perspective” (1997, p. 23). This fits with Bryman’s definition of qualitative research. Bryman describes the core elements of a qualitative approach as being:

- seeing through the eyes of the participants
- description and context
- processes
- flexibility; and
- concepts and theory as outcomes of the research process (Bryman, 2001, p. 264).

These core elements and how they have been applied in this research are considered below.

People and their social world are the subjects of the social sciences. Therefore, it is essential to see the social world through their eyes and to understand the meanings they apply to it and their experiences. This can be achieved by seeking their views and seeking to understand their context, and experiences of the social world. This was achieved here by in-depth interviews and relates to the above stated interpretivist stance taken within this research.

Further, qualitative research seeks to describe, understand and explain a situation *in its context*. Thus descriptive detail is used to build up the context so that the people or structures in a study may be best understood within their whole background, i.e. not looking at one aspect out of context. Here this has been achieved by providing rich descriptions of the selected libraries in order to allow a deeper understanding of their contexts (see descriptions in Section 3.10).

Qualitative social science research is often concerned with how events or patterns unfold over time, and the processes involved. This is in contrast to a quantitative approach, and particularly natural science research which, in general, records a situation at one point in time, i.e. a static situation. Although looking at processes over time may be more associated with ethnography (Bryman, 2001, p. 279), it can be applied to many
qualitative studies. In this research, this was applied by seeking to understand the origins, aims and history of the various women’s libraries, and to explore the processes that had affected their changing aims, roles and outlooks.

With regard to quantitative research, there is often a pre-determined structure with fixed hypotheses, categories and labels. In contrast, a qualitative approach seeks to remain flexible in terms of the defined structure of the research in order to take advantage of new discoveries or interpretations. For example, in a structured interview there may be little opportunity for a participant to volunteer an angle that the researcher had not thought of – a semi-structured interview schedule (such as the type deployed in this research), allows greater flexibility and enables ideas to be generated by, and flow from, the discussion.

Finally, qualitative social science research will often apply the principle that concepts and theories are outcomes of the research process, rather than pre-formulated ideas. Strictly speaking, this implies a grounded theory approach, although true grounded theory methodology also encompasses a constant feeding back of the findings from data analysis into the data collection processes, refining the processes and questions where applicable. Bryman notes however, that whilst many research projects claim to follow a grounded theory approach, few actually apply all the principles (2001, p. 391). Grounded theory is an inductive approach, where theory arises out of the data, and contrasts with a deductive approach where a pre-conceived theory is tested against hypotheses. For this thesis, an inductive approach was adopted so that the situations of women’s libraries in Britain and the situation in Wales could be explored in their own terms in order to provide some understanding and context as to the potential role of a women’s library in women’s lives in Wales. The theories and concepts regarding women’s libraries in Britain have arisen out of the research. However, the research was not conducted within a grounded theory approach.
3.5.2 Relating methods of data collection to the research questions
With a feminist perspective and an interpretivist, constructivist, inductive, qualitative approach pervading the research, what methods might be appropriate for data collection? The principal research aim, of seeking to explore whether there is potential for a women’s library in Wales means one has to be able to answer the question: ‘what are women’s libraries?’ Once an understanding of their nature, roles, aims, structures and processes has been reached, it should be possible to examine the potential for such an organisation in Wales, bearing in mind the current structures that already exist in Wales. Therefore, methods need to be chosen that would help illuminate the current positions and functions of women’s libraries in the British Isles. The current situation in Wales would also need to be investigated, and the findings from the practical research would need to be analysed within the context of Wales, as well as within the broader context of current librarianship. In order to choose the optimum data production methods, a range of possible methods were considered and their suitability to this research is discussed below.

3.5.2.1 Interviews
Interviews enable the researcher to delve deep into a situation in a way that questionnaires are often unable to do. Using a qualitative approach implies, to some extent, the use of a semi- or unstructured interview schedule, as opposed to a structured interview schedule which can often just resemble a questionnaire. Semi- or unstructured interviews are more flexible and can be compared to conversations in style. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to explore issues as they arise, whilst providing an initial framework for areas for discussion. They also facilitate an immediate response to a question, allow both parties to explore the meaning of the questions and answers and resolve any ambiguities and can provide a friendly emphasis to data collection (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 124). Further, they encourage the participant to tell ‘the story’ in their own words. This is most beneficial not only for a feminist approach, but also when seeking an understanding into processes and beliefs. They can also return an element of power to the participant in that the participant can, to some extent, determine the direction and content of the interview.
However, interviews (and particularly semi-structured ones) should not be seen as problem free: they can be time consuming, costly, overly personal and open to bias (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 125). It can also be difficult to sift the useful information from the whole (possibly lengthy) interview. There may also be a discrepancy between what the participants say and what they actually feel. Interviews, even if completely unstructured, are not natural settings, and if the participant is reserved, unforthcoming or reticent, the ‘flow’ of the interview may be less like a conversation than a question and answer session. Conversely, the opposite can also happen, with a very talkative participant, with the potential danger of a ‘life-history’ or narrative account ensuing, unless the interviewer is able to guide the interview to the necessary questions.

An interview may also be seen as a one-way medium, with the researcher rarely giving back to the participant (Oakley, 1981, p. 30). There is often little of benefit for the participant. Furthermore, interviewees can be seen as passive objects or data sources (Oakley, 1981, p. 30) and there may be little or no social interaction between the two people, with the situation being one of hierarchical power. Feminism however, sees interview participants as individuals and values their experiences and also tries to avoid situations of power being imposed over others. Another problem is that the interview process itself may remove the context, so that extraneous material is eliminated as superfluous. As was discussed earlier, qualitative research tends to be context-rich, so extra detail is useful such as body language, tone of voice etc. Also, interviewers are encouraged to be neutral, not to give opinions, and not to answer questions. However, this again can lead to a question-answer session, rather than a more in-depth discussion, and some evidence may not come to light.

