

**Books By Women, For Women, About Women: An Oral History of Everywomans Books in Victoria,  
B.C., 1975-1997**

by

Taylor Antoniazzi  
B.A., University of Victoria, 2013  
M.A., University of Waterloo, 2016

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

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## **Abstract**

Everywomans Books was a non-profit feminist bookstore established in Victoria, B.C. in 1975. The store closed in 1997 due to financial problems, but it was the last remaining non-profit feminist bookstore run by an all-volunteer collective in Canada. From the beginning, the collective pursued its vision to create a comfortable, safe space for women to access vital information that was hard to find anywhere else. Though creating and maintaining the bookstore was a thoroughly feminist endeavour, the bookstore itself was not a centre of political activity in the community. Its animus was to provide the literature that would raise women's consciousness, impel their identity formation, foster bold, independent thinking and jolt women into political action. This thesis draws on oral history interviews with collective members and customers of the bookstore and the Everywomans Books archival materials housed in the Women's Movement Archives at the University of Victoria. It analyzes how the bookstore's location in a smaller, more racially homogeneous and less radicalized city allowed the collective to avoid many of the tensions that divided feminists in major urban centres. This thesis argues that the project of running a feminist bookstore mostly involved mundane tasks, yet the ordinary, everyday work of the women who poured their time and energy into keeping a small, local bookstore open and making feminist literature available in their community was life-changing for many.

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## Introduction

In the early 1970s, political pamphlets, periodicals, newsletters, essays and manifestos written by women began to proliferate in North America. This writing was so abundant that between 1969 and the mid-1980s, it is estimated that forty new feminist periodicals were published in Canada alone.<sup>1</sup> Women who discovered this writing were immediately struck by its boldness. As any book lover can attest, recognizing your own life experiences articulated by another person in writing is profound; coming across a sentence that names the most difficult things you might be too afraid to admit can be life-affirming. All this is to say that women's interactions with this writing, and their pivotal moments of identification with it, were intense. In one of my favourite book series, Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels set in Naples, the protagonist Elena Greco is introduced to feminism when her sister-in-law gives her some feminist literature to read, including a manifesto by the Italian feminist, Carla Lonzi, *We Spit on Hegel*.<sup>2</sup> Head spinning, the protagonist describes how she could hardly believe what she was reading:

Every sentence struck me, every word, and above all the bold freedom of thought. I forcefully underlined many of the sentences, I made exclamation points, vertical strokes. Spit on Hegel. Spit on the culture of men, spit on Marx, on Engels, on Lenin. And on historical materialism. And on Freud. And on psychoanalysis and penis envy. And on marriage, on family. And on Nazism, on Stalinism, on terrorism. And on war. And on the class struggle. And on the dictatorship of the proletariat. And on socialism. And on Communism. And on the trap of equality. And on all the manifestations of patriarchal culture. And on all its institutional forms. Resist the waste of female intelligence.<sup>3</sup>

So all-absorbing was this literature, she carried it around with her in her purse, thought about it constantly, attended a political meeting with her sister-in-law and told her best friend about what she was reading. Like Greco, many women's first encounter with the feminist movement reached them

<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Wachtel, *Update on Feminist Periodicals* (Ottawa: Secretary of State, 1985), cited in Joan Sangster, "Creating Popular Histories: Re-Interpreting 'Second Wave' Canadian Feminism," *Dialectical Anthropology* 39, no. 4 (November 2015): 385.

<sup>2</sup> The real title of this text is *Let's Spit on Hegel* (1970).

<sup>3</sup> Elena Ferrante, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* (New York: Europa Editions, 2014), 260.

through texts. Reading feminist literature unlocked something for many women who saw their life and concerns reflected in what they read and were politicized by it.

Women in small towns had a harder time getting their hands on feminist reading material than those in major cities, but were just as hungry for it. With an eye trained on the growing feminist bookstore movement in the United States, which corresponded with a boom in feminist literature, and recognizing the stark urgency for feminist reading material in their own community, Lynn Greenhough and Ann Hillyer decided to open a women's bookstore in Victoria, B.C. in 1975. With a collective of eight women, a donation of \$1,500 and a sense of relentless optimism, they started Everywomans Books – an anti-hierarchical, all-volunteer bookstore that would sell feminist literature and provide a meeting space for the local women's community. The bookstore served both as an important site where women on Vancouver Island who had felt isolated from the larger women's movement could connect and an accessible, non-intimidating entryway for those who had no prior knowledge of or experience with feminism, helping them make sense of their lives and experiences and providing them with an introductory education in feminist thought. In this way, feminist bookstores like Everywomans Books played a fundamental role in reaching out to women and raising their feminist consciousness.

While some feminist organizations struggled for greater rights and equality for women through traditional channels by demanding changes in law, others took to the streets in mass demonstrations and still others employed a "politics of outrage"<sup>4</sup> to effectively mobilize women around a particular issue. Although such manoeuvres might have enjoyed immediate social or political successes, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how feminist projects that took a gradual, more oblique approach to social change affected women's individual lives every day and promised to build into something transformative. Because of their modest approach and pragmatic ideas about change, feminist bookstores have not

<sup>4</sup> Brenda Cossman and Shannon Bell, "Introduction," in *Bad Attitude/s on Trial: Pornography, Feminism and the Butler Decision*, eds. Brenda Cossman, Shannon Bell, Lisa Gotell, and Becki Ross (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 9.

received much attention in historical literature. Critics of cultural feminism, in particular, have roundly accused women's alternative cultural spaces like bookstores of deradicalizing the women's movement<sup>5</sup> and thus failed to understand the untold promise of literature. In 2018, Jorge Méndez Blake constructed an art installation consisting of a colossal brick wall built precariously around a novel. The bricks arched at the source of the disruption in the wall, Franz Kafka's *The Castle*, which created a wave rolling through the structure, warping it and transforming everything. The misshapen structure illustrates the immense impact a book can have. No matter how small and inconsequential the book appears, its subtle, transgressive insertion transforms the entire structure surrounding it. The Everywomans Books collective had a good understanding of the radical, transformative potential of a single book. In the interviews I conducted with collective members, many lovingly described the books they had read that had had a profound effect on their lives and their personal journeys of coming out or coming-to-feminism. For many, their passion for books and conviction in the power of literature led them to volunteer at the bookstore.

In general, bookstores tend to be viewed as neutral, non-threatening spaces. Everywomans Books defined itself as a safe, broad-minded space in the feminist community that its customers could access differently than they could more specific community services like the Transition House or Rape/Assault Centre. They could linger in the bookstore for hours, discovering a vast range of books, picking them up and putting them down, taking from them as much or as little as they wanted (or needed). Though the store was forced to close in 1997 due to financial problems, Everywomans Books was the last remaining feminist bookstore run by a non-profit all-volunteer collective in Canada. To the end, it defied expectations and preserved the integrity of its original vision. The collective speculated that they owed their ability to survive for so long to the support they received from their loyal

<sup>5</sup> Junko Onosaka, *Feminist Revolution in Literacy: Women's Bookstores in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

customers and to “the special nature of Victoria itself.”<sup>6</sup> This thesis argues that in contrast to organizations in larger, more politicized cities like Toronto, feminists working in smaller communities, which have tended to be less studied by scholars, were generally less riven by tensions over political and social issues or differences in perspective and strategy that led to splits in other feminist organizations. The store’s unifying vision and approach to social change also helped them avoid friction and tension. This thesis concerns itself with the history of Everywomans Books, analyzing the extent to which its location in a small city influenced its principles, politics and longevity and exploring its positive, lasting effect on its customers and community. In order to analyze the bookstore’s role in the local women’s community, this thesis will examine the collective’s vision to create a safe gathering space where feminist thought could be disseminated and debated among women and that could eventually serve as a valuable point of departure for political action. The political work that went into building such a community resource centre was mostly mundane and lacked the glamour of radical feminist organizing in the early years of the women’s movement; the kind of work that can easily be erased and forgotten. My thesis will demonstrate the value of studying the tedious everyday efforts of feminists located in a smaller city, who focused on the pragmatic goal of providing a service that was needed by the women in their community and a base for consciousness-raising and further advocacy, and what it can contribute to our understanding of second-wave feminism in English Canada.

## **Methodology**

This thesis is based on twenty in-depth interviews with collective members and customers of Everywomans Books as well as on the Everywomans Books fonds, which includes a vast collection of logbooks and meeting minutes, community newsletters, article clippings related to the bookstore,

<sup>6</sup> Victoria Women’s Movement Archives (hereafter VWMA), Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Posters 1982-1995, Everywomans Books 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party Celebration pamphlet, 1995.

organizational files, audio recordings, photos, correspondence and ephemera like posters and buttons. The fonds are part of the Victoria Women's Movement Archive collection housed at the University of Victoria. I cannot overstate the immense value of this archive, which has made it possible for me to uncover and enhance the visibility of women's contributions to the Victoria community. Recognizing that the history of women's activism at the community level was in danger of being forgotten, Debby Yaffe and Susan Moger sought to build this archive to preserve and increase accessibility to the materials that document women's important contributions and accomplishments. However, archival materials are open to different interpretations. The historian does their best to listen for common themes but acknowledges the risk that they might misinterpret or attach more weight to something than it had at the time it was created. As I pored over the collective's logbooks and meeting minutes and perused correspondences between women, I felt like I was reading someone's private diary. I was immediately invested in their relationships, struggles, conflicts and accomplishments. But what really captured my attention was the interesting women who appeared in these documents doing a thousand different things - training new volunteers, taking home books to review, trading information and skills. I knew the only way to understand how they viewed their actions and understood the vision of the bookstore and the role of feminist literature was to hear them articulate it in their own words so I turned to the collective members and customers of the bookstore.

Echoing the feminist principle of privileging women's personal experiences, feminist scholars have taken up the critical project of recovering women's words as a way of challenging and expanding traditional historical knowledge, which has tended to mask or forget women's lives.<sup>7</sup> It has been assumed that oral history provides a pure and unimpeded version of the past, with the potential for reinvigorating archives and heightening their emotional value. Feminist scholars, however, have

<sup>7</sup> Joan Sangster, "Creating Popular Histories: Re-Interpreting 'Second Wave' Canadian Feminism," *Dialectical Anthropology* 39, no. 4 (November 2015): 382.

debated the methodological issues surrounding the use of oral history, focusing on such issues as the trustworthiness of interviewees, how to deal with the deep and selective nature of memory and the ethical quandary that arises around the inherently “unequal, intrusive and potentially exploitative”<sup>8</sup> relationship between researchers and their subjects.

Joan Sangster urges historians to analyze oral interviews carefully, listening for common words and omissions and attending to how meaning is created in the dialogue between the interviewer and the informant, with all their attendant values and biases. In response to questions about conflicts among collective members, many of the women I interviewed denied that there were any tensions over age, race, class, religion or sexuality. Based on what I had gleaned from secondary sources, however, I knew that tension over these issues was common in other second-wave feminist organizations, including in bookstores. As Sangster points out, “cultural values shape our very ordering and prioritizing of events.”<sup>9</sup> Given that all of the women I interviewed were very similar in terms of demographics, it is possible that they were less conscious of or engaged in these issues. It is also possible that I looked for conflict when it simply was not there. For example, I anticipated that racism and voice appropriation would have been significant issues in the bookstore based on my contemporary experiences, but my interviewees explained that feminists are more aware of these issues now. Valerie Yow has written about how historians inevitably begin their research by asking a question and bringing their life experiences to interviews, which tends to lead them to focus on information only insofar as it is relevant to them.<sup>10</sup> I also considered the explanation that the women might have cherry-picked details as a method of dealing with difficult events or telling the story that was more important for them. Many were understandably proud of the bookstore’s positive contributions to the community and might not have

<sup>8</sup> Joan Sangster, “Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History,” *Women’s History Review* 3, no. 1 (2006): 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Valerie Yow, “Do I Like Them Too Much?: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa,” *Oral History Review: Journal of the Oral History Association* 24 no. 1 (1997): 72.

wanted to diminish them by giving undue weight to disagreements that were not all that important at the time. Or perhaps the positive events were more memorable for them. In any case, all of the women I spoke to agreed that these issues were not a source of tension at the bookstore. While I intend to take them at their word, I believe that it is important to approach the analysis of the interviews with as much nuance as possible. To this end, I have also considered a diverse range of archival material, which taken together presents a more complex picture of some of the issues that emerged at the bookstore.

Of particular relevance to this thesis, some studies have found that when women remember and tell their own stories, they tend toward “understatements, avoidance of the first person point of view, rare mention of personal accomplishments and disguised statements of personal power.”<sup>11</sup> In my study, I found that the collective members I interviewed were modest about their individual contributions and continually emphasized the role of other members. Many of the women apologized that they could not remember specific details, explaining that they had only been “blips” in the bookstore’s history, and advised me to ask someone else who had been more involved or committed than them. Within the value system of the bookstore, shared leadership and collective empowerment were emphasized and the existence of hierarchy was seen as patriarchal and, hence, rejected. In this framework, it is possible that some might have perceived it as necessary to downplay their role in the store, which was crucial for me to keep in mind when writing this history.

Yow reminds historians that they too need to acknowledge the centrality of their role in the interview and interpretation process. She points to scholars who have encouraged researchers to situate themselves in their work and in relation to their participants, attending to how certain demographic factors like gender, class, race or ethnicity and ideology as well as various other details such as their motivations for undertaking a particular project, emotional attachments and expectations might

<sup>11</sup> Sangster, “Telling Our Stories,” 11.

influence the interview, form their understandings and shape the way they chose to narrate a story.<sup>12</sup>

With this in mind, I think it is important to state that I am a young,<sup>13</sup> white woman and a lover of literature. My personal obsession with reading led me to Everywomans Books as a research topic. It was also built into the interview process, when I asked several questions about each participant's relationship to feminist literature. Feminist literature emerged as an important theme in my work, no doubt because it is what excites me personally, but also because it was central in the lives of the women I interviewed.

Just as researchers can impact the interview process, they may be affected by the experience of the interview as well. Yow believes this reciprocal relationship has not received the attention it deserves in oral history research, at least not until recently.<sup>14</sup> After ignoring this interactive process for decades, Yow noticed a trend beginning in the mid- to late 1980s of historians increasingly declaring their identity positions and incorporating in their analysis a discussion of the ways in which they related to their interview subjects and how it had changed them. Yow and other scholars have maintained that cultivating relationships can be valuable as it confers a friendly intimacy and allows for deeper understanding, sensitivity and empathy – capacities that have previously been disqualified or delegitimated because they are consistently linked with feminine values as opposed to objective scientific knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, Kathryn Anderson underscores the significance of relationship building in feminism and in women's lives, more generally.<sup>16</sup> Sangster also points out that during oral interviews, we forge a deep personal connection with our interviewees that is fleeting but meaningful

<sup>12</sup> Yow, "Do I Like Them Too Much?," 64, 67, 69.

<sup>13</sup> Yow has noted that age plays a significant role in determining the topics and information we assume are important. She points to an example of one study in which a researcher who was younger than her participants observed that she was not getting clear answers because she had asked questions that were relevant to her own experiences based in the 1990s and were not relevant to her participant's experiences in the 1960s and 1970s. Ibid., 74.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 55-56

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 68.

nonetheless. However, she suggests that this is not necessarily positive, “as it may lead us to shy away from critical conclusions about their lives.”<sup>17</sup> What emerged from my interview process was a terrifying sense of obligation to the women I interviewed, to doing justice not only in representing their activism and achievements, but in capturing their incisiveness, intrepidity, passion, wit, charisma, conviction, scrappiness and sense of possibility. In writing this history, my main purpose is not to pass judgement – to ferret out flaws in their structure or criticize them for not being inclusive enough. It would be unfair, and futile, to measure the past by our current rubrics for understanding race and gender, which have evolved over time thanks to the efforts of both second- and third-wave feminists and racialized and Indigenous feminists, in particular. My purpose, rather, is to make an argument that I feel is fair and accurate to the best of my understanding, to present the bookstore as accurately as possible and to navigate the complexities of women’s organizing with sensitivity and empathy in order to tell a story that celebrates its protagonists, while recognizing that they acted in the context of their own time and their own experiences.

Between November 2017 and February 2018, I met with fifteen former members of the Everywomans Books collective – some who had started the bookstore back in 1975 and some who had only started volunteering in its final year before closing – as well as five customers. I primarily found research subjects by using the “snowball” method, which involved asking interviewees if they were comfortable identifying other women who were involved with the bookstore and might also be willing to be interviewed. A different set of questions was formulated for each participant group; though some questions were duplicated as they pertained to both collective members and customers. The majority of participants agreed to waive anonymity and use their full name; in the three cases where participants requested anonymity, I have given them a pseudonym to protect their anonymity as much as possible. Participants were asked basic demographic questions as well as general questions about the bookstore

<sup>17</sup> Sangster, “Telling Our Stories,” 12.

and more specific questions about reading and engaging with feminist literature, their membership in the collective or experiences visiting the store as customers and the role the bookstore played in the community.

I talked on the phone with my participants, we met for breakfast, we met in noisy coffee shops and in their homes where they served coffee and an array of snacks. They searched through their collections to show me the books they once got lost in as their cats lounged across my laptop. When I left the interviews, the women sent me home with jars of marmalade and book recommendations, they wished me luck on my project and they sent their greetings and salutations to the next interviewee. These women were born between 1929 and 1961. One woman was born in the 1920s, one in the 1930s, six in the 1940s, six in the 1950s and one in the 1960s. All of the women I interviewed were white and middle class.<sup>18</sup> With regards to sexuality, one woman self-identified as heterosexual, five as lesbians, one as bisexual, one as “open,” one as “too broad to classify,” two did not specify their sexuality but stated that they had been involved in both straight and lesbian relationships over their lifetimes and three did not disclose their sexuality in their self-descriptions. Many of the women did not discuss their religion, though two identified as belonging to the Unitarian Church and six identified as being Jewish. Their average length of membership in the collective was between five and seven years.<sup>19</sup> During the period of their involvement with the collective, they were also variously involved with the pro-choice movement, a Jewish women’s feminist group, a women’s health collective, a radical feminist discussion group, a lesbian support group, Take Back the Night marches, the Victoria Rape/Assault Centre, the Victoria Women’s Transition House, the Women’s Studies Department at the University of Victoria and the Victoria Status of Women Action Group. Today, these women are retired, they are involved in city

<sup>18</sup> Women were asked how they identified in terms of class at the time of the interview. Though most women probably would have also identified as middle class during their period of involvement with the bookstore, some did come from working-class backgrounds.

<sup>19</sup> This number is an estimate as some women could not definitively remember how many years they had been involved in the collective and the archives do not provide sufficient data such as complete membership lists.

council and Women's Studies departments, they are teachers, counsellors, writers, painters, photographers, printmakers, lawyers, naval officers and, of course, lifelong readers.

Of the five customers I interviewed, one was born in the 1930s, three were born in the 1940s and one was born in the 1960s. All were white and, at this point in their lives, identified as middle class. In terms of their sexuality, two women self-identified as lesbian, one did not classify herself but had been in both straight and lesbian relationships and the other two did not specify. One identified as Jewish and one had belonged to the United Church; the others did not discuss their religious affiliation. The frequency of their visits ranged from "most weekends" to once a month to twice a year. Just as with the collective members, the bookstore's customers were heavily involved in feminist causes and organizations in the city, including Prime Time – an organization for women in their middle years, Bridges for Women – a group combatting women's poverty, Together Against Poverty, End Legislative Poverty, South Island Women for Economic Survival, the Victoria Rape/Assault Centre, the Victoria Women's Transition House, the Women's Studies Department at UVic and the Victoria Status of Women Action Group.