In what is now frequently-quoted research, Oakley encountered many problems whilst she was interviewing pregnant women, and argues that interviews should not be automatically regarded as qualitative in approach and suitable for feminism, and that women interviewing women may encounter some problems. Whilst she was conducting
her interviews she found that the women repeatedly asked her questions that she could not possibly answer with: “I guess I haven’t thought enough about it to give a good answer right now” or to use a head-shaking gesture which implies that the question was too tough to answer – answers that the textbooks suggest should be used. For example, many of the women were pregnant for the first time and asked her (as a mother) things like “why is it dangerous to leave a small baby alone in the house?” and “which hole does the baby come out of?” (Oakley, 1981, p. 124). She argues that by answering, the interviewer becomes more involved with the participant and thus interviews cannot be seen as a detached method of data collection. Further, if a series of interviews are conducted with the same participants over time, a relationship builds up that may or may not affect the process. (This confirms the belief that science and research is not value-free or totally objective.) She argues however that although the interviewer cannot remain neutral this need not lead to bias, but may lead to differences of understandings (Oakley, 1981, p. 51). That is, each interviewer would produce different findings corresponding to their different interpretations of situations.

Others have argued that women interviewing women can be a positive experience, and the expected barriers between an interviewer and participant (e.g. power imbalance, one-way dialogue etc.) may not materialise (Finch, 1993, p. 174). Furthermore, some feminist researchers also contend that as women tend to be highly skilled in human interaction and conversation, interviews are well suited to feminist researchers (Reinharz, 1992, p. 20).

Other common problems with interviewing are related to empathy. Where social or biological variables match between interviewer and participant, the degree of empathy may be greater and this may lead to a more revealing interview (Oakley, 1981, p. 55; Valentine, 2002, p. 119). For example, a young white male researcher may not gain the trust of older, Asian women. This is particularly true for interviews where the issues are sensitive or personal. This issue of difference could theoretically lead to different researchers achieving different results. This therefore supports the argument that
research is not value-free and cannot claim to be entirely objective. Even if the researcher maintains (or attempts to maintain) a neutral position throughout the research, their participants may well be influenced by a variety of factors leading to subjective, context-dependent results.

Despite these potential problems, it was decided that interviews were the most appropriate method for data production. One reason is the depth of information that can be provided during an interview. In order to place Wales in a wider context, the situation of women’s libraries in the British Isles is of immense relevance. Thus, their history, aims, roles, functions, current processes etc, are of interest. Whilst some relevant information can be obtained by documents, staff members are often best placed to answer questions about the organisation, especially if they are long-serving members.

Conducting face-to-face interviews with staff members would also provide the researcher with an opportunity to visit each library, to use their collections (where appropriate), take pictures, develop a feeling for the type of institution and structure, and to witness first-hand the processes involved in serving their communities. Therefore, combining visits with interviews would be a sensible and practical approach.

Further, face-to-face interviews, particularly within a feminist perspective, allow for a degree of rapport between the two people involved, and can thus facilitate a greater degree of providing information. This may not be achieved if a questionnaire is sent through the post from an unknown person (see 3.5.2.4).

3.5.2.2  Questionnaires
For this thesis, one of the key aims was to reach an understanding of the functions of women’s libraries. Thus, whilst it would be interesting to explore the thoughts and behaviour of current users of the women’s libraries, given the limited resources, it was decided that this angle would not be practical or possible. To seek an in-depth understanding of the processes involved in running women’s libraries, it was felt that
interviews with staff members would provide more context and information than questionnaires. Furthermore, the participation of staff could be difficult to obtain if self-completion questionnaires were sent though the post with little context as to the research or the researcher.

Moreover, questionnaires are frequently thought of as being a tool for quantitative data collection. This is in part due to their nature and their ability to pose a variety of types of closed-questions which lead to the collection of numerical data and subsequent statistical analysis. This type of approach is particularly suited for testing and proving hypotheses, which is not relevant to this thesis. It is possible to use more open-ended questions, either for self-completion or face-to-face questionnaires, but as this thesis was interested in exploring, in considerable depth, the current and past situations for women’s libraries, it is unlikely that this level of detail could be obtained through self-completion questionnaires.

3.5.2.3 Observation
Observational methods are useful means of gaining understanding about the processes involved in a situation. In this research for example, it could involve watching staff conduct their work in a women’s library. However, such a research method might not always be practical. Whilst it might be illuminating to sit quietly in a corner of the library for a whole day, or longer, the type of findings produced by this method may have limited applicability in terms of assessing whether a women’s library would be possible in Wales. It would also be a time-consuming approach, and the staff in the various libraries may be uncomfortable about being observed. Although I could have attended the libraries covertly, i.e. as a member of the public, if I wished to then make direct contact with the staff, they might remember me from my period of observation and be suspicious as to my motives. Observation is particularly well suited to situations where the research is seeking to understand people’s behaviour. However, this research is not really concerned with how people behave in women’s libraries. Although an
3.5.2.4 Focus Groups
Focus groups are primarily used for generating data out of group discussion and interaction (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999, p. 4). They can encourage participants to talk to one another and are equally interested in the exchanges between the participants as the content of what they have to say. Focus groups can be seen as particularly relevant to feminist research as they

are a contextual method: that is, they avoid focusing on the individual devoid of social context, or separate from interactions with others.

Second, focus groups are a relatively non-hierarchical method: that is, they shift the balance of power away from the researcher towards the research participants. (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 64)

Thus focus groups are set up as social interactions, best suited to producing data where the social connections are important to the findings. This was not necessary for this thesis. How the various libraries operate and their histories is information that could be provided by documents and interviews with individual members of staff. Although talking to various staff members at once could be beneficial in terms of time saving, the interaction between the staff is not something that is relevant to the research aims of this thesis.

However, it must be noted that two interviews with women in Wales were conducted in pairs. This was for convenience for the participants and for the researcher. Most textbooks suggest that about 4 people is the minimum for a focus group; as there were only two women in each case, the interviews do not fall into the classification of a focus group.

3.5.2.5 Documentary evidence
In addition to interviews and site visits, information was gathered through documentary evidence. For example, recent material produced by the various women’s libraries (such
as newsletters, magazines or reports). This frequently provided further contextual information that helped create an understanding of each of the women’s libraries, their history, aims and the roles they serve. As this thesis was not intended to be a comprehensive critique of the women’s libraries, researching their detailed histories was not felt to be necessary. Sufficient information was gathered that facilitated a brief description of their background, which contributed towards the creation of different models of women’s libraries.

A summary of the discussion of the possible research methods is presented below in table format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Advantages of method</th>
<th>Disadvantages of method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>☐ able to expand on points (both interviewer and participant)</td>
<td>☐ time intensive – conducting and transcribing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ able to follow new ideas as they come up</td>
<td>☐ time intensive for staff member(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ able to clarify any confusing terms</td>
<td>☐ no certainty that interviewees are asked same questions in same manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire (post)</td>
<td>☐ questions asked in exactly the same way for all staff</td>
<td>☐ potential mis-understanding of questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ answers to open-ended questions may be hard to read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ too structured to allow previously un-thought of issues to emerge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ participants may not see the need to complete and return it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>☐ able to get a feel for the library and how it is used and run</td>
<td>☐ time intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ not suitable for factual questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>☐ collects opinions of a reasonable number of participants in a short period</td>
<td>☐ time intensive – conducting and transcribing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ time intensive for staff member(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ this study isn’t interested in group interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ this study does not need to talk to every staff member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ may prevent subsequent interviewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary</td>
<td>☐ provides additional material</td>
<td>☐ not all evidence may be publicly available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Summary of research methods**
In light of the above discussion and with consideration to the aim of investigating the current role and nature of women’s libraries, it is possible to see that a combination of visiting and observing the library, documentary evidence, and interviews with staff are likely to be the optimum methods.

3.5.2.6 How have other studies conducted their research?
As has been discussed in the literature review, there are very few studies on women’s libraries, either in Britain or internationally. The most relevant piece of research (by Ilett, 2003) used interviews and visits to three women’s libraries in Britain. However, for some reason (that the author herself found puzzling), Illet was denied access to interview staff at one location (the Women’s Library). For this library she relied instead on documentary evidence, attended an AGM and conducted two unrecorded conversations (Ilett, 2003, p. 78). She was personally involved with one of her sample libraries and thus relied on her personal knowledge and experience. As the women’s libraries in my thesis were all ‘new’ to me it was not possible to utilise personal knowledge.

The remaining literature on women’s libraries tends to be fairly descriptive in nature, rather than providing analytical discussion based on empirical research. It is also frequently written by practitioners at the libraries concerned in the articles, rather than by external researchers. Whilst the paucity of research in this field enables this researcher to operate with considerable freedom, not constrained by following particular data production methods that are taken as requisites for a particular field, it also means there is little other similar research to enable comparisons of suitable methods and to apply the optimum techniques. Despite this, undertaking face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with an element of observation of setting, could be considered to be a fairly standard approach, that could be applied further in subsequent research or by other researchers.
3.6 *The practical research phases*

The practical research was conducted in two main phases: interviewing staff in women’s libraries in England, Ireland and Scotland (June-September 2003), and interviewing women involved with related groups working in this field in Wales (June-August 2004).

3.6.1 *The selected libraries*

The International Information Centre and Archives for the women’s Movement (IIAV) website was used to search their *Mapping the World* directory which provides listings for women’s libraries across the world. It is stated on their website that the directory is updated weekly. Defining the search by selecting ‘United Kingdom’ brought up a list of 11 women’s libraries (in Spring 2002). From this list, another institution was added after a literature search revealed an article on another women’s library in the British Isles (Duguid, 2000). An Irish case study was included after attending a conference where the Director of the Women’s History Project in Ireland spoke about the organisation, its aims and achievements. This list of 13 organisations was narrowed down to a smaller selection (five) of the most relevant libraries. Each organisation was considered in terms of its scope, services and accessibility. The five chosen were the most general in terms of their definitions and approach as I reasoned that investigating very subject-specific women’s libraries, whilst interesting, would not perhaps provide the most useful or applicable information for applying any model or approach for Wales.

The list of possible women’s libraries is provided in Appendix 1.

The chosen five libraries were (in alphabetical order):

- Feminist Archive (South) (Bristol)
- Feminist Library (London)
- Glasgow Women’s Library
- Women’s Library (London)
Women’s Resource Centre (London)

Staff at the five libraries were contacted via a combination of letters, email and phone calls to arrange convenient times for a visit to interview staff. All the staff were willing to participate in the research.

In Wales, the approach taken was broadly similar to that for the rest of the British Isles. Using my prior knowledge from previous research and personal contacts, a list of possible organisations dealing with women’s information was drawn up (see below). Some were identified as not being appropriate in terms of their activities, scope, approach and outlook, as can be seen in the first four organisations:

- **BAWSO** (Black Association of Women Step Out)
  Whilst they have a resource centre/library in the HQ, providing information is not their main activity

- **MEWN Cymru** (Minority Ethnic Women’s Network)
  Umbrella body - whilst providing some information and training, is not specifically a women’s centre or library.

- **Welsh Women’s Aid**
  Although it has regional offices, HQ, and local branches, all of which have information collections, providing information services is not its primary role.

- **Women’s Workshop, Cardiff Training Centre**
  Specifically provides training, no resource collection or library as such.

The organisations that were identified as being primarily concerned with providing information, preserving archives or operating as women’s resource centres were:

- Archif Menywod Cymru/Women’s Archive Wales (AMC/WAW)
- Swansea Multicultural Women’s Resource and Training Centre (known informally as Swansea Women’s Centre – SWC)
- Women in Jazz (formerly Women’s Jazz Archive, Swansea)
Having already conducted the practical research in England and Scotland, the preliminary findings from the data analysis was used to inform the selection of the most relevant and suitable organisations or stakeholders to visit in Wales. Given more time and resources, it would be interesting and useful to extend the investigation to all the related organisations in Wales but the key research question was being borne in mind at all times, and meant that the research had to focus on only organisations that were the most relevant, to this thesis.

Having selected the three organisations, a similar approach was used to contact staff via a combination of letters, email and phone calls to arrange convenient times for me to visit and to interview staff. Again, all the staff or committee members were welcoming and interested in the research. The interview with the director of the Women’s History Project (Ireland) was conducted in late summer 2004. For reasons of practicality and convenience, this was conducted over the telephone rather than a face-to-face visit.

3.6.2 Interview schedules
Semi-structured interview schedules were created for use with staff in the selected libraries. A basic schedule of 21 questions was drawn up, focusing on the library’s aims, funding, facilities etc. Further questions were then added that related specifically to each separate library and their facilities. Because the interview was semi-structured it enabled free-flowing conversation to develop around the questions and for exploration of previously unexpected avenues. The generic interview schedule can be seen in Appendix 9. The interviews in England and Scotland had already taken place, as had the analysis of this first phase of research, before the interviews in Wales were conducted. Thus it was possible to feed some of the findings into these interviews such as the validity of the concept of two main models of women’s libraries.