These women were all brilliant and articulate during the interviews. Some were quiet and paused to think about my questions before delivering thoughtful, lucid answers, others were forthright and responded quickly and unapologetically, and the consummate storytellers remembered with good senses of humour potlucks with too many potato dishes and marching with the Everywomans Books' banner in bright fuchsia harem pants in the 1977 Victoria Day Parade. A vivid portrait began to emerge of the sharp and engaging, strong and educated characters that animated the bookstore. One remark I heard often throughout the interview process was: "Ask Debby." If the woman I was speaking to couldn't answer my question, she seemed sure that Debby Yaffe, a member of the collective from 1982 until the bookstore closed in 1997, would be able to. I decided to save my interview with Yaffe for last so that I would have the experience of the previous interviews and could finally clarify some ambiguities in

the archival materials and get answers to the questions that had been on my mind since starting this project. I believe her interview imparts most clearly the passion that fueled the bookstore, a passion that grew clearer as we spoke. I left her house with a powerful sense that there was an alchemy between the bookstore and the collective members that changed them in some way, and probably changed the customers too. At the end of the interview, Yaffe told me that she was grateful that my thesis would chart the history of the bookstore: “otherwise nobody even knows [the bookstore] existed and it was a centre of our universe for such a long time, for so many women, it really was, and it was unimaginable that it wouldn’t exist.”<sup>20</sup>



Figure 1. Members of the collective march with the Everywomans Books’ banner<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Debby Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>21</sup> *Members of the Everywomans Books collective marching with banner, Victoria, B.C.*, n.d., VWMA, Everywomans Books, 97-177, Box 1, Newspaper Clippings – Memorabilia #1, n.d.

## Chapter Summaries

In the first chapter, I will introduce relevant historical work on the second-wave women's movement in Canada. From there, I will turn to a discussion of the limited research in both Canada and the U.S. that exists on feminist bookstores and their role in their communities as well as the women's movement more broadly. In addition to the obvious advantage of increasing the visibility and accessibility of women's writing, this literature also calls attention to the value of feminist bookstores for community and identity building.

My second chapter begins with a narrative about the opening of the bookstore, but is primarily devoted to the customers of Everywomans Books. The bookstore's foremothers desired to make feminist reading material widely available to all book lovers in an accepting, non-threatening environment. This chapter draws extensively on customers' oral histories to determine how they engaged with the radically new ideas they found in feminist books and used them in their processes of fashioning lesbian and feminist identities. Many women I interviewed expressed their deep gratitude and relief at finally being able to access this material and discussed literature as an important dimension of their consciousness-raising.

My third chapter will focus on the collective structure of the bookstore. Everywomans Books was built around feminist principles, which favoured shared leadership and consensus decision-making as an alternative to traditional hierarchical organizing models. This chapter draws on interviews with collective members to examine how their love of books united them in their vision to provide a community service for other book lovers and helped them avoid getting embroiled in internecine debates. Though some conflict did arise, primarily concerning the daily operation of the store, Everywomans carefully navigated around contentious issues like racism and voice appropriation in its efforts to be seen as a site of respite in the community. As we will see, however, failure to engage critically with these issues may have created a sense of exclusion for racialized and Indigenous women.

In my fourth and final chapter, I will analyze the bookstore's involvement in feminist debates around sex and pornography. As a small local bookstore, their potential for intervention into the struggle with Customs censorship was much more limited than the gay and lesbian bookstore Little Sister's in Vancouver, which was at the centre of this battle. In response to the problem of censorship, Everywomans Books formulated a statement on pornography and censorship for the store that offered a nuanced take on these issues. The collective articulated in forceful terms their belief in the necessity to promote the full range of voices, images and sexualities - excluding those which were racist and sexist - and for women to make their own decisions about what to read. The collective was also involved in some internal debates over censorship that forced them to engage critically with each other and with literature. Their willingness to wade into political issues related to censorship suggests that the collective placed more weight on problems that affected their store directly, while largely avoiding getting involved in political issues such as racism and appropriation, which seemed less central to the almost exclusively white collective.

The conclusion offers an assessment of the converging factors that contributed to burnout, bankruptcy and the eventual closure of the bookstore. Some scholars have suggested that women's alternative spaces like bookstores were too inward focused and this ushered in the decline of radical feminism.<sup>22</sup> I argue, however, that the bookstore's closure was a direct consequence of the increased visibility of feminist titles on the shelves of mainstream and chain bookstores, which can be seen as evidence of the bookstore's success in disseminating feminist ideas into mainstream culture.

<sup>22</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 281.

## Chapter One: Historiography

This chapter begins by charting a general overview of the second-wave women's movement in Canada. It is only recently that there has been significant work published on second-wave feminism in Canada and much of it focuses on particular aspects of women's organizing such as sexuality, reproduction, access to safe, legal abortions and the women's shelter movement.<sup>1</sup> This review will focus on the development of the women's movement in English Canada. In 2001, Meg Luxton described how Canada's geographic diversity shaped the women's movement:

First, Canada's relatively small population, spread out over a large geographic area, and its federate state structures means that organizing typically occurs at a local or regional level, reflecting regional differences based on local and diverse economics, provincial or territorial and municipal legislation, and linguistic, racialized, ethnic, or national cultures, and patterns of settlement. The political differences that hampered pan-Canadian movements are compounded by the logistical difficulties and financial costs imposed by the physical distances.<sup>2</sup>

This complicated situation produced three movements in Canada, all distinct from one another:

francophone feminism in Quebec, Indigenous feminism and the mainstream movement "in the rest of Canada."<sup>3</sup> Luxton added that racialized and immigrant women emerged as another unique and particular group when they began to organize autonomously in response to the mainstream movement's failure to incorporate difference. Though there was a degree of cooperation between the mainstream movement and communities of racialized, immigrant and Indigenous women, there was relatively little dialogue between the francophone feminists and feminists in the rest of Canada.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Becki Ross, *The House that Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Christabelle Sethna, "Clandestine Operations: The Vancouver Women's Caucus, the Abortion Caravan, and the RCMP," *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (2009): 463-495; Christabelle Sethna, "The Evolution of the *Birth Control Handbook* from Student Peer-Education Manual to Feminist Self-Empowerment Text, 1968-1975," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 23, no. 1 (2006): 89-117; Nancy Janovicek, *No Place to Go: Local Histories of the Battered Women's Shelter Movement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001): 65.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. For a more in-depth discussion of francophone and Indigenous women's organizing, see Sean Mills, "Quebecois deboutte!? Nationalism and Feminism in Quebec, 1968-1975," in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, edited by Mona Gleason, Tamara Myers and Adele Perry (Toronto: Oxford University Press,

*Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (1988) by Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail remains one of the most comprehensive overviews of the contemporary women's movement in English Canada<sup>5</sup> and thus provides a crucial foundation for this overview of the development of the second wave.

Given commonalities with the U.S. women's movement and the greater range of American literature, I sometimes draw on this work, particularly in my discussion of cultural feminism and the critique of women-centred services. The ascendance of cultural feminism is one of the major issues that has been addressed in the American literature on the second-wave women's movement, largely because of its most prominent critic, Alice Echols. Though this is only one facet of the work that has been done on second-wave feminism in the U.S.,<sup>6</sup> this overview focuses heavily on cultural feminism because it pertains directly to women-centred services like feminist bookstores. There is comparatively little Canadian literature on cultural feminism.<sup>7</sup> After providing an overview of the women's movement in English Canada, and connecting it with the women's movement in the U.S., the historiographical examination will focus on scholarship that discusses feminist bookstores. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the limitations in the current literature on feminist organizing and by identifying a shift in studies that emphasize the value of examining women's organizing efforts in smaller cities.

2011, 6th edition), 339-351; Cheryl Suzack, Shari M. Huhndorf, Jeanne Perreault, and Jean Barman, eds. *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See also Judy Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution* (Toronto: Penguin 2005); Ruth Roach Pierson, Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Paula Bourne and Philinda Masters, *Canadian Women's Issues: Volume I: Strong Voices: Twenty-Five Years of Women's Activism in English Canada* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1993); Ruth Roach Pierson and Marjorie Griffith Cohen, *Canadian Women's Issues: Volume II: Bold Visions: Twenty-Five Years of Women's Activism in English Canada* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Historical literature has explored various aspects of the second wave in the U.S., particularly issues of race. See Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Becky Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 337-360; Anne Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, DC* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Janovicek deals with similar critiques of cultural feminism in a Canadian context, agreeing with scholars who have assumed that feminist organizations formed in smaller communities in Canada were inherently "less radical." See Janovicek, *No Place to Go*.

## The Women's Movement in English Canada

In *Feminist Organizing for Change*, Adamson, Briskin and McPhail examine the history of women's organizing, its ideology and organizational expression as well as its conflicts and contradictions. The authors are explicit about their personal experiences with women's movement organizing and how their politics and point of view necessarily influenced their interpretation and presentation of events.<sup>8</sup> They argue that such transparency forces readers to adopt a more nuanced and critical stance and resist the impulse to treat what is presented to them as objective truth.<sup>9</sup> This approach is guided by the feminist idea that women should become active, analytical readers, critical of authoritative voices and able to evaluate a range of perspectives and arguments and draw their own conclusions.<sup>10</sup> After positioning themselves as socialist-feminists activists,<sup>11</sup> the authors also situate socialist feminism in a Canadian context. They analyze liberalism in Canada, with its emphasis on the individual and individual success, and contrast this political position with the socialist-feminist strategy, which envisions a collective project of building society rather than advancing one's own interests. The animating principles behind socialist feminism are favouring community over competition and believing in the possibility of collective organizing as an effective and creative form of social change.<sup>12</sup>

Adamson, Briskin and McPhail described the Canadian landscape in the early 1960s as one with "few women's organizations, no women's bookstores (because there were almost no books about women) and no women's studies courses in schools and universities."<sup>13</sup> By the early 1970s, however, movement-based sites, like women's centres, domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centres, coffee houses, publishing houses, presses and bookstores, flourished across the country. Feminism in America

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 18.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-101.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

had gained political traction during the era of the civil rights, anti-war, and New Left movements. In Canada, too, the women's movement was born in the social movements of the 1960s like the New Left as well as the peace, Indigenous rights and student movements.<sup>14</sup> Women in Canada actively supported the civil rights movement and draft resistance in the U.S. and to a large extent, it was this early political organizing that led them to the women's movement.<sup>15</sup> In these new social movements, women found that they were largely consigned to the periphery, where they performed the work expected of women like typing, photocopying and making coffee.<sup>16</sup> Even so, this work provided them with a background in political action which they needed when they eventually engaged in autonomous organizing. Many women who had come from the U.S. with draft dodgers brought additional skills and experience to the Canadian women's movement.<sup>17</sup> From the beginning, the women's movements in Canada and the U.S. were inextricably linked, though as we will see, they moved in different directions over certain issues.

Other scholars have traced the beginnings of second-wave feminism in English Canada to the founding of the Voice of Women in 1960, followed closely by the creation of the Committee on Equality for Women (CEW) in 1966.<sup>18</sup> A year later, the CEW had successfully lobbied the federal government to establish the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) and in 1970, the RCSW submitted its report, which included 167 recommendations to address discrimination against women in society.<sup>19</sup> The CEW eventually dissolved and was succeeded by the National Ad Hoc Action Committee on the Status of Women, which, in 1972, simply became the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC).<sup>20</sup> NAC's purpose was to ensure that the RCSW's recommendations were implemented. By 1986,

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>16</sup> Roberta Lexier, "How Did the Canadian Women's Liberation Emerge from the Sixties Student Movements? The Case of Simon Fraser University," *Women and Social Movements* 13, no. 2 (2009): 4.

<sup>17</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 44.

<sup>18</sup> Naomi Black, "The Canadian Women's Movement: The Second Wave," in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada, 2nd edition*, edited by Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code and Lindsay Dorney (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), 157.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 167. For a discussion of NAC's history, see Jill Vickers, *Politics As If Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of*

NAC “could claim to represent five million women in more than five hundred organizations.”<sup>21</sup> Naomi Black remarks that this stunning cooperation of various organizations under the umbrella of NAC was a distinct characteristic of the women’s movement in Canada.<sup>22</sup> The liberal feminists in NAC came to be regarded as the “national voice” of the women’s movement,<sup>23</sup> in no small part because their politics were more acceptable to a wider audience than that of radical feminists, who emphasized the fundamental differences between men and women, identified sexism as the root of women’s oppression and advocated around difficult issues like sexuality and violence against women.

By the end of the 1960s, then, two distinct streams in feminist thought and action had emerged and crystallized: institutional feminism, which played a hegemonic role in the women’s movement, and grassroots feminism, which originated in the new social movements of the 1960s. Institutional or liberal feminists concentrated their efforts on working within traditional channels to pressure the government for equal rights and opportunities for women in the public sphere. Rather than lobbying for reform within existing institutions, grassroots feminists concerned themselves with creating alternative structures altogether and reaching out to women at the community level. Adamson, Briskin and McPhail identified two rallying cries closely associated with the grassroots feminist movement: “the personal is political” and “sisterhood is powerful.”<sup>24</sup> The former slogan gave voice to the assumption that women’s personal, often unseen, concerns were shaped and controlled by systematically oppressive social institutions. From this perspective, feminists rejected the traditional separation between public and private spheres, arguing that every aspect of women’s personal lives, including sex and child-rearing, were public concerns and needed to be understood as political issues. Adamson, Briskin and McPhail

*the National Action Committee on the Status of Women* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Black, “The Canadian Women’s Movement,” 157.

<sup>22</sup> Lexier, “How Did the Canadian Women’s Liberation Emerge from the Sixties Student Movements,” 8.

<sup>23</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 71.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

pointed out the Abortion Caravan of 1970, during which the Vancouver Women's Caucus traveled across the country to Ottawa to demand the decriminalization of abortion, as an enactment of this ideology.<sup>25</sup>

Recognizing that women's private experiences could serve as the impetus for change, consciousness-raising groups were formed to provide women with venues to share and validate their personal experiences.<sup>26</sup> Giving women the opportunity to articulate the experiences they were normally told to keep hidden had a profound and overwhelming effect. As individual women engaged with communities of women who felt the same way they did, they increasingly recognized the relationship between their personal problems and the collective or systemic oppression of women in society, a recognition that was "instrumental in both politicizing and activating women."<sup>27</sup> For this reason, in *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (1989), Alice Echols calls the consciousness-raising group "the movement's most effective organizing tool."<sup>28</sup>

The concept of universal sisterhood built on the notion that all women were united by a common biology, common experiences and a shared struggle against their male oppressors. However, this idea of solidarity did not take into account differences along the lines of race and class, for example. For many women, gender was not the only or even the most salient source of oppression in their lives.<sup>29</sup> Adamson, Briskin and McPhail remarked that while racialized women, immigrant and Indigenous women were involved in the women's movement from the beginning, their problems and concerns were generally ignored as they were not considered to fall within the realm of "women's issues."<sup>30</sup> As a result, racialized, immigrant and Indigenous women were alienated from the movement and many feminist organizations consisted of almost exclusively white women. Vijay Agnew has also explained the

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>28</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 224.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 83.

absence of racialized, immigrant and Indigenous women in feminist groups by pointing to the fact that many of these women had families and worked full-time jobs and simply lacked the time to attend collective meetings and debate feminist theory. She adds that other factors like a lack of English language skills or unfamiliarity with the particular vocabulary (i.e. patriarchy, collective, consciousness-raising) and references (i.e. feminist literature classics) that were general knowledge among most white feminists might have also been alienating.<sup>31</sup>

Beginning in the early 1980s in Canada, racialized, immigrant and Indigenous women rigorously challenged the predominantly white women's movement to incorporate difference in its narrow analysis of women's oppression and to develop anti-racist practices.<sup>32</sup> The movement underwent a shift as white feminists increasingly became conscious of the ways in which they elided women's different priorities and started discussing anti-racism within their organizations.<sup>33</sup> Many racialized, immigrant and Indigenous women were still not satisfied with the way racism was being addressed by white feminists, however. They viewed the inclusion of their concerns in feminist theorizing and practices as token gestures and critiqued the extent to which white women expected racialized, immigrant and Indigenous women to educate them on their issues. They also pointed out that white women used anti-racism workshops to look inward in a way that was self-preoccupied without gaining any insights on racism or making concrete changes in their organizational structures and practices.<sup>34</sup> Alienated by a movement

<sup>31</sup> Vijay Agnew, "Canadian Feminism and Women of Colour," *Women's Studies International Forum* 16, no. 3 (March 1993): 221-222.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. For a discussion of anti-racist efforts in the second wave in the U.S., see Stephanie Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Rita Felski, "Problematizing Privilege: Another Look at the Representation of 'Women' in Feminist Practice," in *And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada*, edited by Linda Carty (Toronto: Women's Press, 1993), 207-209.

<sup>34</sup> Some scholars who have discussed this include: Agnew, "Canadian Feminism and Women of Colour," 217-227; Janovicek, *No Place to Go*; Sarita Srivastava, "'You're Calling Me a Racist': The Moral and Emotional Regulation of Antiracism and Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 1 (2005): 29-62; Sarita Srivastava, "Tears, Fears and Careers: Anti-racism and Emotion in Social Movement Organizations," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 31, no. 1 (2006): 55-90.

that they felt was either incapable of understanding their concerns or slow in taking them seriously, many racialized, immigrant and Indigenous women opted instead to organize autonomously and create services and resources for their own communities.

The grassroots women's movement was largely divided into two streams, socialist feminism and radical feminism, each with their own approaches and analyses of women's oppression. Whereas socialist feminists articulated a class-oriented analysis of power and advocated for structural changes in society more broadly, radical feminists insisted that biological differences between men and women constituted the foundation upon which male privilege and patriarchal culture were built.<sup>35</sup> By the early to mid-1980s, the mainstream women's movement in Canada was increasingly influenced by socialist feminists who restated the centrality of working-class women's issues.<sup>36</sup> Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, who identified themselves as socialist feminists, clarified that the socialist-feminist analysis of women's oppression addressed the intersections of class, gender, race and sexual orientation.<sup>37</sup> The socialist-feminist understanding was that women's oppression was deeply ingrained in "patriarchal capitalism"<sup>38</sup> and that mitigating class-based inequalities would automatically mitigate racial and sexual ones. More broadly, socialist feminists asserted that the whole system of patriarchal capitalism was implicitly oppressive and insisted on a fundamental shift in the state of things.

To offset the socialist feminists' emphasis on working-class interests, radical feminists emphasized the notion of sisterhood or community among all women. On a fundamental level, they argued that the differences between men and women were immutable and set at birth, like male

<sup>35</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 10-11.

<sup>36</sup> Lynne Marks, Margaret Little, Megan Gaucher and T.R. Noddings, "'A Job That Should Be Respected': Contested Visions of Motherhood and English Canada's Second Wave Women's Movements, 1970-1990," *Women's History Review* 25, no. 5 (2016): 774.

<sup>37</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 98. Many racialized feminists still did not feel that race was being taken seriously. See Agnew, "Canadian Feminism and Women of Colour," 217-227.

<sup>38</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 99.

aggression and female peacefulness. They maintained that “male-stream”<sup>39</sup> society did not provide women with the services and support they needed and advocated banding together in the service of mutual interests. This led to the birth of cultural feminism; a term that described the process in the 1970s whereby feminists tried to build an alternative culture with its own feminist organizations and services upon what they defined as the female values of love, emotion, intuition, respect, equanimity and creativity. Indeed, Adamson, Briskin and McPhail wrote that “the number of women’s organizations and services started up in the seventies is staggering.”<sup>40</sup> Included among these organizations and services were feminist presses, publishers and bookstores, with the first women’s bookstore in Canada being opened on July 16, 1973 in Vancouver.<sup>41</sup>

Organizers of such women-led spaces deployed specific strategies to promote the participation of women and the spaces provided a means to resist their powerlessness in traditional male-dominated organizations.<sup>42</sup> They forcefully rejected hierarchical organizational structures, the notion of leadership and centralized-decision making.<sup>43</sup> Rather, feminist alternatives prioritized the female principles of “egalitarianism and collectivism.”<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, participating in such organizations offered women an opportunity to gain confidence as well as critical organizing and advocacy skills.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, feminist processes such as the rotation of administrative tasks and decision-making by consensus could be extremely inefficient and time-consuming.<sup>46</sup>

Critics of cultural feminism lamented the move away from radical-feminist concerns with violence against women and women’s sexual subordination, which motivated their work in rape crisis

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>44</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 280.

<sup>45</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 236.

<sup>46</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 17.

centres, transition houses and battered women's shelters as well as the large-scale demonstrations and protests that came to characterize the early years of the movement. Critics attributed the increasing invisibility of the women's movement to the rise of cultural feminism with its focus on establishing a range of feminist services, which often came to be viewed as havens or places where women could seek retreat from their political frustrations. They pointed out that the constant effort it took to keep such alternatives alive and functioning meant attention was focused inward, especially "as people [became] absorbed with the problems and dynamics of their specific group."<sup>47</sup> This significant shift provides us with a context for understanding why some feminists and feminist historians have described cultural feminism as a depoliticization of radical feminism, a crucial factor in the decline of the women's movement and "a place of emigration, an end in itself."<sup>48</sup>

Another source of division that engendered particularly high tensions in the American women's movement was sexual identity. Specifically, the years from 1970 to 1972 came to be characterized by the contentious gay-straight split.<sup>49</sup> In Canada, animosity between lesbian and heterosexual feminists did not exist to the same degree and the gay rights movement unfolded side by side with the women's movement.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, lesbian women in U.S. organizations struggled to achieve greater visibility for themselves, particularly within the radical current of the movement to which many lesbian feminists belonged. Many heterosexual feminists dismissed lesbianism as an issue of sexual orientation rather than political choice,<sup>51</sup> while other prominent figures like Betty Friedan labeled lesbianism a "lavender menace" that threatened to weaken the cohesion and credibility of the women's movement.<sup>52</sup> In

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 281. See also Brooke Williams and Hannah Darby, "God, Mom & Apple Pie: 'Feminist' Business as an Extension of the American Dream," *Off Our Backs* 5 (February 1979): 18-20; Brooke Williams, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism," in *Feminist Revolution*, edited by Redstockings (New Paltz, N.Y.: Redstockings, 1975), 65-68; Ellen Willis, "Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism: The '60s Without Apology," *Social Text* 9, no. 10 (Spring - Summer 1984): 91-118.

<sup>49</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 220.

<sup>50</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 58.

<sup>51</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 211.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 212.

reaction to these charges, lesbian feminists asserted that lesbianism was not only a political choice, it was “the quintessential act of political solidarity with other women.”<sup>53</sup> Radical lesbian feminists advocated that those women who were truly committed to the struggle for liberation should separate from male-dominated society and build a female counterculture; this strategy was termed lesbian separatism.<sup>54</sup> In its most extreme interpretation, this meant completely removing themselves from mainstream society and living in women-only communes; however, more often it involved the creation of woman-positive spaces.

According to Alice Echols, it was precisely these tensions, which arose around the issue of lesbianism, that provided cultural feminism with the conditions needed to coalesce and replace radical feminism in America by 1975.<sup>55</sup> With the rise of cultural feminism, she posited that the women’s movement underwent a genuine shift away from radical feminist ideas and strategies toward the creation of woman-positive communities.<sup>56</sup> Echols argues that by using a biological explanation to justify the essential differences between men and women and a call for a reclamation of traditional female values and virtues, cultural feminism seemed to open the possibility of soothing the tensions between straight and lesbian feminists and reunifying the fractured women’s movement.<sup>57</sup> By arguing that women were, by nature, more nurturing and gentle and less violent and sexually-driven than men, however, cultural feminism in many ways reinforced rather than repudiated common assumptions about male and female sexuality.<sup>58</sup> For instance, Echols explains that the feminist anti-pornography debate in America was an extension of this oppositional understanding of sex roles.<sup>59</sup> Anti-porn

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>54</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 58.

<sup>55</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>57</sup> Alice Echols, “The New Feminism of Yin and Yang,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 455.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 442.

feminists held the deeply ingrained belief that male sexuality was inherently violent and expressed itself through pornography.<sup>60</sup> This dichotomous image of male power and violence and female weakness and submission further entrenched normative notions of women's sexuality in the cultural imagination. Thus, at the same time as the anti-pornography campaign attempted to tame men's sexuality, it repressed women's sexual freedom.<sup>61</sup> In Canada, anti-porn feminists waged a campaign over violent male sexuality as well and marshalled women around the issue of pornography. Other feminists claimed that calling for censorship only offered a band-aid solution to the real problem of violence against women.<sup>62</sup> These anti-censorship feminists posited that violent and degrading pornography was a symptom of a much larger problem in society. They objected to censorship as a means to mitigate the dangers of pornography on the grounds that anti-pornography laws would inevitably be used to harass and suppress vulnerable sexualities.<sup>63</sup> As we will see, feminist and gay and lesbian bookstores, in particular, became embroiled in these intense debates over pornography and censorship.

The rise of cultural feminism created a new framework for resistance. Women now directed their attention toward constructing alternative structures that might serve as a haven from the sexism and homophobia they encountered in mainstream culture. Despite admonitions that this approach was "diversionary or escapist,"<sup>64</sup> some feminists argued that the struggle to secure greater rights and equalities in society could not be won solely by "negation and fighting," but rather through the "creative process" of building new culturally productive spaces for women.<sup>65</sup> In some respects, the process of constructing new cultural spaces can be seen as a creative, forward-looking act shared between women,

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 449.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 455.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 454.

<sup>63</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Brenda Cossman, Shannon Bell, Lisa Gotell and Becki Ross, *Bad Attitude/s on Trial: Pornography, Feminism, and the Butler Decision* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Kathy Lee Peiss and Christina Simmons with Robert A. Padgug, *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

<sup>64</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 271.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 270.

allowing for freedom, invention and female bonding. Some have also argued that these spaces provided the best approach to immediately improve women's situations, either by providing them with useful services or helping them achieve empowerment.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, community-based spaces for women were nominally open and accessible to a broad range of working-class, racialized, immigrant and Indigenous women. Yet their detractors leveled the criticism that feminist alternative structures acted primarily as sanctuaries for women outside of the larger male-dominated culture and had "no particular interest in reaching beyond their confines."<sup>67</sup> Echols writes that "these largely self-contained communities provided support to those who belonged, but often seemed indifferent to those who did not. In practice, local women's communities were small, self-contained subcultures that proved hard to penetrate, especially to newcomers unaccustomed to their norms and conventions."<sup>68</sup> For Echols, women's bookstores were emblematic of the rise of cultural feminism because they "represent[ed] a retreat from the difficulties of political struggle into the self-validation that community-building offers."<sup>69</sup> Echols points out that in practice, "feminist businesses had a difficult enough time merely surviving, much less resisting the system."<sup>70</sup> Indeed, many feminist businesses were forced to prioritize their economic survival over their commitment to feminist organizational models and processes and even then, were unable to sustain themselves.<sup>71</sup>

Adamson, Briskin and McPhail acknowledged that there was a drive to build alternative structures for women in Canada as well. They defined the process of creating alternative women's institutions outside of the dominant culture as "a politic of disengagement," which invariably led toward

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>67</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 192.

<sup>68</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 281.

<sup>69</sup> Echols, "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang," 455, quoted in Junko Onosaka, *Feminist Revolution in Literacy: Women's Bookstores in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 117-118.

<sup>70</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 280.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 280.

“marginalization and invisibility.”<sup>72</sup> That said, the alternate strategy of “mainstreaming” carried with it the attendant risk of institutionalization.<sup>73</sup> Adamson, Briskin and McPhail suggested that the socialist-feminist strategy, which involved establishing feminist organizations not as safe havens, but as a means of genuinely challenging power disparities based on class, race, gender and sexual orientation, might serve as an effective third path between disengagement and mainstreaming, making it possible to avoid both marginalization and institutionalization.<sup>74</sup> Implicit in the socialist-feminist strategy they described is a commitment to working with men and organizations outside of the women’s movement, including peace, anti-racism and environmental efforts.<sup>75</sup> They also boasted that the chief strength of socialist feminists was their ability to take feminism out into society by means of education and outreach: “Socialist feminism unmasks how the system works; makes known the limitations of conventional political routes, thus empowering people with that information and perspective; and links one feminist issue to another to provide a complete picture of women’s oppression.”<sup>76</sup>

As highly visible public spaces that anyone could enter, feminist bookstores were not looking to disengage from dominant culture. Given the centrality of women’s bookstores in their communities and evidence of the varied events, programs and services they offered - from building relationships with diverse local organizations to sponsoring fundraisers to providing referrals to other community services - any attempts to label feminist alternatives as sites of respite rather than sites of resistance cannot be so broadly applied to women’s bookstores. Feminist literature also served as a central part of the educative process described by Adamson, Briskin and McPhail. In addition to providing women with information and raising their consciousness about feminist issues, women’s writing disseminated feminist values and

<sup>72</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 253.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 251-252.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

ideas outward into society and helped feminist ideas become mainstream.<sup>77</sup> The scholars discussed in the next section implicitly reject the reductive terms that have been used to describe feminist bookstores as part of a broader critique of cultural feminism. Their work convincingly demonstrates that while women's bookstores may have served as communities for women, they were powerful, politicized communities in which women acquired a full education in feminist thought and mobilized to move beyond their walls.

### **Feminist Bookstores**

Very little scholarship to date has concerned itself with the bookstores that developed alongside the women's movement, distributing its poems, pamphlets and polemics from the 1970s to the 1990s. The fact that such spaces have been largely overlooked in the body of literature on the second-wave women's movement is especially surprising if we take into account that, historically, spaces have been "fundamental to the success of any social movement."<sup>78</sup> With this in mind, Daphne Spain, Anne Enke, Liz Millward and Kathleen Liddle take up the critical project of analyzing the role of gendered spaces, particularly as revealed by feminist bookstores. Echoing Jo Freeman of Chicago Women's Liberation, who pointed out the significance of the factory to the labour movement, the church to the civil rights movement and the campus to the student movement,<sup>79</sup> Daphne Spain suggests that "secular feminist places," like women's centres, health clinics, domestic violence shelters and feminist bookstores, "were to the women's movement what churches were to the civil rights movement: safe havens that fostered

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of how women's health literature widely distributed vital information about women's health, raised women's consciousness and empowered them to take control of their own bodies and health, see Kathy Davis, *The Making of Our Bodies/Ourselves: How Feminism Travels Across Borders* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Sethna, "The Evolution of the *Birth Control Handbook* from Student Peer-Education Manual to Feminist Self-Empowerment Text, 1968-1975," 89-117.

<sup>78</sup> Daphne Spain, *Constructive Feminism: Women's Spaces and Women's Rights in the American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2016), 19.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

political action among people who had experienced a lifetime of discrimination.”<sup>80</sup> In her work, *Constructive Feminism: Women’s Spaces and Women’s Rights in the American City* (2016), Spain notes that prior to the 1970s, public spaces for women simply did not exist. However, as the women’s movement grew, so too did the demand for places where women could congregate. In the 1970s, feminists responded to these demands in two ways: whereas institutional feminists moved through legal channels to gain equal rights for women in public institutions, grassroots feminists “created small-scale places that gave women the confidence to claim their rights to the public sphere.”<sup>81</sup> These “small-scale places” were massively influential in women’s lives. Indeed, discovering such spaces in their communities was a transformative and empowering experience for many women, especially lesbian feminists. Spain’s primary concern is with the ways in which women constructed their feminist identities in and through “quasi-public”<sup>82</sup> movement-based sites like feminist bookstores. She argues that by providing a nurturing, community-oriented environment in which women could reimagine what it meant to be a “lesbian” or “feminist” in mainstream culture, the bookstores laid a crucial foundation for women to eventually move beyond their walls and articulate their demands for equality.<sup>83</sup>

Similar to Spain, Anne Enke also employs a spatial analysis in *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (2007) to understand how “activist communities constituted themselves and constituted feminism as a mass movement”<sup>84</sup> through everyday spaces like women’s bookstores. The title of her work refers to women who had heard about the women’s movement but did not know where to find it. Enke identifies three kinds of cultural spaces, that is, community and

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>83</sup> Spain points out that women’s full participation in the public sphere was often circumscribed by various factors such as susceptibility to crime or a lack of opportunities for mobility. However, by cultivating a sense of security among women, spaces like bookstores created a context for political action.

<sup>84</sup> Anna Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2007), 19.

commercial spaces, civic spaces and institutional spaces, where feminism “was known and practiced on the ground in daily life.”<sup>85</sup> Spain and Enke are both in agreement that building a broad-based movement was an unfolding process with “spatial consequences.”<sup>86</sup> From Enke’s perspective, women’s alternative cultural spaces served as a notable example of how feminists intervened “in racist and heteronormative public landscapes”<sup>87</sup> to disrupt the traditional social hierarchies which underpin mainstream culture. Enke contends, however, that the women who produced these counterpublics also produced pernicious new categories of exclusion around race, class and sexuality.<sup>88</sup>

Unlike the other works, Liz Millward situates her analysis of women’s scene-building efforts squarely in a Canadian context. Millward maintains that particularly for lesbian feminists, the presence of women’s alternative spaces in the larger heteronormative landscape offered more than just a place to seek shelter from dominant culture – it also reinforced the visibility of lesbian women.<sup>89</sup> She explains that the title of her work, *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community across Canada, 1964-84* (2015), has a dual meaning, referring both to “the act of bringing attention to oneself, causing a spectacle” and “the act of lesbians and gay men creating a place in which to find each other and discover themselves.”<sup>90</sup> As discussed above, in the early 1970s, lesbian feminists began to challenge their invisibility within the women’s movement and many concentrated their efforts on opening up public spaces such as women’s centres, health clinics, domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centres, bars, coffeehouses, publishing houses and most notably, women’s bookstores.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the role of lesbians in founding feminist

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>86</sup> Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 2.

<sup>87</sup> Enke, *Finding the Movement*, 100.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>89</sup> Liz Millward, *Making A Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-84* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 112.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>91</sup> Ross, *The House that Jill Built*, 43.

bookstores was so crucial that Junko Onosaka claimed “without lesbian feminists, disseminating women’s words might have been extremely difficult, if not impossible.”<sup>92</sup>

Given the centrality of lesbians in movement-based sites, Millward and Kathleen Liddle both focus on the usefulness of feminist bookstores as venues for lesbian-feminist identity and community building. Within these spaces, women could safely and discreetly seek out hard-to-find resources such as lesbian literature and knowledgeable bookwomen to guide them through the process of testing out new lesbian-feminist identities. In “More than a Bookstore: The Continuing Relevance of Feminist Bookstores for the Lesbian Identity” (2005), Liddle uses survey and interview data collected from lesbian-feminist bookstore customers to evaluate the feminist bookstore as a site “where women could build courage and confidence before moving out beyond its walls.”<sup>93</sup> Significantly, Liddle is the only scholar to privilege the perspectives of bookstore customers rather than founders or collective members, which distinguishes her work from other studies. As the women in Liddle’s study grew older and developed a stronger sense of their identities and their places within the lesbian community, they reported that they no longer needed to use feminist bookstores for personal exploration. These women felt strongly that feminist bookstores nonetheless retained their uses in uniting a generation of younger women in their local communities and in a “broader imagined community”<sup>94</sup> of fictional lesbians. Building on this work, Millward claims that the shared experience of reading and discussing lesbian literature engendered feelings of excitement and interconnectedness among women that, in turn, contributed to their sense of being “at home”<sup>95</sup> and among family at the bookstores. In many of the testimonials that Liddle collected, women used similar language to articulate their memories and experiences with feminist bookstores, emphasizing the community aspect of such spaces and describing

<sup>92</sup> Onosaka, *Feminist Revolution in Literacy*, 47.

<sup>93</sup> Kathleen Liddle, “More than a Bookstore: The Continuing Relevance of Feminist Bookstores for the Lesbian Community,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 9.1, no. 2 (2005): 154.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>95</sup> Millward, *Making a Scene*, 135.

them as “an oasis of sorts.”<sup>96</sup> Spain, who also considered testimonials from the women who visited feminist bookstores, found that “themes of safety and the bookstore as an oasis from a hostile world pervade the recollections of founders and customers.”<sup>97</sup>

In a more recent study, “Distribution Matters: Feminist Bookstores as Cultural Interaction Spaces” (2019), Liddle argues that a variety of factors such as physical space, atmosphere, stock as well as bookseller and customer characteristics converged within feminist bookstores to affect the ways women acquired, interpreted and used feminist books.<sup>98</sup> She argues that the constellation of these factors in feminist bookstores, what she calls “cultural interaction spaces,” led to more intense experiences than one might have if they had found the same book in a library, chain bookstore or online. In contrast to these spaces, feminist bookstores forged distinct identities as “multi-use spaces”<sup>99</sup> where women could browse and purchase books, while simultaneously observing and interacting with other lesbian and feminist women, which was profoundly important for identity and community building. Liddle’s study is useful because along with archival material, interviews and written surveys with bookstore staff and owners, she also engages directly with the customers of feminist bookstores to find out how the stores changed their lives. The customers described feminist bookstores as places where they formed deep emotional connections and affirmed their desires and identities. For them, feminist bookstores provided opportunities to find friends and role models and a non-judgmental space to experiment with new lesbian or feminist identities, leading to personal empowerment and collective gains.

In the only study as yet of Everywomans Books, Debby Yaffe elaborates on the ways in which the immediate pragmatic concerns of organizing often overshadowed political strategizing within the

<sup>96</sup> Liddle, “More than a Bookstore,” 148.

<sup>97</sup> Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 109.

<sup>98</sup> Kathy Liddle, “Distribution Matters: Feminist Bookstore as Cultural Interaction Spaces,” *Cultural Sociology* 13, no. 1 (March 2019): 58.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

bookstore collective. Yaffe's article, "Feminism In Principle and In Practice: Everywomans Books" (1996), is grounded in her lived experience as a volunteer at the bookstore, which gives her a deeper insight into the priorities of the collective and allows her to offer a sharper diagnosis of its strengths and weaknesses. She explains that the bookstore collective rarely discussed feminist ideology simply because they were too focused on the practical needs of maintaining a feminist storefront.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, she writes: "In all my years of activism, I've never seen any organization come closer than Everywomans Books to putting our feminist principles into daily practice."<sup>101</sup> Her account brings to light what feminists in smaller communities made possible every day. As Yaffe argues, not only was the bookstore able to survive longer than many others, it also retained its collective, all-volunteer structure when others were forced to reframe themselves as commercial enterprises,<sup>102</sup> in large part by operating on a base of practical rather than ideological concerns.