The interviews in England and Scotland were recorded on tape, whilst the interviews in Wales were recorded on an mp3 player (except for at Swansea Women’s Centre where
the interview was not recorded\textsuperscript{1}). The interview with Dr Maria Luddy of the Women’s History Project was conducted over the telephone and was also taped, using the mp3 player. Permission to record the interviews was sought and given in all cases. As has been mentioned above (see section 3.5.2.4) the two interviews with committee members of AMC/WAW were conducted in pairs, partly for logistical reasons and also because the committee is made up of a number of the founding members and it enabled the thoughts of several to be heard rather than just one or two.

The advantages of recording the interviews are that the transcripts allow for comments to be quoted verbatim, and they act as a valuable aide-memoire, which can be returned to over time, and enable the interviewer to focus on the questions and guiding the interview rather than trying to write everything down (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 131, p. 135). The problems associated with recording are that it may act as a constraint, possibly reducing the likelihood of getting sensitive information; obtrusive background noise may obscure the voices and it can be time consuming to transcribe the interviews (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 135). On balance, I felt that these disadvantages were outweighed by the benefits of full transcripts and thus recorded the interviews.

\textbf{3.7 Data Analysis}

Flick regards coding as the core of qualitative research (1998, p. 178) as it directly influences the interpretation and analysis of the data. A theoretical coding procedure was introduced by Glaser & Strauss in 1967 and has been further developed by them individually throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Whilst Glaser & Strauss’ grounded theory approach was not applied here (e.g. the interpretation of the data to feed back into collection of more data), an understanding of coding was important in order to enable a full analysis of the data. Thus Flick’s notion of ‘open coding’ (1998, pp. 179-180) was applied whereby concepts and categories are coded at varying levels: word, sentence

\textsuperscript{1} At Swansea Multicultural Women’s Resource and Training Centre the one paid staff member was interviewed, but, as she was involved with a training day for volunteers at the time, the interview consisted more of a general chat (with her and the volunteers) during their tea break and a tour around the venue. It was not possible to record either conversation but copious notes were made instead and typed up the following day to ensure that no information was lost.
and paragraph. With these codes as basic units, it is possible to then take each category and look at the relationships between the codes, thus facilitating the formulation of theories (Flick, 1998, p. 185)

The data analysis began as soon as each interview was over. Tours of each library generally took place before the interview, and when the interview ended and any documents had been consulted, I left the library. I endeavoured to retire somewhere quiet soon after, in order to write up notes regarding my impressions of the library, and any anecdotal evidence that had been provided off-tape, particularly during the tours. Although these notes often only contained my impressions of how each interview went, or my opinions regarding each library, they helped situate each library in my mind.

The recorded interviews were fully transcribed by myself as soon as possible after each interview had taken place. Once the transcripts had been typed into Word, they were printed out and read, several times over. After all five interviews in England and Scotland had been transcribed and read, it was possible to see some common themes and issues. The printed transcripts were then marked with a numbered system depending upon the topic under discussion e.g. management = 1, finance = 2. In constructing the list of topics (key terms), I tried to use a word or phrase from within the script, thus retaining an element of the women’s words in the analysis. These key terms then formed the basis for the coding trees within the qualitative software NUD*IST (version 4). In order to analyse the data within NUD*IST, the Word documents were reformatted according to the requirements of the software. The initial key themes or concepts were then created as nodes, and each transcript was read (on screen) and coded, according to these nodes. Some sentences or sections covered several nodes (themes) so these were coded twice, or as applicable. During the coding process other themes arose and these were incorporated into the tree structure.
Having created nodes on specific themes, it was then possible to print out each node, with quotes from all the relevant interviewees. With this level of analysis, comparisons between the various libraries, and exploration of each theme was possible. However, as coding can sometimes be seen to ‘fracture’ the data, paper copies of the full transcripts were always kept close to hand to provide the whole context of each interview.

After the interviews with staff in Wales and Ireland had also been conducted, they too underwent the same process. Whilst there were many common themes, there were also concepts or issues that were particular to Wales (or Ireland), so more nodes were created as appropriate.

### 3.8 Ethics

Whenever research is conducted with participants it is important that certain ethical considerations are borne in mind (Bryman, 2001, pp. 484-485). One of the key issues is that of informed consent as this can cover other ethical issues such as anonymity and confidentiality.
Informed consent provides the (potential) participant with information about the research which may be relevant to their decision about whether to participate. Such information might include the potential risks, benefits, alternatives and the nature and purpose of the procedure. Informed consent also ensures that the participant understands the information given (e.g. by providing information sheets written in a manner suitable for the subjects) and also ensures that participation is voluntary as the form will nearly always require written consent.

The informed consent form for this thesis consisted of an introductory letter outlining the purpose of the research, the researcher’s background, and what would be required of the participant. At the time of interview, a consent form was presented to each participant, again with background information about the project, but with additional material covering issues such as the voluntary nature of participating; anonymity for each woman; confidentiality of their opinions and the recording of the interview. It also included a tear-off slip for their name and address if the participant wished to be entered into a free prize draw. It was decided to offer this prize as a thank you for the participants for their time and thoughts. Although it was only a token gesture, in some way it reflects a more two-way process, and is aligned to a more feminist perspective of conducting research. The participants were given a spare informed consent form that they could keep for future reference. (See Appendix 10 for a sample copy of the form.) The researcher also informed the participants that she would provide them with a summary of the findings, once the research was completed.

The participants (staff in the various women’s libraries) were assured of their anonymity. This meant that if they made negative comments, no one would know who had made the comments. This perhaps created an atmosphere of greater freedom for voicing their opinions. When referring to these women in this thesis where I am quoting their opinions, no names are used and instead non-identifying references are made such as “according to one member at a women’s library” thus making it impossible for any
reader to identify the interviewee. Unfortunately, where there is only one staff member in a particular library, if a quote is obviously from or about that organisation, it was not possible to disguise the source of the quote.

3.9 Limitations and review
I had initially hoped to conduct interviews with some users of the libraries to explore why they used the library, what they used it for etc., but this was not possible due to either no users being present at the time, or permission not being granted by the staff. However, staff in the libraries did allow me to leave questionnaires (with stamped addressed envelopes attached) and an explanatory letter, in the libraries. A total of two users from one library returned these questionnaires. Therefore it was not valid to include the users’ side of the investigation into women’s libraries. This would have provided a different angle for exploration, although it could not be matched in Wales where no equivalent organisation exists. No other specific problems were encountered with practical aspects of the research. Despite the localised nature of this study - within the British Isles - and the views of only the staff rather than staff and users of women’s libraries, the research is still a valuable contribution to the field of women’s libraries.