In *Feminist Revolution in Literacy: Women's Bookstores in the United States* (2013), Junko Onosaka uses archival records as well as interviews with booksellers and customers to examine the central role of feminist bookstores across the U.S. in the Women in Print movement. She takes issue with the criticisms commonly leveled against bookstores, either that they "weakened feminism" or "hastened its increased invisibility,"<sup>103</sup> underlining the importance of feminist bookstores not only in women's lives but also in the feminist publishing world and book trade. Much more than mere booksellers, she argues that the staff and volunteers at feminist bookstores played an activist role by introducing women to a broad body of literature that disseminated feminist values and ideals, simultaneously educating women on the political purposes of the movement and facilitating a

<sup>100</sup> Deborah Yaffe, "Feminism In Principle and In Practice: Everywomans Books," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal. Special Issue: Connecting Practices, Doing Theory* 21, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 156.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>103</sup> Onosaka, *Feminist Revolution in Literacy*, 1.

widespread “feminist revolution in literacy.”<sup>104</sup> Rather than turning inward to create insular alternative spaces for women, Onosaka suggests that bookstores increased the public visibility and accessibility of women’s writing, sustaining the feminist publishing system and intensifying and accelerating the development of the women’s movement itself by raising women’s consciousness and ushering them into feminism.<sup>105</sup>

In line with Onosaka, Kristin Hogan is intimately aware that “the work of feminist bookwomen has never been only to order books and arrange them on shelves.”<sup>106</sup> In her work, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (2016), Hogan draws on her observations and experiences as a previous manager and book buyer at the Toronto Women’s Bookstore to illustrate the complexities of bookwomen’s radical work:

[T]he work of feminist bookwomen centrally involves contextualization, a complex practice of using spatial organization, programming, and reflection to map shelf sections as ways of relating to each other, to change reading and relational practices by creating new contexts for each text, to enact a feminist ethics of dialogue, speaking with each other rather than for each other, to revise this knowledge building in conversation as bookwomen discussed, contested, and redefined these contexts in collective meetings, transnational gatherings, and through the *Feminist Bookstore News*.<sup>107</sup>

Hogan terms this practice of organizing and negotiating texts “the feminist shelf”<sup>108</sup> and likens it to the process of editing feminist anthologies: “Understanding bookwomen’s work as a version of

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>106</sup> Kristin Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 37.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>108</sup> Hogan also examines the ways in which feminist bookwomen sustained the feminist shelf practice following the institutionalization of women’s studies programs in the 1980s. Hogan observes that feminist bookwomen resisted creating a single “Women’s Studies” shelf title, opting instead to create and recreate interdisciplinary shelf sections that reflected new directions in feminist thought and highlighted texts not often included in women’s studies curricula. Bookwomen thus mediated between women in the academy and in the local community and provided opportunities for the wider community of non-academic women to engage in the debates taking place within women’s studies programs. This relational practice trained readers to become activists beyond the walls of bookstores, educating and challenging family, friends and other members of their communities to address their own racism and work toward building alliances across difference. See Kristen Hogan, “Women’s Studies in Feminist Bookstores: All the Women’s Studies Women Would Come In,” *Signs* 33, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 595-621.

anthologizing emphasizes both how bookwomen's seemingly simple practice of creating new sections is a radical intervention and how this practice of the feminist shelf changes what readers expect from reading and from each other."<sup>109</sup> The purpose of this practice was to put feminist texts into conversation with each other, thereby creating new contexts for readers to understand them. Hogan's concept of "the feminist shelf" is comparable to Liddle's notion of "cultural distribution spaces," which emphasizes how the important choices bookwomen made about everything from the space they created to the books they carried affected how customers interacted with and understood cultural objects like feminist books.

Based on interviews conducted with the store's founders and staff and drawing extensively on her own observations and experiences at the Toronto Women's Bookstore, Hogan elucidates how bookwomen developed an ethical practice of lesbian anti-racism and feminist accountability with far-reaching influences through the feminist shelf. As discussed above, in Canada and the U.S., the assumption that all women's oppression was based around gender was repudiated by racialized and Indigenous women who had different understandings of their oppression. They argued that feminist analysis was primarily concerned with the interests and goals of white middle-class women and ignored issues of race and that feminist organizations excluded them from positions of leadership. Though the 1980s saw a greater acknowledgment that racialized and Indigenous women had different sets of priorities, race continued to be a point of contention in the women's movement. Racism was a particularly germane issue in an increasingly multi-cultural Toronto in the 1980s.<sup>110</sup> Agnew looks at these tensions in the context of the 1986 International Women's Day Committee (IWDC) celebration in Toronto.<sup>111</sup> The theme of the 1986 IWDC celebration, "Women Say No to Racism, from Here to South

<sup>109</sup> Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 115.

<sup>110</sup> Felski, "Problematizing Privilege," 208.

<sup>111</sup> Agnew, "Canadian Feminism and Women of Colour," 225.

Africa” was meant to signify feminists’ commitment to opposing racism at home and abroad, but many black feminists interpreted this as an empty gesture.<sup>112</sup>

During this period, the Toronto Women’s Bookstore was becoming known for hiring a diverse staff and centralizing the voices of racialized and Indigenous women by stocking diverse texts and refusing to sell authors who depicted characters whose experiences differed from their own in terms of race or ethnicity or appropriated a culture that was oppressed by the author’s own. Staff member Sharon Fernandez also created the *Women of Colour Bibliography* - a document that Hogan claims “changed the bookstore and feminism in the city.”<sup>113</sup> The *Bibliography* affirmed the substantial theoretical contributions of racialized and Indigenous women before the 1980s and the existence of a large, yet often overlooked, body of writing by racialized and Indigenous women.<sup>114</sup> “Internally,” writes Hogan, “the *Bibliography* created the conditions for a sea change as it, and conversations around it, prepared the Toronto bookwomen to take responsibility for unearned privilege, to prioritize authors and bookwomen of colour, and to participate in transracial alliances.”<sup>115</sup> Externally, by enhancing the visibility of writing by racialized and Indigenous women and uncovering new knowledge about their participation in the women’s movement, the *Bibliography* shaped discussions taking place within the academy and feminism at large about anti-racism and the necessity of incorporating difference in an analysis of women’s oppression.<sup>116</sup> Hogan posits that Fernandez’s work “connect[ed] levels of organizing, from internal collective relationships to larger movement relationships, to influence larger public systems.”<sup>117</sup> There has been a tendency to focus on the efforts of the white, middle-class women who were the most visible in the second-wave women’s movement at the expense of racialized and

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>113</sup> Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 123.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 128.

Indigenous women. Hogan's work is particularly useful for what it does to centre the efforts of the lesbian and racialized and Indigenous women who pushed the bookstore staff to become more aware about certain issues and take them up in a meaningful and effective way and contributed to the development of the bookstore and their community. Hogan's in-depth study of the Toronto Women's Bookstore celebrates the positive and productive results of internal conflicts around racism. Though tensions over racism were one factor, along with others, that contributed to the ultimate collapse of the bookstore, in Hogan's estimation, the work they did to develop accountability around race and racism had an enormous impact that outlasted the bookstore.

Onosaka and Hogan both adopt the same register in addressing the central role of bookstores and bookwomen in their communities and in feminism more broadly. Onosaka explicitly rejects the pejorative critique of cultural feminism and emphasizes the activist role booksellers played in terms of feminist publishing and distribution. Her analysis is oriented around "the feminist revolution in literacy," which enabled an explosion of writing by women, amplifying previously unheard voices and perspectives and providing a possible alternative to mainstream literary culture. Hogan addresses similar themes; however, she analyzes them through the framework of "the feminist shelf," which she describes as the process by which bookwomen put books in conversation and created new contexts for understanding. By drawing on her personal experiences and observations as a former manager of a feminist bookstore and providing a host of concrete examples of the ways in which "literature [became] a staging ground for developing this vital anti-racist feminist relational practice,"<sup>118</sup> Hogan's intervention into the debate surrounding the significance of feminist bookstores in the women's movement is stronger and more compelling. *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, *Feminist Organizing for Change* and Yaffe's account of Everywomans Books achieve something different and more complex because they are written by feminist activists who vividly remember the issues and events they describe. Although historians who

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., xxv.

revere impartiality and objectivity in research would take issue with their implicit bias, I argue that having a personal connection to their research is an asset, especially since the authors reveal their bias, encouraging readers to take a more active and critical role in negotiating their texts. These authors are honest about highlighting the successes and shortcomings of the women's movement and are interested in the lessons and strategies that can be gleaned from their failures and how they can be used to help feminism move forward. Hogan, in particular, highlights the challenge that bookwomen faced in reconciling "economic success and supporting 'the books that tell the truth about women's lives.'"<sup>119</sup> She demonstrates that as feminist bookwomen directed their attention to saving independent bookstores and their own economic survival, they turned away from lesbian anti-racism and feminist accountability. She explains that the "devastating cost" of this shift away from politics toward profit was "the loss of vital difficult conversations about race and feminism."<sup>120</sup>

Ultimately, however, Hogan measures the success of feminist bookstores in terms of their legacy rather than their longevity.<sup>121</sup> Although feminist bookwomen were predominantly white, beginning in earnest in the 1980s, bookwomen committed to supporting the writing of racialized and Indigenous women through creating bibliographies and making ethical buying decisions as well as encouraging the participation of racialized and Indigenous women within their organizational structures by developing anti-racist practices and affirmative action policies. From this perspective, the literature lining the shelves of bookstores that helped women find a voice and sense of belonging and prepared them to demand changes in the structure of society is viewed as being more powerful and enduring than the ability of the store itself to thrive in the face of mounting competition from chain and online retailers. Hogan advances a persuasive argument that we measure the success of feminist bookstores by the way they fundamentally transformed how women interacted with literature, circulated an

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., xxv.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 147.

awareness of feminist values and concerns in their communities and encouraged an engagement in anti-racist work. The framework she establishes is particularly useful for this thesis as well as future research that attempts to evaluate the success of feminist bookstores in terms of their lasting influence. Hogan's strength is her ability to make the ordinariness of bookwomen's work compelling and to convey the promise and possibility of women's bookstores. Feminist bookstores provided women friendly, intimate contexts for understanding and relating to each other and to literature. Through feminist bookstores, women not only found lovers, they also fell in love with literature. Hogan's account serves as an important reminder of the love and passion that impelled the creation of feminist bookstores and sustained them for many years.

## Summary

Much of the existing scholarship on the second-wave women's movement in Canada has concentrated on major urban centres, especially in central Canada, which means that smaller communities often get overlooked. Save for some examples from the West, both *Feminist Organizing for Change* and *The Feminist Bookstore Movement* are grounded in the authors' experiences with organizing in Ontario and Toronto, more specifically. While there is a tacit acknowledgement of the significance of regional differences in Canada and the value and import of women's organizing in smaller cities and towns, these accounts tend to present an undifferentiated picture of women's organizing without giving very much attention or detail to what was going on in Canadian cities outside of their scope. In reality, feminist organizations in small cities were different from those in large cities in significant ways. Nancy Janovicek engages in a more nuanced and wide-ranging examination of community-based feminist groups. In *No Place to Go: Local Histories of the Battered Women's Shelter Movement* (2007), the first historical work focusing exclusively on women's organizing in smaller

cities,<sup>122</sup> she examines transition houses in small Canadian cities in the 1970s and 1980s, analyzing how a number of factors, including their geographies and limited resources, influenced the techniques of feminists working at the local level, who recognized that they were in a uniquely difficult position to make demands in any legal system and developed alternative strategies accordingly. Rather than aiming for policy change, which was, in most cases, beyond their control, they focused on incremental changes that had the potential to make a powerful difference in women's lives by providing them immediate access to safe spaces, helping them develop self-confidence and transforming how the broader society thought about the problem of violence against women. Janovicek insists that while their approach to achieving social change might have been more modest in scale, their goals and vision were no less radical than the anti-violence activists working in major cities. Feminists working in transition houses in small communities might not have put an end to violence against women, she argues, but they made it easier to talk about intimate subjects like violence against women as a political issue and helped an untold number of women gain self-confidence and understand that abuse was not their fault.<sup>123</sup>

Both Janovicek and Yaffe illustrate how women in smaller cities focused on the pragmatic goal of creating services for the women in their communities and in doing so, gradually normalized feminist ideas and helped build momentum for the women's movement. These authors make a strong case for examining the different ways in which women organized at the local level, not in spite of, but because of the fact that it might seem mundane. Their studies provide a valuable reference point for research that seeks to nuance the historical record by documenting the ordinary daily activities of feminists seldom seen or highlighted. Building on this precedent, this thesis shifts from traditional historical considerations of feminist organizations in major centres to look at a women's bookstore located in a smaller Canadian city in order to critically re-examine its role in the local and wider women's movement

<sup>122</sup> Janovicek, *No Place to Go*, 18.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

and what it can tell us about how women's organizing in small communities contributed to the development of second-wave feminism in English Canada.

Though political differences divided feminists in big cities, feminists located in smaller communities were usually able to negotiate their differences and work together, as evidenced by Yaffe's account of Everywomans Books and in Janovicek's study of transition houses in small cities in Canada. This thesis deepens our knowledge of how women working at the local grassroots level in a smaller, less radicalized city like Victoria, B.C. were able to avoid many of the tensions over politics that divided feminists in major urban centres, allowing them to become the last remaining non-profit feminist bookstore run by an all-volunteer collective in Canada.<sup>124</sup> Janovicek explains that feminists in small communities understood their limitations and developed realistic solutions that were logical responses to their circumstances. Recognizing their economic constraints, the Everywomans Books collective developed a sophisticated, pragmatic strategy that focused on incremental change and practical, achievable improvements for women. Instead of aiming for reproductive freedom and safe access to legal abortion, equal pay or the legal recognition of same sex partners in marriage, they had humbler ideas about the bookstore as a force to change if not the world, then at least to raise the consciousness of women by provoking conversations about these issues and providing the ideas and inspiration that would radicalize and spur them into action.

Finally, in the aforementioned studies of feminist bookstores, we hear relatively little from the customers and even less about their engagement with feminist material. An exception is Liddle's study, which interviews booksellers and their customers to examine how they interacted with the physical

<sup>124</sup> Although other feminist bookstores in Canada, like the Toronto Women's Bookstore which closed in 2012, stayed open longer than Everywomans, they were forced restructure from non-profit collective models into worker-owned co-operatives or more traditional business models. For example, the Toronto Women's Bookstore met with resistance when it transitioned to a profit-making business model and some collective members started to receive a salary. Everywomans Books always operated as a non-profit collective model and volunteers did not even get a discount on their own book purchases.

space of the bookstores, with feminist literature and with each other. Her work is particularly useful because by pivoting the perspective to focus on the customers of women's bookstores, she adds another dimension to our understanding of the role feminist bookstores played in women's lives, their communities and the women's movement as a whole. However, since her study focuses on the continuing relevance of feminist bookstores for the lesbian community, she does not interview heterosexual customers; their perspectives and experiences with feminist bookstores are still largely unknown. Additionally, her account is much less about the books themselves and much more about the bookstores that stocked and sold them. We still know surprisingly little about the fiction and non-fiction books women chose to buy at feminist bookstores and why. I maintain that feminist literature has not received the attention it deserves. My study attempts to fill this gap by talking to women about the life-changing (and life-saving) books they bought at the bookstore and the enormous influence they had on their personal becoming.

## **Chapter Two: Lifelong Readers and Life-Affirming Literature**

This chapter begins by charting the origin story of Everywomans Books and the founding mothers' pioneering vision to create a safe and welcoming space for women to access vital information that was urgently needed and difficult, if not impossible, to find elsewhere. Their impetus to start a feminist bookstore was the absence of spaces in the mainstream where women could access feminist books and other important resources. Taking their cues from women who had started opening up feminist bookstores across Canada and the U.S. in the 1970s, the founders of Everywomans came up with the bold idea to foster such a space in their own community. Around the time the bookstore opened, the women's movement was gathering momentum and women were creating public spaces for themselves; it was a period that surged with hope, anticipation and limitless possibilities.

The chapter draws on oral interviews with collective members and customers to capture the exuberance and excitement that the bookstore radiated in its early years. The chapter then considers the diverse group of women who constituted the customer base at Everywomans and follows their discovery of feminist literature. It explores the range of books, resources and services offered at the bookstore and examines how women chose to engage with the store and with feminist writing in their personal journeys of constructing lesbian and feminist identities. Though this chapter focuses predominantly on the early years of the bookstore, it also addresses certain themes that were evident from the very beginning and thread throughout the bookstore's history.

### **The Origin Story**

During a visit to Oakland, California in the summer of 1974, Ann Hillyer and Lynn Greenhough discovered ICI: A Woman's Place, one of the first two feminist bookstores in North America.<sup>1</sup> With the

<sup>1</sup> Amazon Bookstore in Minneapolis also opened in 1970.

first part of its name, ICI, short for Information Center Incorporate, the bookstore identified itself as a resource centre for women.<sup>2</sup> Hillyer and Greenhough, who were in the process of moving from Vancouver to Victoria and knew they wanted to be involved in a community service for women, dreamed of creating something similar in Victoria: a resource centre that would provide vital information to women through books that were not readily available elsewhere. In Victoria, Hillyer explained, “it [had] been so hard to get feminist literature and any kinds of works by women, for women and about women.”<sup>3</sup> They realized that the only way they were going to get the books they wanted and some women needed to read was by opening a bookstore themselves.<sup>4</sup> Hillyer and Greenhough had worked together previously at Fed-Up Co-operative Wholesaler, a distributor that provided wholesale food to co-ops throughout the province, and decided that selling one commodity versus another could not be that different: “We figured if we could sell tractor trailer loads full of food, we could certainly sell a few books.”<sup>5</sup> As they hitchhiked home from San Francisco, Hillyer and Greenhough stopped along the way to visit newly established feminist bookstores and to pick up practical advice from the women running them on how to open their own store in Victoria. Kristen Hogan calls this process of knowledge exchange between bookwomen and potential bookwomen the “recurring oral and written history trope of the feminist bookstore pilgrimage,”<sup>6</sup> as it was a common occurrence in the early 1970s for women to embark on road trips to visit and learn from other feminist bookstores.

Soon after arriving back in Victoria, Hillyer and Greenhough began writing to publishers, figuring out their finances and looking for a location. With a generous donation of \$1,500, they were able to rent the bookstore’s first location - a small space at 2033 Oak Bay Avenue. Due to the store’s location outside

<sup>2</sup> Kristin Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Ruttan, “By Women, For Women, About Women,” *Times Colonist*, June 21, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 26.

of the downtown core, Hillyer and Greenhough knew that it would have to be “a destination bookstore.”<sup>7</sup> And as Greenhough recalled, it became just that: “it became a place to chat, it became a place to visit. Customers who came in would hardly ever just come buy a book and leave you know, it really became a place to visit and spend some time.”<sup>8</sup> Everywomans Books<sup>9</sup> finally opened its doors on February 14, 1975. The deliberate decision not to use an apostrophe in the store’s name was meant to reject the notion of possession by any one woman and to signify instead that the bookstore was inclusive of all women, regardless of class, race, sexuality or feminist perspective. “It didn’t have a particular ideology in terms of we were the lesbian store or we were the socialist women’s store, of which there were iterations around North America. We really tried to hold that we would be this centre for any woman who came in,”<sup>10</sup> explained Greenhough. The rush of excitement and newness surrounding the bookstore radiated outward, attracting people from different sectors of the community, all curious to understand why women needed their own bookstore.

In 1979, Everywomans Books moved to a larger location on Johnson Street to accommodate its growing stock of books. The move downtown increased the bookstore’s visibility and made it accessible to more women. In its new central downtown location, Everywomans shared an entrance with a barber shop. “There’s been a distinctive gender pattern to the traffic entering the door at 641 Johnston St. in downtown Victoria,” wrote a reporter for the *Times Colonist*, reveling in the irony of a women’s bookstore next to a barbershop. “Most of the men, bent on having their ears lowered at Riviera Barber Stylists, hang a left. Those turning right are mostly women, about to have their consciousness-raised at Everywomans Books.”<sup>11</sup> In 1994, the bookstore moved again to its final location at 635 Johnson Street.

<sup>7</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Hogan points out that many feminist bookstores established in the 1970s drew inspiration for their name from Judy Grahn’s 1969 collection of poems, “The Common Woman.” See Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>11</sup> Deborah Pearce, “Bookstore Turns A Page,” *Times Colonist*, February 28, 1994.

In this location, the collective contracted a local woman to build shelves that doubled as pull-out benches where customers could sit and read comfortably as well as a new workstation for the store's first computer. In its second and third incarnation, the bookstore continued to serve as a welcoming, safe space in the community for all book lovers to come and explore feminist literature.



Figure 2. Ann Hillyer photographed inside Everywomans Books in 1977 for a newspaper feature<sup>12</sup>

## The Customers

When asked about who the store's core customers were, collective member Suzanne Dearman alleged that "the store attracted people like the people who were running it,"<sup>13</sup> referring to the fact that the store primarily drew in women who would have considered themselves committed feminists.