3.10 Descriptions of the libraries visited
Detailed descriptions of the various libraries visited, or archive projects consulted, are provided below. The information is presented here in order to streamline discussion in the findings and analysis chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), and to prevent repetition of information. The descriptions include information about historical foundations, aims, funding, management, membership or Friends schemes where appropriate, brief details about the collections, number and type of staff, opening hours and contact details. The libraries are presented in alphabetical order. The information was sourced from the interviews and published literature.
Archif Menywod Cymru/Women’s Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW) was officially established in 1998, after several meetings of like-minded women who were interested in women’s history and archives. In 1997 Ursula Masson, a founding member of AMC/WAW and Senior Lecturer at the University of Glamorgan, hosted the first meeting at her house, which was attended by about 40 women. Masson was involved with Swansea Women’s History group, which she directed in conjunction with Jen Wilson and Gail Allen and which had been founded c.1980/1981.

Early aims of AMC/WAW included a desire (“dream”) to create a women’s library which would combine an academic (archive) role as well as including social elements e.g. a café and meeting rooms for women’s organisations to use. However, personal experience and advice from the professional archivists in the group encouraged AMC/WAW to concentrate on cataloguing existing resources pertaining to women, and rescuing undiscovered but valuable material about women’s lives in Wales.

AMC/WAW operates through a system of donations and distributed depositing of relevant material from individual women and national women’s groups in Wales. For example, a woman might approach the organisation with a range of material pertaining to her and her predecessors’ lives. Archivists in AMC/WAW will then assess the material in terms of its relevance and importance, and if it is accepted by AMC/WAW, a set of procedures is put in place to agree its final location and ownership. This material is deposited under agreement in local public record offices, or the National Library of Wales if the material is of national significance, and in either case it is listed under the name of Archif Menywod Cymru/Women’s Archive of Wales. Certain restrictions on access can be put in place if necessary. AMC/WAW is currently working on a database of the material donated under this scheme, and the committee hopes this will be available electronically through their website. Their collections currently are focused around papers from individual women documenting the Women’s Liberation Movement and women’s involvement in the peace movement of the 1980s e.g. Val
Feld, Sonia Davies, as well as papers from women’s organisations e.g. Older Lesbian Network, Permanent Waves (a women’s arts association) and the Equal Opportunities Commission Wales.

AMC/WAW is run solely by volunteers, managed by a committee of about 6-10 women. It has been awarded some small grants in the past, for example, for a one-year part-time post which started in 2000, funded by the Community Fund Small Grant programme. The money to distribute flyers and hold events comes from donations and subscriptions. AMC/WAW currently has about 130 members. At the time of writing it was in the process of applying for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for two projects, and for an Esme Fairbairn Foundation grant. If successful, these projects would enable AMC/WAW to set up workshops to promote the work of the organisation, search for existing collections of women’s oral history and to create databases of this work.

Ursula Masson, Archif Menywod Cymru / Women’s Archive of Wales, School of Humanities, University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, CF37 1DL
01443 483406 or 01792 233482
http://www.womensarchivewales.org/

**Feminist Archive South (Bristol)**
The Feminist Archive was founded in 1978 in south-west England and grew from “one woman's personal collection in an attic” (quote from their website) and was “the first women’s library and museum outside London” (a direct quote used in Davies & Walbe, 1982, p. 22, but no reference given by them). It relocated several times within the region including a spell at Bath University Library (Davies & Walbe, 1982, p. 22). The writer Fay Weldon was involved from the early days. It subsequently divided into two branches (North and South) in 1988 for logistical and personnel reasons. The Southern branch has been housed in a side room of a local authority branch library in Bristol since this time.
Its aims then, and now, are to collect and preserve material from the second wave of feminism, roughly from 1960-2000. It remains an independent institution, with its accommodation and utilities being paid by the local Council. Its only other source of funding comes from donations and a Friends of the Feminist Archive scheme. It has about 80 Friends ranging from individuals to organisations and women’s groups. The Archive is run as a feminist collective, with no staff hierarchy. There is a Board of Trustees that oversee the strategic management of the Archive. The Archive is open one afternoon a week from 2.00pm to 4.30pm, and is run by two part-time volunteers.

It has a collection of about 1000 non-fiction items, 600 fiction and 1500 other items such as banners, badges, records, postcards, diaries and other ephemera. Some of their key collections include the Dora Russell papers and her Women’s Peace Caravan (from 1958 and therefore slightly before the main collecting era for the Archive) and a Greenham Common Collection. From c.2003, it has been investigating the possibilities of relocating the Archive within an university collection and has been holding talks with local institutions. Its ‘sister’ archive, The Feminist Archive North (Leeds) is housed within Leeds University but is not open to the public. The Feminist Archive (South) is a Registered Charity.

Trinity Road Library, Trinity Road, St Philips, Bristol, BS2 0NW
0117 935 0025
http://www.femarch.freeserve.co.uk/

**The Feminist Library (London)**
The Feminist Library was founded in 1975 in London and was originally called the Women's Research and Resource Centre. Its aims at that time were to foster research and networking, to support women and to disseminate results of research into women’s lives. The founding collective was active in publishing research papers and notable writers in the research group included feminist historian Leonore Davidoff and feminist writer and academic Dale Spender. In 1983 it changed its name to the Feminist Library
and Information Centre when it began to focus more attention on its lending and reference resources, and it also signalled a desire to be more explicitly feminist in its profile (Collieson & Follini, 1995, p. 163). In 1991 it became a women-only space (Collieson & Follini, 1995, p. 163), but from the end of the 1990s it was open to men once again. The women-only policy caused some controversy at the time (Collieson & Follini, 1995, p. 164). As well as maintaining a library, it also ran monthly discussion groups and other social events. During the 1980s it maintained an index of women’s studies courses (Wahhab, 1980, p. 13) and its collection was primarily centred around contemporary women’s information, resources and literature. Its collection consisted of about 10,000 books, 1500 journals, 1200 articles and 1750 pamphlets and items of ephemera. In 1995 it won the Pandora Award (organised by Women in Publishing) for its commitment to women and the book world and was referred to as “the largest contemporary feminist resource and information centre in Great Britain” (Collieson & Follini, 1995, p. 160).