<sup>12</sup> Ann Hillyer, *Everywomans Books*, c. 1977, pictured in Mike Hughes, "The Oasis: Women Find Comfort at Oak Bay Bookshop," *Times Colonist*, November 22, 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Suzanne Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

However, the store was run by an extremely eclectic group of women. The people who visited the bookstore, then, were just as diverse: men, local women, tourists, bookwomen from out of town embarking on a pilgrimage to visit other feminist bookstores, young women coming in to buy texts for their women's studies courses and older women who "had been desperate for these books for a long time"<sup>14</sup> all visited the store regularly. When the bookstore moved to its downtown location in 1979, it began to attract more walk-by traffic. Women wandered into the bookstore unwittingly, perhaps curious about the newest eye-catching window display or the stained-glass sign in the window in the shape of the women's movement symbol, and asked the collective member at the front counter "what do you mean Everywomans Books?"<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, one of these women was the Canadian author P.K. Page, who collective member Rosalie Walls remembered coming in and enquiring about the need for a women's bookstore: "That was a question that often people would wander in and ask, why do you need a woman's bookstore? Then I heard in the late '80s, she came and gave a poetry reading there so there was an evolution, you know, because she came in and she said why do you need a woman's bookstore? And I had no idea who P.K. Page was and she said I'm a writer and I don't understand this and then in the '80s she came back and gave a reading."<sup>16</sup> By returning to give a reading, Walls felt that the author had answered her own question: there was an urgent need for a women's bookstore because before Everywomans opened, there was no place in the city where women's words could be distributed and debated and where collective members and customers could come to learn from each other and from feminist writing. The appearance of the bookstore was probably startling for many people because it exposed and dramatized the male dominance of existing systems like writing, publishing and distribution and prompted many to examine for the first time the erasure of women's words in society.

<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Waelti-Walters, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 6, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>15</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>16</sup> Rosalie Walls, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.



Figure 3. Stained glass sign in the window of Everywomans Books handmade by Heather Hestler<sup>17</sup>

Regular customer Susan Moger recognized the immense value of having a visible presence for the women's community in Victoria, especially when the store first opened in Oak Bay in 1975 and quickly became "a gathering place" for women when "there wasn't anything else like that here."<sup>18</sup> Although Moger did not have much money at the time, she felt that it was important to support Everywomans by buying books there when she could.<sup>19</sup> For our interview, Moger pulled out an early edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (OBOS) that she had bought at the bookstore. When the first edition of OBOS came out in 1970, addressing a variety of controversial topics from masturbation to menopause, it was considered groundbreaking. Flipping through the pages of the reference book containing text,

<sup>17</sup> *Stained glass sign, Everywomans Books*, c. 1997, pictured in Cathy Pitman, "Changing Times Brings End to Everywomans Life in Victoria's Feminist Community," *Martlet*, October 16, 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Moger, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 9, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

diagrams and pictures of the female body years later during our interview, Moger explained “there was nothing like this where you could look through and see pictures and this was written by women so already there was just a feeling of comfort.”<sup>20</sup> She stopped when she saw something had been underlined in the chapter on celibacy and read it aloud: “I saw that my initial frustration at not having a man had to do with the judgement I was making of myself. A man meant completion. Without one I could never feel whole. After several months of celibacy, I was feeling pretty whole.”<sup>21</sup> “I mean who wrote those sorts of things?”<sup>22</sup> she asked, giving me a sense of just how profound these ideas were at the time. Another customer, Alice Ages, said that she wanted the bookstore to exist “whether [she] ever bought a book there or not” because “[she] supported the ideological concept that there be a women’s bookstore that would carry revolutionary concepts”<sup>23</sup> like those found in OBOS, which had previously been unthinkable for women to write about openly. Moger added that she “felt really proud that we had that here [in Victoria].”<sup>24</sup>

Many customers were so excited to find the bookstore that they brought their friends and partners back with them. But like any community, the bookstore could also feel insular and exclusive to outsiders. This might have been more pronounced in a small city like Victoria, where visitors were either in awe that such a store existed in the city or felt like interlopers. One customer felt so snubbed by the volunteers when she visited the store’s downtown location in 1978 that she felt compelled to write a letter of complaint. In the letter, she stated that on two occasions when she had visited the bookstore, she felt as if she had “intruded upon personal territory.”<sup>25</sup> Finding a small group of women gathered around the counter reinforced her sense of alienation. On the second visit, she had brought a friend

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Alice Ages, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 14, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>24</sup> Moger, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 9, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>25</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Correspondence 1975-1990, 5 May 1978.

with her who confirmed her feelings. Such letters serve as an important reminder that everyone interacted with the bookstore in different ways and their experiences were not unequivocally positive. Although the collective members I interviewed emphasized the great effort they put into making everyone who entered feel welcome,<sup>26</sup> they were not always successful. For some visitors, the bookstore felt like an enclosed community. Of course, as the women I interviewed pointed out, the atmosphere of the bookstore changed depending on who was in the collective and who was on shift;<sup>27</sup> some collective members were brusquer and could come across as harsh to customers.

Similarly, while some women suggested that the bookstore was “a place to be seen”<sup>28</sup> in the community, others described feeling shy or nervous as they recounted their first time visiting the store, especially since feminist bookstores were often lesbian-run and lesbian-identified spaces.<sup>29</sup> As one former customer told me in our interview, she felt a bit of trepidation going to Everywomans because she knew that many of the women involved with the bookstore were out lesbians and going there felt, somewhat unwittingly, like “an act of coming out.”<sup>30</sup> Collective member Reva Hutkin picked up on these women’s reluctance to be seen at the bookstore: “the funny people that came in were the people who were lesbians but not out and it was like a big secret, they kinda looked around, made sure nobody was watching them, looked at the dyke books, it was really funny but that was part of it too, you know, helping people find out who they are.”<sup>31</sup> Although many women indicated that the bookstore was the

<sup>26</sup> Marianne Alto, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, February 20, 2018, Victoria, B.C.; Suzanne Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.; Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.; Ann Hillyer, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.; Reva Hutkin, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 13, 2017, Victoria, B.C.; Waelti-Walters, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 6, 2017, Victoria, B.C.; Debby Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>27</sup> Alto, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, February 20, 2018, Victoria, B.C.; Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.; Hillyer, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.; Marisa Sarratore, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, March 18, 2018, Victoria, B.C.; Claire Weeks, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 29, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>28</sup> Marjorie McIntyre, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, January 19, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>29</sup> Hogan, *Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Sarratore, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, March 18, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>31</sup> Hutkin, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 13, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

only place in the city where they could claim their identity or ask for books about women's health and sexuality without feeling embarrassed, for those who had not yet come out or begun exploring their sexuality, being associated with the bookstore and thus implicitly with lesbianism could be nerve-racking. With this in mind, women's bookstores took pains to provide a safer space for their customers' personal exploration than mainstream bookstores. In addition to evoking a sense of comfort that would make women feel at home, collective members made sure to give their customers the requisite privacy and alone time needed for exploration.

Walls remembers that though she often longed to engage in dialogue with the women who entered the store about the "profound and powerful"<sup>32</sup> books she was reading at the time (mostly lesbian literature), she did not want women to feel confronted:

You had to think about who was coming in the door 'cause we wanted people to come back, you know? So you wanted to encourage but you also wanted to not dominate and frighten people away from ever returning to the store because there was a tenderness about it, you know? Like I can remember seeing one woman go back and forth, you know, and a little hesitant to come in the door and so then you think well you're coming into a kind of sort of place where you are worried that somebody's going to think you're some kind of person so you wanted it to be a safe place.<sup>33</sup>

When Walls joined the bookstore collective, she was still sorting out her own sexuality. She explained to me in our interview that at the time, she was struggling to figure out how to live as a lesbian in Victoria with her whole family living in the same city and with the looming threat that she could lose her job as a family counsellor in the school system if people found out about her sexual identity. Walls paid close attention to the women who came into the store and those who lingered outside of it. She had an intimate understanding of how difficult it could be to enter a space that might align you with the local lesbian community and did what was needed to foster a roomy, non-threatening environment.

The collective's practice of providing privacy through silence might explain why one customer I

<sup>32</sup> Walls, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

spoke to felt that the volunteers could have been more helpful. Moger, on the other hand, appreciated the fact that she could have stayed sitting on the floor, taking out and looking at books for hours without being bothered. She described how by encouraging women's interests, but giving them the freedom and privacy to explore difficult or challenging material on their own terms, the bookstore raised their consciousness around the issues affecting them: "I think it was a very strong voice for women's rights, for encouraging women to, I think, inform ourselves to be safe, to know what our rights were, to support political action, to support women regardless of sexual orientation and it was just done in a really kind of quiet, supportive way like a bookstore would."<sup>34</sup> Moger remembered one instance when she went to the bookstore looking for books on prostitution and was told by a volunteer to try searching under "sex work." "I remember thinking god, why did they do that? And I might have asked and they would have informed me about a different feminist political perspective. I think it was teaching in the nicest of ways because it would have been what I picked up and what I did with that in my own life,"<sup>35</sup> she explained. This practice brings to mind Hogan's notion of "the feminist shelf," which places faith in the analytical skills of the reader and grants a corresponding amount of responsibility to the bookwomen who organized books in ways that encouraged their customers to see the world in new ways. McIntyre reiterated that the collective members never tried to push books, authors or ideas to their customers in a way that came across as condescending, strident or preachy; they simply let women know what was available, or in some cases talked about their favourite books, and let them explore the subjects that interested them.

In her analysis of the significance of lesbian fiction for establishing a sense of community and identity, Bonnie Zimmerman suggests that,

Fiction is a particularly useful medium through which to shape a new lesbian consciousness, for fiction, of all literary forms, makes the most complex and detailed use of historical events and social discourse. By incorporating many interacting voices and points of view, novelists give the

<sup>34</sup> Moger, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 9, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

appearance of a reality to a variety of imaginary worlds. Novels can show us as we were, as we are, and as we would like to be. This is a potent combination for a group whose very existence has been either suppressed or distorted. Lesbian novelists, then, have taken on the project of writing us into our own version of reality.<sup>36</sup>

As an avid reader herself, Hillyer had a sense of how reading fiction, in particular, could be a powerful and transformative experience: “I think for women to read fiction, it’s life changing because you can read about everything, all those things that you’re afraid of, that you maybe are afraid to talk about, you can find it in fiction.”<sup>37</sup> Reading about intimate matters like one’s own sexuality in a crowded public place, however, could be frightening. The bookstore recreated the feeling of curling up with a book in one’s own home that is accompanied by warmth and security.<sup>38</sup> Such private moments alone with a book allow even the most introverted and shy readers to fantasize and access new worlds and identities that they might not feel ready to take out in the open yet.

Reading, Hillyer explained, “isn’t asking anything of you other than what you’re ready for, it’s not like having a conversation.”<sup>39</sup> This belief in the power of literature, both fiction and non-fiction, to empower and embolden women informed the hands-off approach the collective adopted in relation to their customers, which encouraged women to think for themselves and allowed them to draw their own conclusions. Greenhough suggested that the bookstore was always intended to be a quiet centre for learning where women could come to inform themselves:

The function of the bookstore, the structure of the bookstore, was to provide the information that maybe would inform further political involvement. Our function was to be the structure. Our function was not to be the political energy going in all these different directions beyond the structure. We were to bring the books in, you read them, you take them where you want to go, right?<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Bonnie Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1967-1989* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Hillyer, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>38</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Besides being a generally more vibrant and inviting presence in the local women's community than many other women-centred spaces, Everywomans Books was different from single-issue organizations because it contained books that addressed a range of issues and offered a multitude of feminist perspectives. Adamson, Briskin and McPhail claimed that while single-issue organizations with a laser-focus and tangible goals were often more effective in achieving immediate change, multi-issue organizations like the bookstore were uniquely positioned "to link together the range of issues that feminism addresses and present them as a package."<sup>41</sup> Instead of advocating for one particular cause, the collective shared a common goal to provide women with intellectual nourishment and create a space where women could come to puzzle over a range of issues on their own terms and develop their own feminist analysis and worldview. By agreeing on a broad series of objectives and services aimed toward nurturing the explorations and transformation of all women, the collective was able to widen the narrow purview of single-issue organizations and expand the conversations happening in feminism to potentially include more women.

## **The Bookstore**

When customers entered the bookstore in Oak Bay, they would find that it resembled an ordinary household: there was a row of potted plants, a couple of comfortable chairs and often a fresh pot of coffee.<sup>42</sup> On the walls hung art by local women, political posters as well as a bulletin board for notices. When the store first opened, there was more shelving than titles and all of the books were facing outward on the shelves to fill the space.<sup>43</sup> The atmosphere was convivial; the store was inhabited

<sup>41</sup> Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 246.

<sup>42</sup> Daphne Spain argues that women's bookstores were often designed to look like domestic spaces to enhance women's sense of security and comfort. See Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Hillyer, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C. and Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

by friendly and eager volunteers and the four or five customers who would be wandering around the small store might end up talking with the volunteers or with each other about the books they were reading or what was going on in the local women's community. As Ages put it, "we weren't just customers, people were relating to each other, which is unusual, but there was a tacit understanding that we all had more or less shared values or we wouldn't be there, so it was a chatty place."<sup>44</sup> Building on this image, Heather Hestler, the collective member who painted the stained-glass sign that hung in the window, described the bookstore as "bright, cheerful and reflective."<sup>45</sup> For Hillyer and Greenhough, it was crucial that the store not only feel like an oasis for women, but that it look beautiful as well. Greenhough explained how in the first location, they carefully created a space with this concept in mind: "We had plants, we thought about colour, we thought about placement, shelving, we wanted it to be a place where women felt really comfortable to come and gather but that it didn't look sleazy, it didn't look tawdry, it didn't look sad, you know? We didn't want it to look sad and I could tell you there were women's spaces that did look like that."<sup>46</sup> As Liddle has pointed out, the many and varied choices bookwomen made about the physical space and atmosphere of bookstores influenced the way customers interacted with the space, with books and with each other, creating a very different experience from other movement sites.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ages, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 14, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>45</sup> Heather Hestler, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, Victoria, B.C., December 8, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>46</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>47</sup> Kathy Liddle, "Distribution Matters: Feminist Bookstore as Cultural Interaction Spaces," *Cultural Sociology* 13, no. 1 (March 2019): 71.



Figure 4. Everywomans Books, Oak Bay location, 1975<sup>48</sup>

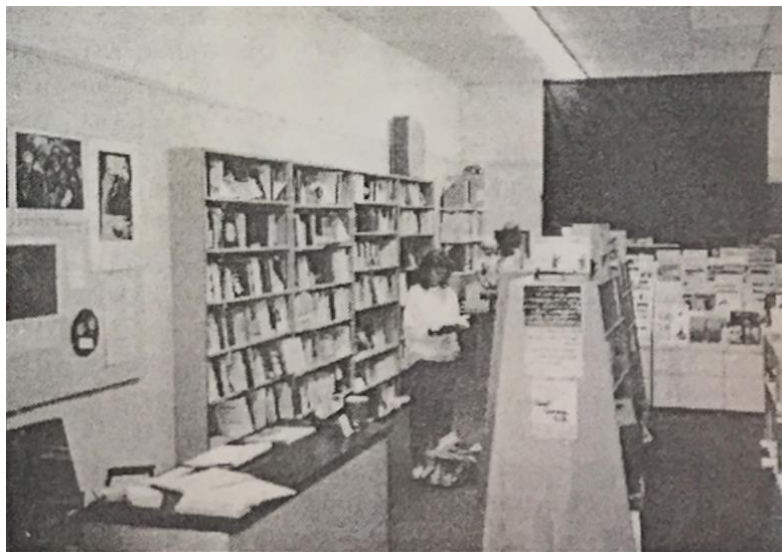


Figure 5. Everywomans Books, Johnson Street location, 1987<sup>49</sup>

As a positive, welcoming space open to all book lovers, the bookstore differed distinctly from other women's groups in the city like the Victoria chapter of the Status of Women Action Group (SWAG), which had been operating since 1971, the Transition House, which opened with the Women's Centre in 1974 and ran out of a basement in 1974 and the Victoria Rape/Assault Centre, which was established in 1975 along with the bookstore. Greenhough noted that "a woman could come into the bookstore

<sup>48</sup> *Everywomans Books, 2033 Oak Bay Avenue, Victoria, B.C., c. 1976*, pictured in Ruttan, "By Women, For Women, About Women."

<sup>49</sup> *Everywomans Books, 635 Johnson Street, Victoria, B.C., c. 1987*, pictured in "Victoria," *Feminist Bookstore News* Vol 10, No. 3 (October 1987): 15.

differently than she could go into the sexual assault centre, very very differently. She could come to the bookstore differently than she could even go into the women's centre so it was a safer space for many women, it was a more neutral space. A bookstore is a little bit respectable, right, and that was still an issue I think for many women."<sup>50</sup> One customer who was directly involved in feminist organizing in the local community, explained that the feminist community in Victoria was very much focused on these three spaces and many women who were involved in these organizations also volunteered at Everywomans. Once the bookstore moved to its second location downtown, "many people would pop out of Status of Women and go over to Everywomans and vice versa,"<sup>51</sup> she told me, mapping out the geography of the local women's movement. Unlike any other women's organization, however, the bookstore maintained an idiosyncratic presence in the city because it was generally seen as a more neutral, non-threatening everyday space that customers could access differently than they could some of the other more overtly politicized community services like the Transition House or Rape/Assault Centre, for example.

To be sure, many women experienced the bookstore as a site of reprieve or safe haven. One collective member confided that she slept in the back of the store on Johnson Street when she first moved to Victoria and was between places to live because it felt like home: "Nobody else knew about that, but I slept in the back sometimes, not often but a couple times like it felt really safe. I grew up in Toronto, I was far from home, I didn't know anyone in Victoria, I was going through a lot of stuff around my sexuality, coming out, and that was isolating in terms of my family and friends in some ways while I was figuring that out, and it really felt like an important...like a safe place."<sup>52</sup> Whereas some might have felt apprehensive about going to the Women's Centre for help, this anecdote reveals that by establishing itself as a more neutral women-centred space in town, the bookstore became a shelter and

<sup>50</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>51</sup> Sarratore, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, March 18, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>52</sup> Daphne Joy, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi via telephone, December 9, 2017.

a starting point from which women who were new to the city could find a community of feminists and begin to build a home. The bookstore also served as an important space where lesbians, including those who were newly out and had few public places to get together outside of bars, could meet and socialize safely.

In contrast to mainstream bookstores, women's bookstores clearly provided their visitors with much more than just reading material; they provided a possibility for connection and exposure to new ideas. Collective member Marianne Alto summed up the ways in which Everywomans stretched the traditional definition of "bookstore" to include referral services and other critical resources as follows:

It was always much more than a bookstore, again, primarily the reason it exists is to sell books, sell particular types of books to women, in particular, but the flipside, I think, is that it naturally and organically evolved into almost a referral centre, where we were seen as a place where you could get resources and information and that translated into we would host poetry readings, authors readings, events. When there were marches, we were always there, we were always part of that, and so it was definitely a larger component of the women's community than just a bookstore and I think that's probably typical of most women's bookstores.<sup>53</sup>

The bookstore became the glue that held the local women's community together; women could gather to explore books, exchange ideas, attend author readings and signings, buy tickets for women's events and mobilize for Take Back the Night marches. Indeed, women would stop by the store sometimes just to read the bulletin board announcing upcoming events and activities for women or even to ask for the number of a good doctor or counsellor. For this reason, Everywomans assembled a community resource book in which women could share their experiences with woman and woman-friendly doctors, lawyers and other professionals. In 1991, however, the store was forced to abandon this service for legal reasons<sup>54</sup> but continued to keep a shortlist of useful phone numbers and addresses. "You could literally phone up the bookstore and say hey, are there women doctors in Victoria? And we'd go yes there are and here's a list, we're not recommending anyone but here's the list,"<sup>55</sup> said Alto. While many women

<sup>53</sup> Alto, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, February 20, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>54</sup> They were told that they were permitting people to make unreasonable remarks and could be sued.