It moved location five times from its founding until 1986 when it was housed near Waterloo Station in a council building along with other voluntary organisations. Prior to this its homes had included being with other feminist and alternative organisations e.g. with Spare Rib above the feminist bookshop Sisterwrite, and in the Women’s Centre in Hungerford Place on the Embankment.

It was an independent institution (and a registered Charity), run along feminist principles as a collective. There were no hierarchical positions among the volunteers who worked in the library, nor among the women who formed the management committee. It had been founded without the benefit of any grants but won funding in 1976. Its annual funding of £39,000 was withdrawn in 1988, at which point many women thought it had closed (Ilett, 2003, p. 274) although it continued to operate, relying on a voluntary workforce rather than paid staff. In the 1980s it had up to five paid staff (Wahhab, 1980, p. 14)). It was threatened with the loss of its office space in
1993 when Council rents were increased, but a grant from the local Council covered the rent increase.

Any woman could join the library in order to use the materials and borrow items, and there was a sliding scale of membership from £5 to £25. The library’s income was primarily from subscriptions (membership fees), but this had been falling over recent years. Ilett quotes membership figures of c.1000 in 1982, with a peak of 1700 in 1985. By 2000 this had fallen to 95 (Ilett, 2003, p. 281). In 2003 it was open two and a half days a week, and was run by about 10 core part-time volunteers.

The local borough Council paid its rent and utilities (c. £12,000 pa) but in January 2003 the collective were informed that the Council would no longer pay these monies from May 2003. A reprieve was made to extend it until September 2003. Despite various ‘brainstorming sessions’ and appeals, the library eventually closed in 2004. At the time of writing the future of its collections remains uncertain.

(Former) contact details:
5a Westminster Bridge Road, Southwark, London, SE1 7XW
020 7928 7789
http://www.feministlibrary.org.uk/index.htm - no longer available

**Glasgow Women’s Library**
A community-based arts group called Women in Profile formed in 1987 to create art work before and during 1990 when Glasgow was to be European City of Culture. After this year and its activities ended, it was decided to establish Castlemilk Women’s House to house much of the creative work and to act as a centre for the continuation of various arts projects. The positive reception towards, and growing collection of, the Women’s House stimulated the creation of Glasgow Women’s Library which was launched in September 1991 in premises close to Women in Profile’s original work base. The restricted size of the venue and the desire for a more central location led to the Library
moving to its present premises in 1994. It is currently involved with moving to bigger and more convenient premises and will relocate to the newly refurbished Mitchell Library in Glasgow city centre at the end of 2006, and is also considering the notion of becoming the National Library for Women in Scotland.

Key aims of the library are to provide an information resource, run on feminist principles, to meet the needs of women looking for information on a range of women's issues. The library was self-funding from its inception in 1991 until 1994 when it was awarded grants from a variety of sources, principally local councils and in 1995 was able to pay for library staff. Today its funding comes from a mix of local grants, donations and a membership scheme. Use of the library facilities is free but there are currently 1700 paying members of Glasgow Women’s Library. As members, they receive a quarterly newsletter and are entitled to discount tickets for library events. Being a member costs from £8.50 low-waged, £17 waged, and £25 for an organisation.

It is an independent institution run by a board of directors. The Board consists of women from the paid and volunteer staff, some library members and women outside the library organisation who work in particular spheres e.g. finance or management. It is currently open four afternoons and one late night a week, and is staffed by a total of seven full-time and part-time paid staff, along with about 20 volunteers.

Over time the library has broadened its services from library-based activities to include lifelong learning courses, free advisory sessions, a book club, a newspaper cuttings service, research consultancy service, Women at Work database of women in businesses in Scotland, and an allotment. It also produces a glossy quarterly magazine. It has about 20,000 books and videos, as well as many journals and ephemera. Some of its collections include Edinburgh Women's Centre archives and the Scottish Women's Aid newspaper cuttings archive from the 1970s.

Since 1995 is has housed the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre (LAIC), although this is run separately from the Library. It acquired this resource when the LAIC lost its
London home (due to losing its grant). The LAIC was founded in 1984. At the time of interviewing the LAIC was not open to the public, but since the appointment of a Lesbian Resources and Services Development Worker in June 2005 the LAIC is open four afternoons a week.

Glasgow Women’s Library was also the first Scottish Parliament Linked Library, appointed as such in June 2003. This scheme is administered by the Parliament’s Education and Outreach Service as part of the Participation Services in the Scottish Parliament. It gives women who use the library the opportunity to access information and documents from the Scottish Parliament. Linked Libraries are those that serve a particular community of interest. The Library also offers lifelong learning courses directly related to the Scottish Parliament such as an introduction to the Parliament and how to participate in Parliament. In 2000 it became a registered charity.

4th floor, 109 Trongate, Glasgow, G1 5HD
0141 552 8345
www.womens-library.org.uk

**Swansea Multicultural Women’s Resource and Training Centre**
Swansea Women’s Centre was founded in 1979 by women who were involved with Swansea Women’s Group, which had been founded in 1972. In 2003 this women’s centre was “the only one remaining in Wales” (Rolph, 2003, p. 55). Early aims of the centre were for it to be a meeting place, a social space for women, and to have a direct role in campaigning on women’s issues, providing information and a variety of resources. Today, its aims are to empower women to develop their potential and to help them make choices about their own lives. The centre provides an information resource collection (books, magazines, leaflets), and training when there is specific project grant money e.g. for mental help or rape support schemes. Other services the centre provides are drop-in sessions, free advice sessions, free Internet access and volunteer training. The information resource collection comprises of three bookcases.
The centre is run by one paid member of staff, along with a team of about 10 volunteers who do a variety of jobs such as administration or database maintenance. The centre is overseen by a board of management. It moved to its current location in 1997, which is its fourth home. The rent is paid for by the local council. During 2004 the building was refurbished to accommodate disabled access. The building also houses other women’s groups such as BAWSO, a black and ethnic minority women’s group for domestic abuse. During the 1990s the Centre has been involved with various other women’s organisations in the area working towards establishing a single large centre for women’s groups, but this has currently not come to fruition. The Centre is open three days a week by appointment only, and two mornings a week on a drop-in basis.

The name had changed over time in order to attract more women and to have a broader remit, thus appealing to more funding bodies.