<sup>55</sup> Alto, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, February 20, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

would not likely think of calling other bookstores in town if they were having problems with unemployment insurance or to ask about where to buy tickets for the upcoming lesbian dance, the standards for women's bookstores were much higher. At Everywomans, volunteers were expected to be knowledgeable about literature as well as community events and services and to be compassionate and tender when the situation called for it. Oftentimes, women would phone the store seeking information, support or simply a sympathetic ear to listen. Hutkin remembered that when she was volunteering at the bookstore, she had "all kinds of interesting phone calls like people transgendering and people seeking their identity, it didn't only serve as a bookstore but I thought we extended beyond into the greater community."<sup>56</sup> Frances Dearman also shared a similar memory: "I fielded a phone call once from somebody who was asking me what herbs would procure an abortion. There were some people who really needed us, we were a connection."<sup>57</sup>

Although the bookstore's volunteers helped connect women with crucial information about everything from childcare services to coming out, Frances Dearman was aware of her limitations and the fact that "we were not counsellors but we could help people to connections, open doors and windows."<sup>58</sup> As Greenhough explained, it became a large part of the bookwoman's task to "try and stay abreast of what was happening and let women know if they came in with a question or you know try and read between the lines sometimes 'cause not everybody is completely direct about what they want in terms of information so part of our job, I think, was to kind of listen on a deeper level and let people know what was available."<sup>59</sup> Echoing Greenhough, Debby Yaffe also emphasized listening attentively as a core role of collective members: "Women would come in with a tale of woe and you'd listen, you would just offer that solace. I think a lot of people came in for company, you know, women who just

<sup>56</sup> Hutkin, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 13, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>57</sup> Frances Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

needed to talk to somebody.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, the daily work of feminist bookwomen was much more involved than simply ordering books and stocking shelves. While one woman might come in looking for feminist books to read to her daughter, another might just want someone to talk to about the struggles of single motherhood and volunteers were there to provide both.



Figure 6. Bulletin board inside Everywomans Books<sup>61</sup>

## The Books

In addition to offering validation, consolation, encouragement and guidance, collective members could connect the women who came to Everywomans seeking support to a wide range of

<sup>60</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>61</sup> *Bulletin board, Everywomans Books*, c. 1978, pictured in Nancy Brown, "Pipeline Through Bookstore," *Daily Colonist*, April 15, 1978.

texts and resources. The bookstore carried pamphlets like the widow's handbook, a guide written by a local woman to help new widows, along with feminist magazines and periodicals, publications put out by the Feminist Lesbian Action Group (FLAG) of Victoria, *The Pink Pages*, a directory for gay and lesbian-friendly businesses and services, and a resource booklet created by a group of women for the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre, which provided information for women who had been sexually assaulted as well as for their friends and relatives. As the number of women's titles in print grew, the body of literature available at Everywomans also expanded to include a variety of novels, plays, poetry, non-fiction books, biographies of women, books by and for women of colour as well as non-sexist, role-free children's literature. Because the bookstore wanted to highlight lesbian literature, it also had extensive lesbian fiction and non-fiction sections, which made up about 20% of the downtown store in 1994.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, some of the fastest and best sellers were new lesbian titles along with books dealing with women's spirituality, "from classical goddess mythology to analyses of how conventional religions treat women."<sup>63</sup> Other shelf sections included addictions and recovery, birth control, childbirth, crimes against women, death and widowhood, disabilities, feminist theory, health, humour, women's history, middle age and aging, pornography, parenting, psychology, self-help, sexuality, travel, work and money and women and the law.<sup>64</sup> These shelf titles are indicative of the diversity of women's writing at the time and the broad range of topics available at the bookstore. The bookstore also provided a mail order service, sending out a booklist twice a year to their mailing list to keep those on the list informed of recent releases and new titles and allowing those who lived in remote parts of B.C. and Canada or who could not make it to the store for other reasons to access feminist books. Additionally, Everywomans carried sidelines like jewellery and cards made by women in the community, calendars, buttons, posters supporting local women in politics like Rosemary Brown and music produced by women artists.

<sup>62</sup> Pearce, "Bookstore Turns A Page."

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Store Operational and Policy Procedures, Coding, n.d.

Although the bookstore aimed to increase the visibility and accessibility of all women's writing, there were some restrictions surrounding what was considered appropriate for the store to carry and books were only put out on the shelves if they had been read and reviewed by a member of the collective or had been reviewed in the *Feminist Bookstore News* or local newsletters like the *Victoria Status of Women News* or *LesbiaNews*, which announced and recommended new titles. Customers could also recommend books and frequently took part in discussions about the books they wanted ordered. Due to this careful selection process, the store's customers knew that they could feel confident about the quality of the literature they found on the shelves at Everywomans. "I felt like I had access to, I imagined, the most kind of cutting edge, these are going to be the most feminist books and so I felt like there was kind of an endorsement, like if they were selling it, then it was probably a good thing to read,"<sup>65</sup> said Claire Weeks (a pseudonym). Each book that was sold at the store was chosen with care and thus, books deemed sexist were not carried. However, with so many different volunteers ordering books, there seemed to be many interpretations of what was suitable for the store to carry. In 1989, the collective decided that its ordering policy needed to be clarified and developed an ordering policy that clearly laid out which titles, topics and authors were appropriate for the store.<sup>66</sup> Following these guidelines, woman authors like Nancy Mitford, Ngaio Marsh, Daphne Du Maurier and Phyllis Schlafly, whose writing was not in keeping with the feminist vision of the store, were deemed unsuitable.<sup>67</sup> "And we didn't carry you know romances and bodice-rippers and those kinds of things,"<sup>68</sup> added Jennifer Waelti-Walters.

The collective members were acutely aware that their role in making decisions about what

<sup>65</sup> Weeks, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 29, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>66</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Meeting Minutes, June 89 – Feb. 91, Summer '89 Retreat, 4 June 1989.

<sup>67</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Ordering Policy 1989, Everywoman's Books Ordering Policies, 27 July 1989.

<sup>68</sup> Waelti-Walters, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 6, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

women got to see on the shelves was important politically. As part of their mandate to “support women who wanted to represent different voices than the mainstream,”<sup>69</sup> Everywomans also prioritized books from alternative presses that were not widely available at other bookstores, even if they were not the most profitable and might sit on the shelf for a couple of years. According to Frances Dearman, this often meant that “people would come in looking for mysteries [but] the mysteries we carried were unusual ones, not the bestsellers. We would cut our own throats financially and quite happily and wisely by not giving shelf space to something that could be purchased somewhere else.”<sup>70</sup> Given the store’s limited budget and shelf space, the collective decided not to carry the novels of popular woman authors like Agatha Christie that were easy to find elsewhere, “but voices like Rita Mae Brown, for example, that were not available everywhere,”<sup>71</sup> said Greenhough. More mainstream women writers like Jane Austen, then, would not likely have appeared on the shelves at Everywomans, “but a feminist critique of Jane Austen, yes, right? So it had to have a feminist slant,”<sup>72</sup> explained Waelti-Walters. Furthermore, although feminist classics like Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* were not popular sellers, the store always had a copy on hand for “when someone comes to that place and wants to read it,”<sup>73</sup> Alto told the *Times Colonist* in 1994. “One of the challenges was many of us were of the opinion that even if it only sold one copy every two years, we should have *The Second Sex* on our shelf or some of the [other feminist] classics. And they would only sell once every two years, maybe, but it just felt like we weren’t just a bookstore, we were also some kind of repository,”<sup>74</sup> said Yaffe, highlighting one of the central ways in which feminist alternative businesses differed from traditional businesses, namely by prioritizing educating its customers over making a profit.

<sup>69</sup> Walls, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>70</sup> Frances Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>71</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>72</sup> Waelti-Walters, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 6, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>73</sup> Pearce, “Bookstore Turns A Page.”

<sup>74</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

Another debate surrounded whether or not books written by male authors should be included in the bookstore's collection. Early on, texts by a few male authors could be found at Everywomans, primarily in the children's section; however, when the store revised its ordering policy in 1989, it was decided that books currently in the store authored or co-authored by men would be sold out of stock and not re-ordered.<sup>75</sup> Greenhough explained that "we had limited resources and we knew how much coverage women were getting and were not getting. I think we made a pretty conscious decision to carry books, as we said, by women, for women, about women."<sup>76</sup> In accordance with the new ordering policy, if a collective member felt that a book that was authored or co-authored by a man, including all books with a man as a contributor or illustrator, was covering a topic of interest or importance to women, they could suggest the text at a regular collective meeting and it could be deemed an "exception" by the members in attendance. The general rule, however, was that such works by men would only be carried if nothing else on the topic was available that was written by a woman or "unless every woman [was] going to die without it."<sup>77</sup>

Though this note taken down by a collective member in the meeting minutes might seem melodramatic, for many women, the feminist literature they encountered at Everywomans was vitally important. In our interview, Greenhough told a story about an older collective member who approached her with questions about some of the literature that was carried in the store that illustrates how having access to hard-to-find information through the bookstore could be a life-and-death matter for women:

She was very troubled and what she was troubled about were the titles that we were carrying about incest, in particular, about sexual assault and she said she really really really was struggling with the number of titles we had and you know, I don't think it was that many, I think it was maybe seven or eight, you know, it wasn't this huge preponderance and she was trying to figure out why was this so prevalent now? And why was this such an issue? And you know I'm listening and I'm saying well, I don't think it is just an issue for now and she said, you know, I had to go and ask my friends and she said so I went to friends my age and asked if they had ever

<sup>75</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Ordering Policy 1989, Everywoman's Books Ordering Policies, 27 July 1989.

<sup>76</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>77</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Meeting Minutes, Minutes Jan.-June '89, 27 July 1989.

been abused, if they had ever been victims of incest, had anything ever happened to them? And she looked at me and her eyes welled up and she said I had to stop asking 'cause every single woman had been abused and nobody had ever talked about it and they had held that secret for 60 years and she said so we need to sell these books. I never forgot that conversation. So that came from somebody within our group who was a 180% in support of everything we did and had external questions and said ok, I'm going to make a little personal study of this and then realized in that course that we had to, we had a moral imperative to bring those stories forward. Were they popular? Were they bestsellers? Absolutely not. But I can tell you, I cannot imagine any single woman who picked up one of those books and read it who did not feel seen in a way she had never felt seen before.<sup>78</sup>

This conversation between collective members elucidates the critical role the bookstore played in providing texts that were urgently needed and not easily accessible to women. Feminist material that was available in general bookstores before Everywomans opened was meagre and tended to mask or bury the reality of women's experiences. As Hope A. Olson points out, "This kind of distortion makes it easier to ignore topics that are outside of the cultural mainstream, just as exclusion makes topics invisible and marginalization sets them aside."<sup>79</sup> For this reason, Greenhough believed it was imperative "for women to have access to information so that they would not feel alone in the world, so they would feel there is, you know, there are backstories that are tragic and you can get past them and let me be that witness for you, even if being that witness is just reading a book."<sup>80</sup> For many women, having their experiences put into words they could share with others to explain how they felt was one way they could talk about personal issues and feel less alienated. However, Greenhough was clear that the books carried in the store about violence against women should not "present this image of woman as victim."<sup>81</sup> Instead, she asserted "we were trying to find texts, books, that reflected a kind of robustness and an up yours kind of attitude as well, you know? That we're more than just the one you've chosen to assault, we are so much more than that so we would try and find the books that different women wrote

<sup>78</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>79</sup> Hope A. Olson, "Difference, Culture and Change: The Untapped Potential of LCSH," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 29 (2000): 62, quoted in Hogan, "Women's Studies in Feminist Bookstores," 605.

<sup>80</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

about surviving.”<sup>82</sup> By choosing positive and empowering images of women to appear on the shelves, women gained control over their own representation and the representation of women’s lives. Recovering their stories from patriarchal discourse and retelling them from a feminist perspective also allowed women to establish their identity and autonomy.

As the bookstore enhanced the visibility of women’s writing around issues like sexual assault, it also increased public recognition of these issues in society. Hogan contends that by bringing books by, for and about women together in one place, women’s bookstores engendered a sense of “collective power.”<sup>83</sup> Just as with consciousness-raising groups, in which women shared and validated each other’s personal experiences, the existence of a large body of women’s writing that uncovered and affirmed women’s hidden experiences had a profound effect on those who encountered it. Many of the women I interviewed described being struck by the feeling that they were being seen for the first time and remembered experiencing a kind of private thrill upon discovering the bold and challenging ideas expressed in feminist books. This was especially true for lesbian literature, which was integral in developing a sense of self for many of the lesbian-identified collective members and customers of the bookstore. Hutkin recalled the emotional intensity of those first encounters with lesbian literature: “I think lesbian books were really reaffirming like that I wasn’t the odd human being in the universe. When I first came out, I thought I was the only lesbian in Montreal, if you could picture that, and here there was a whole culture of books and people.”<sup>84</sup> In fact, Hutkin chose Everywomans Books as the place to be interviewed for the film, *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives* (1992).<sup>85</sup> In this

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Kristen Hogan, “Women’s Studies in Feminist Bookstores: All the Women’s Studies Women Would Come In,” *Signs* 33, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 603.

<sup>84</sup> Hutkin, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 13, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>85</sup> A 1992 documentary film by Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie, featuring interviews with women about their experiences of coming out and exploring lesbian culture in major Canadian cities in the ‘40s, ‘50s and ‘60s.

documentary, she is shown with a large wooden bookshelf brimming with books behind her as she talks about how reading lesbian novels helped her make sense of who she was.

In Kathleen Liddle's analysis of the importance of feminist bookstores for the lesbian community, she argues that visiting a women's bookstore was a pivotal moment in the coming out process for many.<sup>86</sup> Liddle suggests that often in lieu of support from real out lesbians, women found acceptance and belonging within a broader fictional community of lesbians. For these women, finding positive representations of lesbians in novels set them on a path toward "internal understanding before coming out to others."<sup>87</sup> Following this, many of the lesbian-identified collective members and customers of the bookstore claimed that they explored literature as they were coming out and that the bookstore helped them "get a sense of what [lesbian literature] was out there to read."<sup>88</sup> Liddle has also advanced the notion of bookstores as "cultural interaction spaces."<sup>89</sup> Echoing Liddle's respondents, the customers I interviewed also described how the combined effect of being surrounded by women's writing in a comfortable, inclusive environment that allowed them to explore at their own pace shifted their thinking in surprising and interesting ways and expanded their understanding of different political perspectives and of themselves. However, as mentioned above, Liddle is primarily concerned with the role of feminist bookstores as spaces and less so with feminist literature itself. Many of the women I talked to eagerly described the books that had been especially valuable to them as they discovered and explored their sexuality.

In *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1969-1989*, Zimmerman explains how early lesbian novels were immensely valuable to many women because they presented life-affirming proof of lesbian existence, even if they sometimes had to be mined for subtle clues, hidden references and subversive

<sup>86</sup> Kathleen Liddle, "More than a Bookstore: The Continuing Relevance of Feminist Bookstores for the Lesbian Community," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 9.1, no. 2 (2005): 157.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>88</sup> Weeks, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 29, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>89</sup> Kathy Liddle, "Distribution Matters," 58.

subplots.<sup>90</sup> She suggests that “perhaps because lesbian life was so hidden, the written word was crucial to sustaining and promoting lesbian identity.”<sup>91</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, alternative feminist presses began publishing lesbian novels like *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973) that centred and celebrated the lives of lesbian characters. The purpose of this writing was to entertain, educate and inspire, particularly as women who felt alone struggled to come out and looked to fictional role models for encouragement and reassurance.<sup>92</sup> Through these novels, many women stepped into an exciting new world filled with possibility, albeit a private world bound up in one’s own thoughts and isolated from other women. Sharing these books with others helped draw them out of isolation and engage them in creating a lesbian community that gave a physicality to the world they had dreamt.

When I asked women about how difficult it was to find literature with explicitly lesbian themes and positive lesbian role models before the bookstore opened, most collective members and customers agreed that it was tricky and described the thrill of finally being able to get their hands on this hard-to-find material at Everywomans. Hillyer, for example, recalled that “when lesbian literature started to really be something more than *The Well of Loneliness*,<sup>93</sup> like it was a big deal to be able to get anything that wasn’t just gutter trash that was written about gay or lesbian or bisexual people, and so when people were starting to be able to see themselves in books, it was a really stark contrast to what was going on in lots of society.”<sup>94</sup> Daphne Joy (a pseudonym) likewise remembered that when she was working at the bookstore, “finding books with lesbian protagonists, that was huge for me, like *Patience and Sarah*,<sup>95</sup> having never seen that reflected before, that was pretty enormous.”<sup>96</sup> Although many

<sup>90</sup> Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women*, 9.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>93</sup> A classic lesbian novel by Radclyffe Hall published in 1928.

<sup>94</sup> Hillyer, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>95</sup> An historical fiction novel by Alma Routsong, published in 1971 under the pen name Isabel Miller, with strong lesbian themes.

<sup>96</sup> Joy, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi via telephone, December 9, 2017.

acknowledged that the writing of local lesbian-feminist author, Jane Rule, most influenced their thinking and propelled their identity work forward, Walls pointed to the major role that Joan Nestle's *A Restricted Country* (1987) played in her self-discovery. With this collection of essays, Nestle described her experience coming out as a lesbian and claiming her sexuality in New York City in the 1950s. Nestle's writing was passionate, courageous and vulnerable. In the book, she took issue with feminists who undercut the legitimacy of her experience as a femme and criticized butch-femme couples. Instead, she challenged readers to consider these relationships within a historical context to understand their complexity. Walls articulated the meaning and value of Nestle's work for her:

[A] *Restricted Country* was really, you know, had such punch and was just so profound. Because of my own identity and trying to figure out how to do this, especially in Victoria, trying to be able to own who you were and to really find that and, you know, I think because she also wrote about butch and femme and all of the sort of continuum of how we evolve in our discovery of our own sexual orientation and, you know, her courage and bravery in some way gave me permission to be courageous and brave and, you know, because I wasn't butch or femme but I was both in some way and always had been and I didn't want to lose any of those, you know, I wanted to wear nail polish if I wanted to and not be critically judged by the lesbian community, I wanted to find my own place in that, and I think through literature in some ways you could, you know?<sup>97</sup>

For Walls, and certainly for others like her, reading a book was a way to have her identity recognized and affirmed by other subjects, real or fictional. In this light, literature may be seen as an important dimension of consciousness-raising, as it encouraged women to reflect on their own experiences and to develop their identities and understandings of feminist writing at their own pace. Given the themes it explored, many remembered there being a dangerous thrill associated with much of women's writing. A necessary precondition for engagement with this writing was a sense of security, comfort and belonging. Together with an inventory of diverse titles, *Everywomans* provided just such a safe, comfortable environment for women to come and learn about social issues affecting women, feminism and lesbian concerns from books and from each other. Their politicization around women's

<sup>97</sup> Walls, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

issues might have begun with the bookstore but it followed them far beyond its walls as they drove around the city with “Sisterhood is Powerful” stickers on their cars, marched down the streets for women’s equality, entered Master’s and PhD programs, taught university courses on feminism, took up non-gender traditional work and positions in local government, started families and raised feminist sons and daughters.

## **Summary**

This chapter has taken as its starting point the origin of the bookstore as recounted by its intrepid founding mothers. Their driving motivation was to make information available for women who urgently needed it and to create a safe space for everyone to come and learn about feminism through books. The collective members, like the store itself, were broad-minded and rather than try to sell their customers on any one particular feminist perspective, they gave women room to explore at their own pace. Because reading is such an internal process, many consider it to be a passive, private activity. For women who saw their reality acknowledged or portrayed for the first time in books, reading feminist and lesbian literature was an important step in their self-discovery and while many turned their attention inward at first as they created new versions of themselves, they were also activated by that reading to recognize their own oppression and form feminist or lesbian feminist worldviews. The women I interviewed reinforced the huge importance of feminist and lesbian literature in affirming their values, encouraging their budding feminism and leading them to take political action outside of the bookstore.

A danger of cultural feminism, according to its critics, is that in the drive to create alternative spaces and services for women, feminists created depoliticized women-centred communities that were insulated from the rest of society, rather than trying to reshape patriarchal power structures to include them. This approach, which Adamson, Briskin and McPhail termed “disengagement,” led invariably to

marginalization and invisibility.<sup>98</sup> However, there are important differences between building alternative spaces organized around feminist ethics and withdrawing from dominant culture entirely. The bookstore was part of a sprawling network of women's organizations in Victoria that worked together at the community level to create a very public presence for the women's movement, raising women's consciousness, offering services to women and providing a bridge to include more women in the movement. Together, these structures envisioned a dramatic transformation of society. As a bookstore, Everywomans' strategy for achieving social change was very different from other organizations, in that it was quieter and placed greater emphasis on the value of education as a tool of empowerment. Despite whatever weaknesses this approach had, the bookstore can be credited with reaching out to many women and introducing them to feminist ways of thinking. In their descriptions of what reading feminist literature meant for them, the women I interviewed clearly identified the bookstore's significance in their coming-to-feminism. By establishing itself as a visible, public presence for the women's movement and helping to raise the consciousness of its customers, while still serving as a sort of retreat or haven for those who needed it, the bookstore negotiated the boundary between total disengagement and its counterpoint, mainstreaming or institutionalization. The next chapter will explore further how the bookstore's structure served as part of its strategy to combat patriarchal culture. It will also analyze how in pursuing its own vision of the way forward, the store was able to carefully navigate around some of the tensions that typically divided feminists and beset women's bookstores in other cities.

<sup>98</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 253.

### **Chapter Three: Collective Interests and Collective Frustrations**

This chapter will analyze how the vision to create a community resource centre for women provided the diverse group of women who constituted the collective over the years with a basis of unity that kept them from dividing along ideological lines. Everywoman did experience some tensions, though they were often in relation to practical issues that affected the daily operations of the store rather than broader political concerns and they were usually resolved fairly quickly. The chapter will explore these conflicts, then turn to analyzing how the bookstore engaged in political debates within the women's movement, specifically critiques of racism and voice appropriation, and the extent to which these debates governed discussions and decision-making processes within the collective. The chapter will demonstrate that the collective was largely removed from debates around racism and voice appropriation that had a major impact in some larger urban centres, as most of their time was taken up with the often mundane daily tasks of running a bookstore. Their neutrality on these issues was understandable, if not necessary to keep the store open, but it also might have created new exclusions for racialized and Indigenous women who did not see these issues as abstract ideological questions, but as real and urgent problems that needed to be addressed.

#### **The Collective**

Amid contacting publishers, gathering feminist texts, finding a location, scouring demolition sites for wood and sanding bookshelves, Hillyer and Greenhough put out a call in 1975 to anyone who might be interested in joining the bookstore's all-volunteer collective. Though only eight women showed up to the first meeting in the home where Hillyer and Greenhough lived, Greenhough remembered that

“it felt like a houseful and I think everyone committed to that collective from the first meeting.”<sup>1</sup> From there, the group continued to grow with about 20 women usually making up the collective. Volunteers ranged in age from their early 20s to late 60s and represented various socioeconomic classes, sexual identities, feminist backgrounds, personalities and professions.<sup>2</sup> Collective member Suzanne Dearman described the group as “a really varied bunch of women, how they got on, how they worked together, and it gave me a great deal of faith in the future of womankind and I thought god, if they can run a bookstore, they can run the bloody country!”<sup>3</sup>

Everywomans did not exclude anyone from volunteering based on their specific feminist perspective. However, the store took a firm pro-choice stance and “had a clearly stated policy of identifying itself and its members as feminists, committed to feminist ideas and goals.”<sup>4</sup> Women who identified as feminist but did not believe in abortion, for example, would likely not have been accepted. To assess their comfort with these core values, prospective volunteers were interviewed by current collective members “about their ideas and opinions on feminism and about their level of comfort being identified as a member of a feminist bookstore often in the ‘limelight’ of public debate over feminist and women’s issues.”<sup>5</sup> According to Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, this broad acceptability was a common practice for women’s groups in smaller communities that were fearful of excluding women and hence more likely to require potential members to align with core philosophies rather than a neatly inclusive list of positions on political issues.<sup>6</sup> In smaller communities like Victoria with fewer women’s organizations and a limited pool of potential volunteers, there was a greater need for women who held

<sup>1</sup> Lynn Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>2</sup> Reflective of its surrounding community, the collective did not consist of an ethnically or racially diverse group of women.

<sup>3</sup> Suzanne Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>4</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Store Operational and Policy Procedures, Responsibilities of Collective Membership, n.d.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women’s Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 240.

different feminist perspectives to organize together. As a result, interested women were rarely turned away from the collective.

Collective member Susan-Rose Slatkoff could only remember one woman who applied to join the collective being turned down because she had managed to get into arguments with a few collective members before she had even finished her training. Slatkoff explained that they had to consider the consequences of bringing someone who was already rubbing people the wrong way into a consensus-based collective: “To let somebody in who has already ruffled feathers makes us worry we won’t have a consensus. I mean it’s not that we always agreed on everything, but we could convince the others to go along with it.”<sup>7</sup> The process of decision-making by consensus meant that discussion continued until each woman agreed to a decision. While women were encouraged to raise doubts or objections, having one combative woman in the group who was unpredictable or unwilling to compromise might mean lengthier discussions for the whole group, taking up time that could otherwise be spent on the sundry tasks involved in running the bookstore. Slatkoff was careful to point out that they did not want to force women to abandon their perspective entirely, but rather to nuance it.

After being voted in by consensus and undergoing thorough training, most collective members worked two or three shifts a month, attended a weekend retreat twice a year and a combined potluck dinner/business meeting once every two weeks. Volunteers were asked to commit to a minimum of one year in the collective, which meant that women were constantly moving through the bookstore. Suzanne Dearman recalled there always being a “continual flow”<sup>8</sup> of younger women who joined the collective “enchanted with the idea of like this is feminist action here.”<sup>9</sup> These women were remembered fondly by other collective members as founts of youthful energy and new ideas. By 1994,

<sup>7</sup> Susan-Rose Slatkoff, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 14, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>8</sup> Suzanne Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

75 women had belonged to the collective,<sup>10</sup> many of whom stayed connected long after their departure, including both of the store's founding mothers. "The people would come and go in the collective; it was not a hard and fast place that you had to stay for your whole life and that was part of its strength,"<sup>11</sup> claimed Hillyer, underscoring the fluidity and diversity of collective members as a key factor in the store's endurance. Though the collective members over the years differed in their personal visions of feminism, they worked together toward a common vision of the bookstore, prioritizing their commitment to keeping the store open and making books available. Indeed, when Hillyer was interviewed by the *Times Colonist* in 1977, she chalked up the bookstore's ability to survive "while other feminist projects [had] disappeared" to the fact that its collective members had not been diverted by "consciousness-raising groups" or "the abortion issue" but instead had "kept their purpose simple - selling books."<sup>12</sup> Thinking back on the store's success in 1995, Yaffe, who had been a member of the collective for 13 years then, also attributed the longevity of the bookstore to "the fact that it is not geared to one or two or three dimensions of feminism." "That is one of our strengths - there is a lot of give and take and sacrificing of personal vision for the greater good of the store,"<sup>13</sup> she told the *Times Colonist* on Everywomans' 20<sup>th</sup> birthday.

<sup>10</sup> Deborah Pearce, "Bookstore Turns A Page," *Times Colonist*, February 28, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Ann Hillyer, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, Victoria, B.C., December 15, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Mike Hughes, "The Oasis: Women Find Comfort at Oak Bay Bookshop," *Times Colonist*, November 22, 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Jeff Bell, "Store's 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday 'A Miracle,'" *Times Colonist*, February 27, 1995.



Figure 7. Members of the Everywomans Books collective in 1989<sup>14</sup>

Like many women-led cultural spaces in this period, the collective rejected the notion of traditional hierarchical organizing. For women who had largely been excluded from positions of power in 1960s social movements, it was crucial that their own organizations were democratic. As such, feminists committed to creating alternatives to mainstream business models that dealt with issues of power, equality and democracy in their own ways, by discouraging hierarchy and encouraging shared leadership.<sup>15</sup> Organized by consensus, the bookstore was collectively run by a group of women who all participated in making decisions and were equally responsible for carrying them out. In this organizational model, every member of the group had “the same right to question, to initiate changes,

<sup>14</sup> *Everywomans Books collective, Everywomans Books*, c. 1989, pictured in “2 Groups Thrive On Volunteer Woman Power,” *Focus on Women* (Feb. 1989): 12.

<sup>15</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 234.

and to try to make the bookstore reflect [their] own personal vision of feminism.”<sup>16</sup> “It didn’t seem to make much sense to build a women’s bookstore in a hierarchical structure,” said Greenhough, “so we tried to bring that ethos of equality into the structure of the staffing and how we approached even our ordering.”<sup>17</sup> Collective action and organizing are central aspects of the socialist-feminist approach to change, as they are seen as necessary to shift dominant values to emphasize cooperation over competition and the pursuit of collective rather than individual gains.<sup>18</sup> The socialist-feminist understanding was that the collective was not an “autocratic or authoritarian” structure but “one in which shared vision and collectively determined structures allow for the resolution of conflict.”<sup>19</sup> The way the bookstore was organized, then, was inherently political; the collective itself was an embodied ideology, combining theory and practice in a coherent whole that communicated a socialist-feminist understanding of women’s oppression as deeply rooted in the structures of patriarchal capitalism. Although, as Adamson, Briskin and McPhail pointed out, feminist communities in smaller cities probably did not identify themselves in these exact terms, Marisa Sarratore (a pseudonym) explained how socialist-feminist politics did have a direct impact on the organization of the bookstore. She described how part of the socialist-feminist strategy involved building alternative structures in patriarchal-capitalist society: “It’s not just about equal rights or equal opportunity, it includes an alternative organizing against dominant forces and so the bookstore is part of a collection of organizations that were created to combat patriarchal approaches that included the Transition House and Bridges and the Women’s Sexual Assault Centre. These were all sort of politically informed by a similar ethic.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Store Operational and Policy Procedures, Welcome To The Collective, n.d.

<sup>17</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>18</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 101.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>20</sup> Marisa Sarratore, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, March 18, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

Slatkoff suggested that, in part, the “unspoken agenda” of the bookstore may have been to model “how a feminist ideology can work”<sup>21</sup> by putting feminist values into practice, which echoes what Yaffe wrote in her article about Everywomans Books. The bookstore made it a priority to implement feminist values such as power sharing, collectivism and egalitarianism in its daily operational procedures. Accordingly, every member of the collective participated fully in day-to-day decision-making and all larger concerns were clarified and discussed at bi-weekly potluck dinner meetings and semi-annual weekend retreats until a decision was reached that was supported by the whole group. This set-up ensured that the women were constantly sharing, examining and debating women’s issues as if they were in a university seminar – a “women’s university-without-walls.”<sup>22</sup> The decisions reached did not have to completely satisfy every member of the group, but everyone had to at least feel comfortable with them. At Everywomans, this meant that “everything was decided by consensus and argument and another potluck,”<sup>23</sup> said collective member Waelti-Walters, describing the “slow and ponderous and sometimes conflictual”<sup>24</sup> process of consensus decision-making. Without anyone to take on the role of mediator, the group of about twenty women often found themselves suspended between agreement and disagreement, which could be extremely frustrating. This process required commitment, patience and good communication on the part of all collective members. For this reason, the enormous amount of time feminists spent developing alternatives and focusing on internal processes like decision-making by consensus has been criticized for being inefficient and time-consuming, for turning women within an organization against each other and hence, misallocating their energies.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Slatkoff, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 14, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>22</sup> In her seminal essay, “Toward a Woman-Centered University” (1975), Adrienne Rich indicated that contrary to popular assumptions, many promising ideological advances in feminism were, in fact, “taking place outside the academy in ‘unofficial, self-created groups,’” or what she terms “the women’s university-without-walls.” See Adrienne Rich, “Toward a Woman-Centered University,” in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, by Adrienne Rich (New York: Norton, 1979), 126.

<sup>23</sup> Jennifer Waelti-Walters, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 6, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>24</sup> Claire Weeks, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 29, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>25</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 17.

Nonetheless, feminists believed very strongly that feminist processes had distinct advantages. Developing skills and self-confidence were viewed as sources of personal empowerment.<sup>26</sup> In addition to promoting cooperation, the expression of feelings and participation from quieter members of the group and fostering more critical analyses of issues as well as more creative strategies and solutions,<sup>27</sup> making decisions by consensus was also thought to result in a higher degree of commitment and satisfaction from all participants, strengthening the group as a whole as well as empowering individual members.<sup>28</sup> The next section will discuss in more detail some of the issues related to this decision-making model, but it is undeniable that an alchemy happened whenever women worked together; women who alone were very shy and introverted, together felt emboldened. From a socialist-feminist perspective, participation in collective action provided a path toward individual transformation and collective gains as it allowed those involved to see themselves “not as individuals struggling in isolation to survive but as part of a collective of shared vision and interest.”<sup>29</sup> Though Waelti-Walters’ statement above suggests that collective meetings could be very long and tedious, they were also exciting opportunities for learning, discovering and growing together. More than anything, she remembered the meetings being “enormous fun.”<sup>30</sup> The potlucks she and others described sounded both mundane and goofy; some members argued with each other, while others giggled off to the side and some were self-proclaimed “brats” who liked to cause mischief.<sup>31</sup> “Feminist collectives are always argumentative places,” Waelti-Walters said, “but I remember a lot of laughter in the meetings and the potlucks.”<sup>32</sup>

Another concrete way the bookstore enacted feminist principles was by encouraging collective

<sup>26</sup> Stephanie Riger, “Vehicles for Empowerment. The Case of Feminist Movement Organizations,” *Prevention in Human Studies* 2, no. 2-3 (1984), 99.

<sup>27</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Store Operational and Policy Procedures, Consensus, n.d.

<sup>28</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Store Operational and Policy Procedures, Decision-Making by Consensus, February 1982.

<sup>29</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 101.

<sup>30</sup> Waelti-Walters, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 6, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>31</sup> Slatkoff, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 14, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>32</sup> Waelti-Walters, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 6, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

members to learn and share new skills. Every six months at the weekend retreat, a new job list was created and approximately 20 different tasks on the list, from organizing events, creating window displays and updating the bulletin board to writing orders, paying bills and doing returns, were rotated so that “nobody built up a fiefdom and everybody got a chance to see different aspects”<sup>33</sup> and learn by doing. “You just don’t have any idea how interesting it is until you’ve seen all these different things and you don’t know how intricate it is,”<sup>34</sup> said Yaffe. The publishers were also redistributed to relieve overwork and achieve a better balance between members. For Frances Dearman, who had been primarily responsible for managing the store’s books, this gave her a chance to expand her expertise into the field of aesthetics by learning to arrange flowers for author readings and signings. “It’s very simple,” she told me in our interview, “you get three vases, always an odd number, you get three times three of let’s say, a bunch of alstroemeria or something, always the same colour, ya plunk ‘em in there, you put it in front of the lectern!”<sup>35</sup>

For many, the opportunity to learn new skills, meet notable authors who came in to give readings, rub shoulders with other local booksellers at the Victoria Independent Booksellers Association meetings and contribute to a movement that was just getting off the ground was exhilarating. These women reveled in the opportunity to promote the women’s publishing industry, feel connected to the burgeoning Women in Print movement and give women writers “some of the respect and publicity that was theirs as authors.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, many former collective members mentioned that the opportunity to practice feminism on the ground with an ethical organization “dedicated to doing things in a certain way even if it wasn’t always the most efficient”<sup>37</sup> played a large part in their decision to become involved with Everywomans Books. Others cited a desire to connect with women and establish a social circle as

<sup>33</sup> Debby Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Frances Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Weeks, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 29, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

their primary motivation for seeking out the bookstore. For example, Joy had just moved to Victoria to attend university and for her, joining the collective was largely social: “There weren’t a lot of gatherings of women, there weren’t a lot of gatherings with a feminist focus so to connect with those women meant that suddenly I was involved in a lot of different activities and wouldn’t have been able to find that without the bookstore.”<sup>38</sup> Like Joy, Alto also attended school in another province and sought out the bookstore upon her return to Victoria as a means to recover a connection with the local women’s community:

So I walked into the bookstore because I loved books and it seemed like it’s a women’s bookstore, it’s got to be connected to lots of stuff, right? Which was an interesting assumption because in those days that was still true that women’s bookstores tended to not just be bookstores. Obviously that was their reason for existing ‘cause they had to have a business reason but they were very connected to other aspects of the women’s community and so I made that assumption, went into the bookstore, sure enough, that was true.<sup>39</sup>

Such stories illustrate that Everywomans served as an entryway to the local feminist community for many women, helping them find people and organizations. Indeed, the bookstore became a prime gathering spot for making connections and exchanging ideas, book recommendations and business cards.<sup>40</sup> Greenhough suggested that “the biggest resource was connection, you know, information exchange, a place to meet other women, a place to feel like you’re not the only feminist in Victoria or the only lesbian in Victoria or the only single mom in Victoria.”<sup>41</sup> “Ultimately,” she added, “I mean, what is feminism about? It’s building relationships and I think for a lot of women that became a place where they could do that.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Daphne Joy, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi via telephone, December 9, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Marianne Alto, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, February 20, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>40</sup> Finding herself in a new city, Joy joined the collective as a means to get acquainted with the feminist and lesbian community in Victoria. She ended up becoming involved with a women’s massage collective as a result of networking with other women in the bookstore.

<sup>41</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, since lesbians were a core group in the bookstore, both as customers and as collective members, Everywomans also played a fundamental role in introducing women to the local lesbian community. Some collective members shared that they turned to the bookstore when they were in the process of coming out and seeking a place to safely claim their lesbian identities and feel a sense of belonging. As several scholars have pointed out, finding a community that can offer support and validation is a crucial part of the coming-out process.<sup>43</sup> In her account, Joy reinforced this idea by highlighting how becoming a member of the collective was central in terms of community-building and in turn, helping her fashion her lesbian-feminist identity:

I think it was huge for me in terms of finding my community. I think it did really influence me to become as a feminist like it opened my eyes in a lot of ways. I would say it was more educational both by the books but also just by the [...] it was a lot of older women that I really respected and thought were amazing and I was interested in what they thought and what they read and what they talked about and it connected me socially to the lesbian community at the time.<sup>44</sup>

Other women had various reasons for volunteering at the bookstore: one suggested that volunteering gave her meaning and purpose at a time when she was recovering from a death in her family, while another said that it offered her an opportunity to get out of the house and talk with other women. One woman claimed that it was something she had been searching for her whole life: “to do something where I was Suzanne Dearman, I wasn’t Charlie Hunt’s daughter, I wasn’t Johnny Hunt’s little sister, I wasn’t Frank Dearman’s wife and I wasn’t Frances Dearman’s mother, I was Suzanne Dearman.”<sup>45</sup>

Membership in the collective was clearly “raison d’être” for some and “a good thing to do...a hobby”<sup>46</sup> for others, as Greenhough put it, yet all who got involved with the bookstore did so because they relished the opportunity to be surrounded by books. In the interviews I conducted with collective members, many described a passion for reading beginning at an early age. An article that appeared in

<sup>43</sup> Kathleen Liddle, “More than a Bookstore: The Continuing Relevance of Feminist Bookstores for the Lesbian Community,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 9.1, no. 2 (2005): 148.