The Centre is also home to WomenZone, a free bi-monthly newsletter for lesbian and bisexual women in Wales. The newsletter has been in existence since c.2000 and is produced by two volunteers who were initially volunteers from the Women’s Centre, but gradually took on the newsletter as their tasks. The newsletter is now a separate entity from the Centre. Although about 500 copies are distributed each time, there is not fixed subscription fee or donation required.

25 Mansel Street, Swansea, SA1 5SQ
01792 411119
swanwomens@aol.com
Women’s History Project – Directory of Sources for Women’s History in Ireland

The origins of the Women’s History Project date from 1989 when the Women’s History Association of Ireland was established, comprising mainly of historians. Their ideas for tasks and research included creating a database of all documents in Ireland pertaining to women. The group approached the Government and received grant money for one year (commencing in September 1997) to conduct a mapping exercise across Ireland to record all the pertinent records that document women’s lives. After this initial year, the group were successful in being awarded further money until 2001 for wider searching of repositories in Ireland. In total 420 public and private repositories in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland were contacted and visited by a team of professional archivists.

The research led to two databases being created for public access via the Internet. One database consists of details of the collections and records mapped across Ireland, and the other details specific papers in the Taoiseach’s\(^2\) files. Both projects are hosted by the Irish Manuscripts Commission. The former, The Directory of Sources for the History of Women in Ireland covers over 14,000 collections and sources and contains over 100,000 pieces of information from 262 repositories. The database Women in 20th-Century Ireland: Sources from the Department of the Taoiseach 1922-1966 contains just under 20,000 entries and provides details on records from central government relating to women. The Directory is also available as a CD-ROM.

The project is overseen by a Director (Professor Maria Luddy, lecturer at Warwick University History Department), and a team of management. Examples of some of the collections include papers from convents, psychiatric hospitals, and poor law records. As well as mapping collections, there has also been a degree of ‘rescue’ work, whereby important documents that are endangered have been rescued from inadequate situations

\(^2\) The Taoiseach is the Head of the Irish Government
or from imminent destruction e.g. records from the Girls’ Friendly Society, and deposited in a suitable location e.g. the National Archive or the National Library.

http://www.nationalarchives.ie/wh/introduction.html

Women in Jazz, Swansea

Women in Jazz was founded in 1986 by Jen Wilson who is still involved today. It was established as the Women’s Jazz Archive Swansea and arose out of her personal interest in jazz music and her personal and research interests in women’s history. The principle aim of the archive is to collate material pertaining to women who were involved in jazz, not only in Wales but also in America, where the jazz movement originated, and to research the history of how jazz music came to Wales.

The archive was originally housed in Jen Wilson’s own house until it moved with her to Swansea University when she was appointed to a lecturing post in 1992. Due to changing circumstances she left the university in 1996 and took the collection away with her, believing that the University was not providing sufficient interest or resources to the archive. The archive was again kept in her house until 2002 when it moved to its current location. It is currently housed in buildings near the Marina in Swansea, with the City & Council of Swansea paying the rent for the rooms.

At the time of interviewing there was one paid part-time development worker, and Jen Wilson who worked on the collections and the archive in a voluntary capacity. In late 2004, the archive was successful in winning a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for two years. The post of Heritage Development Officer was awarded to Jen Wilson to work on the project: Wales, Slavery and its Music. The archive changed its name to Women in Jazz in the late 1990s in order to be more attractive to funding opportunities. The archive is managed by a board of trustees, with currently about 10 members (male and female). The collection includes thousands of audio/visual records, photographs, journals and periodicals, a growing library, paintings, stained glass windows, stage
gowns etc. Courses and workshops are also provided in improvisation, African Rhythm, Bhangra, Small Group Work and Collecting Oral History. Personnel at the Archive are also able to respond to requests to commission music and regularly perform at concerts. The archive is a registered Charitable Trust.

Rooms 1-3 Queen's Buildings, Cambrian Buildings, Swansea, SA1 1TW.
01792 456666
http://www.jazzsite.co.uk/wja/

Women’s Library (London)
The Women's Library in London has had various names and homes in its past. It was the first women’s library in Britain (founded in 1926) and arose out of a constitutional suffrage group. In 1865 Millicent Garrett Fawcett was involved with the Women’s Suffrage Provisional Committee (Barrow, 1981, p. 212) which became the London Society for Women's Suffrage in 1867. Millicent Garrett Fawcett also became president of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), the largest suffragist group. After various name changes and divisions (see Barrow, 1981, p. 209 for a clear diagram) the London Society for Women's Suffrage opened a women’s service bureau to help recruit and train women for men’s jobs in the war (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 226). After World War I the group changed its name to that of the London and National Society for Women’s Service. One member donated property at Marsham St, Westminster, and this became the Women’s Service House. The papers from various suffrage groups were brought together and the formal inauguration of the Women’s Service Library occurred in 1926 (Pankhurst, 198, p. 226).

The library’s original aims were to preserve the history of the women’s movement as well as to provide an up-to-date collection on social, political and economic concerns useful to women in their new public lives (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 226). Thus is was not only an archive but also a resource for women wanting to enter into the hitherto closed professions. During the 1930s the Women’s Service House was a multi-purpose
women’s centre which housed a lecture theatre, café, theatre, the library etc, and was frequented by the likes of Virginia Woolf and Vera Brittain (Ilett, 2003, p. 240). In 1940 the building was bombed and the library moved to Oxford temporarily. It returned to London over a five year period and was brought back together in a new building in 1956 on Wilfred St, Westminster (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 229).

In 1953 the London and National Society for Women’s Service became the Fawcett Society in honour of Dame Millicent Garret Fawcett and her daughter Philippa Fawcett (who had financially assisted the Library) and four years later the Fawcett Library Trust was founded as educational charity. The Women’s Service Library was transferred to the care of the Trust, and it became the Fawcett Library in 1957, with the aim of promoting and advancing education and learning (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 229). The 1970s saw a decline in members, decline in donations and rise in costs (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 230). Approaches were made to institutions in the hope of finding a way of supporting the library as the Fawcett Society decided it could no longer support the library. In 1976/77 it came under the ownership the City of London Polytechnic (where Rita Pankhurst was Chief Librarian of Library Services and Cynthia White, an active Fawcett Society member, was Head of the Sociology Department). The Polytechnic was able to appoint nine workers for a year under the Job Creation Scheme which enabled the stock to be sorted, rearranged and for a stock check to be conducted, although a large amount of the material remained uncatalogued (Barrow, 1981, p. 192). A little later it received £35,000 from the Inner London Education Authority to pay for librarians and archivists, but due to funding cuts it had to reduce staff in the late 1980s (Ilett, 2003, p. 252). City of London Polytechnic later became London Guildhall University, which, when it merged with the University of North London, became London Metropolitan University (LMU).

From 1977 to 2002 it was housed in a basement at Calcutta House. In 1998 the National Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) awarded London Guildhall University a grant of £4.2 million for the library to relocate into a new purpose-built building nearby in the East
End of London. The library re-opened in February 2002 with the total capital cost being £6.9 million. The building, on the site of a former wash-house and laundry, has won several awards including Best UK Building of 2002 from the Royal Institute of British Architects Journal and Best Public Building from the Brick Development Association Brick Awards 2002. During the HLF application the Fawcett Library had become, temporarily, The National Library of Women (e.g. Anon, 1998, p. 341; Greening, 2000, p. 468; Purvis, 1998, n. p.). After discussions with the other women’s libraries in Great Britain it settled on the new name of The Women’s Library which was formally agreed at the 2001 AGM (Ilett, 2003, p. 249).

Its aims today are to provide reference material and archives on all areas of women's lives in Britain. London Metropolitan University provides it with an income, and it also receives donations from other sources including a range of educational and arts organisations. Income is also provided by the Friends of the Women’s Library scheme (formerly Friends of the Fawcett Society) who pay from £15 upwards to be a Friend. There is also a Patron scheme whereby patrons who commit to an annual fee are entitled to a range of benefits. There are three levels of Patron support, from £30 to £100. In 2003, there were about 300 Friends of the Women’s Library (Ilett, 2003, p. 254).

The library is run by a Director and a board of management. It is staffed by a total of 22 staff, most of which are paid full-time or part-time staff, and the remainder are volunteers. Unlike the other women’s libraries, it has employed male librarians and archivists, the most notable being David Doughan who was Librarian (and Head librarian 1988-2000, Ilett, 2003, p. 245) and worked at the library for 23 years (1977-2001) (Ilett, 2003, p. 245) and writes on women’s history. The first librarian, Vera Douie, served from 1926-1967.

In 1978 it created BiblioFem, a bi-monthly bibliography of material in its library along with the collection of the newly established Equal Opportunities Commission, and recent items catalogued by the British Library or Library of Congress that pertained to
women. *BiblioFem* was sold to interested libraries across the world but was discontinued in 1987 as it became difficult to financially support the venture (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 231).

Today, the Library is open five days a week and has a collection of some 60,000 books, pamphlets, ephemera and artefacts including banners, portraits, medals, cartoons and photographs; 2500 periodical titles; 400+ archive collections and 5000 museum objects. It also holds regular exhibitions based on its collections. At the end of 2005 its catalogue was expanded to enable searching of its archive and museums collection.

Within the Women’s Library there are three special collections: the Cavendish-Bentinck Collection, the Josephine Butler Collection and the Sadd Brown Collection. The Cavendish-Bentinck collection consists of hundreds of early 17\(^{th}\) to early 20\(^{th}\) century works relating to women and was the personal collection of Ruth Cavendish-Bentinck (Barrow, 1981, p. 208); the Josephine Butler Society collection is concerned with the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act and includes the library of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene; the Sadd Brown Collection is material relating to women in the Commonwealth in memory of Mrs Myra Sadd Brown, a suffragette. Within the main collection are personal papers of individual women both famous and unknown e.g. Dame Barbara Cartland (author), Elaine Showalter (feminist writer), Eleanor Rathbone (MP), Sheila Rowbotham (feminist historian); papers of women’s organisations e.g. British Federation of Business and Professional Women, 1933-1972, London Feminist History Group, National Federation of Women's Institutes, Onlywomen Press, Sheba Feminist Press, Six Point Group, 1919-1981 (established by a Welsh women Margaret Haig Thomas) and the Townswomen's Guild, and papers of various women's campaigning groups e.g. Women in Libraries, 1973-1987. It has a particular focus on the papers of the many women’s suffrage societies.

The Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University, Old Castle St, London, E1 7NT
Women’s Resource Centre (London)
The Women’s Resource Centre (WRC) arose out of several previous organisations, but there is little knowledge of its history or background among the staff, who are all new to the institution. Duguid notes that a women’s resource centre was established in London in the mid 1980s to “help women get access to information about groups and services in London via a confidential telephone referral service.” (Duguid, 2000, p. 696). In the late 1990s, following consultation with other women’s organisations in the voluntary and community sector it redefined its objectives and is now a second-tier charity and umbrella body for women’s not-for-profit groups and organisations (Duguid, 2000, p. 696). Its website states that it is a ‘coordinating and support organisation for voluntary and community projects’ that work for and with women, providing information, training, development support, networking opportunities and policy consultation within the non-profit sector. It also states that the WRC is the ‘only pan-London organisation providing infrastructure services specifically for the women’s voluntary and community sector.’

The WRC is an independent institution, which is funded by a variety of project grants. It is run by a director and a board of management. At the time of interviewing (2003) there were three teams (development, information and policy) but by summer 2005 this had increased to five (the additional two being central services responsible for the internal administration and management of the organisation, and the Elevate project team responsible for delivering a funded women’s leadership and management project). The Information Team is responsible for mailings, the website, the bi-monthly newsletter, membership referrals, the resource library, various services such as photocopying and computer usage, and for running the volunteer programme and managing membership.
The library provides a reference collection for women's organisations but not for the general public. Individual women can use the library if they are members of WRC. The library is accessible by appointment only and falls under the jurisdiction of the Information Team. This team comprised of one full-time paid member of staff and two part-time volunteers. At the time of interviewing the library was located in a single room, and consisted of five shelves of reference materials. The Women’s Resource Centre has about 150 members who pay a sliding scale of membership from £5 to £30, depending upon the type of membership (e.g. full, associate, reciprocal) and turnover of the organisation. Individuals can join as members as well. At present any women’s group can use the library, they do not have to be members.

The website hosts details of job vacancies for a range of posts at various women's organisations, primarily in the south east. The WRC also runs training courses which are free to WRC members.

WRC produces a range of publications over many areas of interest to the women’s voluntary and community sector. They also produce a range of policy documents, responses to Government papers and factsheets. The WRC is also a Registered Charity and Limited Company. It recently moved to new premises, still in the East End of London.

Ground Floor East, 33-41 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BB
Tel: 020 7324 3030
www.wrc.org.uk