<sup>44</sup> Joy, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi via telephone, December 9, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Suzanne Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>46</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

the *Vancouver Sun* in 1974 titled “Dreaming the Possible Dream” was spot-on when it declared that “Nearly every woman – that is, if she likes books – dreams of owning a snug little bookstore.”<sup>47</sup> As voracious readers, many former volunteers at Everywomans shared that owning or working in a bookstore had been a lifelong dream. To some extent, the chance to belong to a collective that granted each member equal responsibility in ownership and an equal say in the way the store was run offered them the opportunity to fulfill that dream. “The fact that it was a bookstore that was committed to books by and for women was just like a super bonus,”<sup>48</sup> Alto added. Many collective members recalled enjoying their shifts at the bookstore because they could spend some time “getting familiar with the stock.”<sup>49</sup> Greenhough, for example, warmly reminisced about curling up with a book at the end of her shift, holding it carefully so as not to break the spine,<sup>50</sup> while Suzanne Dearman remembered telling her daughter, also a member of the collective, “You’re not here to read all the books, Frances!”<sup>51</sup> Ironically, the collective members may have been some of the store’s best customers. As Waelti-Walters recounted, “One of the running jokes is that the volunteers kept the bookstore going. We’d read half a book if it was a quiet shift and then we’d buy it and take it home because there was only one copy of everything so you didn’t dare leave it until your next shift in case somebody bought it so it cost us a fortune to actually volunteer.”<sup>52</sup>

The volunteers’ shared passion and belief in the power of books came with a feeling of responsibility not only to support women writers, publishers and printers, but also to provide a place for other readers like themselves to find feminist literature. As Greenhough said:

For the women, all through the years of the collective, certainly when I was involved, this really became a focal point for our lives, we felt like we were doing something important, most of us were mad readers so this was heaven as far as we were concerned and we were committed to

<sup>47</sup> Mary McAlpine, “Dreaming the Possible Dream,” *Vancouver Sun*, December 9, 1974.

<sup>48</sup> Alto, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, February 20, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>49</sup> Suzanne Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>50</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>51</sup> Suzanne Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>52</sup> Waelti-Walters, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 6, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

the feminist movement and for all of us, I think, we felt that the literature that we were providing connected us to the larger world. Victoria can sometimes feel like completely, you know, in some ways, an oasis of non-political activity, it's really hard to get the fires lit here but we felt connected to that larger international movement that feminism was becoming and we also lit a few fires locally and I think that that was very very important.<sup>53</sup>

Here, Greenhough evokes an urgency and a fire created by activist work and its potential to mobilize communities, particularly those that were cut off from political activities in larger cities. The bookstore served as a bridge between the local women's community in Victoria and the larger feminist movement. Yaffe explained to a writer for the *Feminist Bookstore News* in 1987 that "[v]olunteering at the bookstore is something women can do to be a part of the feminist movement and feel actively involved. It's an up place to be – easier in many respects than, say, working on a rape crisis line. It feels really good to work here."<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, many collective members were involved in other women's organizations in the city like the Women's Centre, Rape/Assault Centre and Victoria Status of Women Action Group (SWAG) simultaneous with their involvement in the bookstore. Yaffe coordinated SWAG from 1986 to 1989 and when she retired, Alto took over her position. During the years that Yaffe and Alto were involved in SWAG, they were both very involved with the bookstore as well so a partnership formed between the two organizations. For example, if SWAG brought in an author for a reading, the bookstore might carry titles by that author or do a window display advertising the event. As Alto explained:

Status of Women had a particularly close relationship [to the bookstore] because Status of Women was an advocacy organization and the bookstore was a way to kind of get that message out but I think the bookstore also had a broader and perhaps, less deep, relationship with a lot of organizations because it tried to just be aware of everything that was going on.<sup>55</sup>

The bookstore advocated for issues and other organizations primarily by selling tickets to events, setting up book displays at conferences, visiting schools, writing "shocked and appalled" letters<sup>56</sup> to the local press or bringing in authors to talk about important issues. The collective agreed that the operation of

<sup>53</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>54</sup> "Victoria," *Feminist Bookstore News* Vol 10, No. 3 (October 1987): 15.

<sup>55</sup> Alto, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, February 20, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>56</sup> Suzanne Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

the store was their main focus and individuals should engage in activism on their own.

When Yaffe joined the bookstore collective in 1982, she already had considerable experience with feminist organizing in the U.K. Based on her early experiences with the women's movement, she had certain expectations when she joined the collective and was surprised to find that the priority seemed to be selling books rather than political advocacy.<sup>57</sup> At a retreat in 1995, when women were asked to think back on what their expectations had been when they joined the collective, Yaffe answered that she had "expected political activism and got a group of nice ladies."<sup>58</sup> Although three other women at the same retreat claimed that they, too, had expected more political action when they joined the collective, most women were very clear that they did not think of themselves as political and had joined the collective for the social aspect and as a way to give back to women in Victoria. One woman explicitly stated that she "wanted to be involved in a service to women that wasn't an activist organization."<sup>59</sup> Another said "she expected to be involved in a unique service that wasn't completely political in focus."<sup>60</sup> When I asked this question again in the interviews I conducted with collective members, I received similar answers. Waelti-Walters stated: "I'm a book person and I'm a make things happen person, I'm not really a political person so making it work would have been what my focus was."<sup>61</sup> Hutkin explained that this was her "first foray into anything political so whatever the politics or political levels were, they were more than enough for a person like me."<sup>62</sup> Yet when asked, most women claimed feminism as a political identity and of course, there is an implicit level of "being political" that goes along with belonging to a feminist bookstore. Waelti-Walters was quick to point out that running a feminist bookstore was a political act, even if it was quieter than other forms of activism. And as collective member Sarratore so

<sup>57</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>58</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, 1995 Minutes, Everywomans Books Retreat, 21-22 July 1995.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Waelti-Walters, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 6, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>62</sup> Reva Hutkin, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 13, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

aptly put it, the whole bookstore was an act of resistance manifested in the non-hierarchical organizational structure and democratic processes like the circulation of administrative tasks and agreement by consensus.<sup>63</sup>

As Walls explained, “when you take a bookstore like ours, which wasn’t necessarily driven by people having a political stance but by having a love of literature and longing to have all that literature available, you know, there’s a difference there and so you drew an interesting group of women.”<sup>64</sup> Walls seems to suggest that most of the volunteers were drawn to the bookstore by personal feminist politics. For example, she described how she made a connection between her personal politics and how she related to the store:

It’s an interesting thing what political means because I think what I expected more was to be able to fully have a place where I could claim my lesbian identity both in literature and in life and so, you know, my political identity would have been more the primary thing than, you know, necessarily marching for the Status of Women or whatever. I would march with the Status of Women but it would fit more for me to be thinking about how am I advancing the cause of lesbian, homosexual men? I mean, you know, it was also a time when HIV/AIDS was just kind of starting and it was a really profound time in terms of discrimination.<sup>65</sup>

For Walls, the bookstore was political in the sense that it made a space for queer literature. Though some collective members claimed not to be politically-minded, they were political as feminists and their entire effort to sell feminist books and help the women’s community was politically important work. To keep making lesbian and feminist literature available, they needed to focus on the logistical challenges of running a feminist business and avoid getting caught up in debates that were more ideological and might divert their energy.

<sup>63</sup> Sarratore, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, March 18, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>64</sup> Rosalie Walls, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



Figure 8. Members of the Everywomans Books collective in 1996<sup>66</sup>

### **Navigating Differences, Obstacles and Tensions**

During the interviews, I asked previous collective members to describe any internal issues that arose around age, race, religion, class or sexuality within the bookstore. Suzanne Dearman shared her memory of the collective as “one great big happy-go-lucky family”<sup>67</sup> and said she felt like a “real meanie”<sup>68</sup> when she had to remind the other women about flattening boxes for the recycling. Her anecdote seems to reflect most women’s experiences within the collective. Indeed, most of the women I interviewed struggled to recall infighting and suggested the collective members were almost always in agreement with each other. This led two participants to wonder if they were a “Pollyanna.” As Hillyer said when she was asked about tensions within the collective:

I’m sure we had disagreements in the collective but they weren’t divisive, they were evolutionary conversations and really, for the most part, because the women were so committed to books, I mean there’s something about groups of women and books that I think is unifying, there is just something that is really binding about books and our ability to read things

<sup>66</sup> *Everywomans Books collective, Everywomans Books*, c. 1996, pictured in Anita Lahey, “Between the Pages: Making a Business of Books,” *Herizons* (Fall 1996): 26.

<sup>67</sup> Suzanne Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

and disagree but still talk about them, and so we didn't like I just don't remember - maybe I'm just a Pollyanna - but I don't remember having big arguments about things. And that's not to say we didn't have disagreements or we didn't have problems that we had to solve or there even were maybe sometimes, you know, some personality things, but by and large, it was a pretty cohesive collective.<sup>69</sup>

While some remembered explosions of personal jealousies, the majority of the women I spoke to said there were never real tensions between the collective members and the bookstore was not riven by any major tensions around religion or class, though this probably reflects the largely secular, middle-class make-up of the collective. Yaffe and Hutkin, who were both secular Jewish women, remembered feeling angry and annoyed that the secular women from Christian backgrounds showed little regard for Jewish holidays, often setting meetings on those dates.<sup>70</sup> The non-practicing Christian women in the collective also lacked a clear understanding that people could be secular and still have different religious backgrounds. For example, the collective had a Christmas potluck every year based on the assumption that Christmas was a secular holiday that everyone should enjoy and did not consider that it could be exclusionary to women from non-Christian religious backgrounds.<sup>71</sup> Though Yaffe and Hutkin found this frustrating and pointed it out to the other women, as far as Yaffe could recall, the only time the collective experienced explicit tension over religion was when a Christian woman joined the collective and wanted to see more Christian books in the store. As Yaffe tells it, several collective members responded negatively to this because they felt she was imposing religious values that did not square with the feminist values of the store. Yaffe said "I think at one point I must have said to her, Jesus is not a member of this collective!"<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Hillyer, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>70</sup> Lynne Marks and Margaret Little, "Secular Passions and Religious Alienation Among the Sisterhood," paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association conference, Ryerson University, Toronto, May 2017. [co-authored, co-presented]

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

Though most former collective members did not recall major rifts between straight and lesbian volunteers, the wider women's movement was divided over these issues and it would have been hard for the bookstore to remain completely outside of them. Tensions may not have been as explicit in the bookstore as they were in other feminist organizations, but Walls suggested that there may have been some underlying tension in the collective between those who were "more lesbian identified" and those who were "more book identified."<sup>73</sup> One woman, who perhaps would have fallen into the latter category, felt that some of the lesbian collective members "quite openly had an agenda around [their] own culture."<sup>74</sup> "I don't think that served us well," she said. "If you start from the position that the point is to put books in people's hands, then raising our own consciousness was not the primary objective."<sup>75</sup> She argued that becoming involved in single-focus political issues distracted the collective from its broader vision of "making ourselves available to other women who could make their own decision about raising their consciousness."<sup>76</sup> From this perspective, the primary purpose of the bookstore was not to secure greater rights and equalities for lesbian women, but rather to provide women with the tools to educate and empower themselves to enact further political work in this area outside of the bookstore.

Collective organization presented its own challenges, such as slow decision-making processes and a dependence on unpredictable volunteers with different degrees of commitment and senses of responsibility to the store.<sup>77</sup> In the article she wrote about the bookstore in 1996, Yaffe identified some of the challenges that collective members faced, specifically in terms of unequal power relations and unacknowledged leadership that emerged within the collective:

Newer members sometimes defer to older members. Very young and very old members sometimes are marginalised to the benefit of the slightly middle-aged. Those who spend more time in the store and do more work often speak with more authority and passion, and are more likely to be listened to. Increasingly, there are imbalances between those with lots of experience

<sup>73</sup> Walls, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>74</sup> Frances Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 253.

in feminist organising and those with less. With many Women's Studies students on the collective, there may be a gap between those seen as knowledgeable and those seen as 'merely' enthusiastic. An influx of young, brash, radical, bisexual, vegetarian, ecofeminist activists abruptly shifted the power differentials. Computerisation has brought a gap between the computer nerds and the techno-peasants.<sup>78</sup>

Certain collective processes exacerbated the power differences Yaffe named here. For example, women who were new, shy, young and inarticulate or had no experience in politics or organizing had less power than others in terms of decision-making, even though formally they all had an equal say in group decisions. Slatkoff, a therapist with experience studying group dynamics, agreed that power accrued to those women with "natural charismatic power,"<sup>79</sup> who assumed informal leadership positions. She described how these women emanated authority and might have cowed some of the others into going along with decisions and erased the presence of quieter women. The collective came up with the solution to ask those who spoke often to make space for quieter members to speak; however, some women remembered feeling conflicted about being silenced when it had taken them years to find and be comfortable using their own voice. Nevertheless, as volunteers at a bookstore with strong feminist values built into its organizational structure, many of the women recognized the importance of finding a balance between ceding some power to others and keeping some for themselves. "I wasn't willing to not speak," said Slatkoff, "but I was definitely willing to leave space."<sup>80</sup>

Additionally, experienced women with leadership skills who could provide necessary guidance to the group were reluctant to declare themselves a leader for fear that they might be accused of being too loud, arrogant, competitive, egotistical or authoritarian, capacities that were characterized as being "male."<sup>81</sup> For example, one woman I spoke to said she felt like she was mistrusted by the other women in the collective because of the skills and leadership qualities she was once admired for and eventually,

<sup>78</sup> Deborah Yaffe, "Feminism In Principle and In Practice: Everywomans Books," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal. Special Issue: Connecting Practices, Doing Theory* 21, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 155-156.

<sup>79</sup> Slatkoff, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 14, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 238.

this made it easier for her to leave the organization.<sup>82</sup> In the value system of the bookstore, which emphasized collective power, striving for primacy in the group had patriarchal connotations that attracted the negative judgement and scrutiny of others and may have had the inadvertent effect of causing some women to refrain from taking charge and to diminish their ambitions and aptitude for leadership.

In line with what Yaffe suggested in her paper about power imbalances within the collective, the women I interviewed agreed that some generational tension did arise between older and younger volunteers with the introduction of a computer in the store, shifting the power in favour of the more tech-savvy, middle-aged women. However, Yaffe argued that “diversity within our feminist communities is a lot more diverse than we often imagine and is experienced along a whole range of variables which we should resist always collapsing into predictable categories”<sup>83</sup> like age, race, class, religion or sexuality. One of these variables was women’s computer skills. Many collective members indicated in their interviews that the move toward computerization may have pushed away some of the older and retired volunteers. Yet one woman I interviewed, who was already in her sixties when she joined the collective, denied being driven out by the introduction of computers.<sup>84</sup> In fact, she was already very familiar with computers by the time the bookstore acquired one due to her years of experience using computers in her work outside the bookstore. Women who had worked in the home most of their lives, however, would not have been so comfortable navigating new technology and were faced with the additional challenge of becoming computer literate. Moreover, with a computer, ordering had to be done in-store, after hours and could no longer be taken home to do on one’s own time, which made a difference to women with young children or elderly relatives who needed care.<sup>85</sup> These limitations

<sup>82</sup> Frances Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>83</sup> Yaffe, “Feminism In Principle And In Practice,” 156.

<sup>84</sup> Suzanne Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>85</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

precluded some women from joining the collective and made it easier for those already involved to leave. As Yaffe explained:

[I]t just made everything a bit less personal. We kept a log, you know, hand-written and we had like a hand-written card for each book and you'd recognize people's handwriting on the card and in the log and once we didn't have cards, once it was all in the computer, that connection was lost, you know? It just made everything more impersonal and that made it less of an emotional pull for people, easier to leave.<sup>86</sup>

Although computerization certainly had many advantages, it also fundamentally transformed the geography and social organization of the store. For example, if one woman was using the computer to help a customer, another woman could not use the computer for other tasks like ordering or bill paying.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, Yaffe observed that collective members would no longer engage with customers who came through the door if they were working on the computer.<sup>88</sup> Notes from the retreat in 1995 suggested that some collective members perceived a shift in attention away from customer service toward the computer and that this contributed to a distinct loss of a sense of community.<sup>89</sup> As a result, women felt less compelled to attend the regular collective meetings and semi-annual weekend retreats. The ten women who attended the retreat were urged to "take control of our technology and not be isolated by the computer."<sup>90</sup> In addition to being extremely costly for a store on a tight budget, computerization created barriers between customers and collective members and excluded some women from joining the collective. The collective worked hard to overcome these barriers by recruiting new volunteers and providing additional computer training and support; however, some women still

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, 1995 Minutes, Everywomans Books Retreat, 21-22 July 1995.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

believed that the costs and risks associated with computerization contributed to the bookstore's eventual closure.<sup>91</sup>

Several scholars have emphasized how the divergent needs and wishes of women of varying races, classes and sexualities contributed to infighting and splintering within feminist organizations, but Everywomans did not seem to follow this trend.<sup>92</sup> Whereas in other groups, differences in goals and priorities often led members to disagree about feminist ideology, the bookstore collective avoided major conflicts and worked cohesively toward their goal of providing a feminist service to women by maintaining a clear focus on what was most important: keeping the store open and selling books. In fact, Yaffe claimed that being so goal-oriented was what allowed them to avoid the splits over politics that caused many other women's bookstores to collapse: "we spend very little time discussing feminist principles, as most of our time is taken up with the mechanics of running the business."<sup>93</sup> However, as a feminist business that prioritized meeting women's needs over making a profit, the store's principles and the logistics of running the business often overlapped. Yaffe remembered "massive debates" about whether or not the store should accept credit cards because they did not want to encourage women to overspend.<sup>94</sup> Eventually they decided to allow women to pay by credit, but this example shows that the collective was primarily occupied with the seemingly insurmountable obstacles of running a successful and ethical feminist business and the impact of their decisions on women.

<sup>91</sup> Marjorie McIntyre, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, January 19, 2018, Victoria, B.C.; Carol Sherwood, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 7, 2017, Victoria, B.C.; Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*; Vijay Agnew, "Canadian Feminism and Women of Colour," *Women's Studies International Forum* 16, no. 3 (March 1993): 217-227; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*; Kristin Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001): 63-88; Becki Ross, *The House that Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

<sup>93</sup> Yaffe, "Feminism In Principle and In Practice," 154.

<sup>94</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

For the most part, it seems like collective members were amenable and yielded to the needs and wishes of the majority rather than accentuating disagreements in regular collective meetings and day-to-day decision-making. Yaffe's suggestion that having a clear sense of purpose kept them focused and was conducive to the store's survival was reiterated by other collective members I interviewed who told me that their personal reasons for getting involved with the store, combined with having a practical job to do, kept them grounded and left them little time or desire to argue over ideology.<sup>95</sup> Greenhough clearly articulated how the collective's emphasis on structure prevented conflict from arising:

I think a lot of feminism disintegrated, deteriorated, into personalities and issues around personalities, which can get very ugly, and we had a structure - fill in the logbook, open up, use the cash box, you know? There were things to do, things to be done, that were very structured and I think that took some of the personality stuff out of it 'cause it wasn't about you as a person so much as are you reliable? Are you consistent? Are you honest? Are you doing a good job? Done. And so I think that was very helpful. I think the Women's Centre had a harder time because it was less structured. This had a structure and the structure had to be maintained above all.<sup>96</sup>

Many women also indicated that because they did their shifts at the bookstore alone, there were fewer opportunities to feud with each other than there might have been in other organizations. The logbook usually tempered any arguments that did arise among collective members and although some felt dissatisfied by this impersonal mode of communication, expressing their grievances to the group in writing gave women a chance to reflect on their feelings and carefully compose their entries in the log, which extinguished minor disputes before they blew up. A look through the logbook reveals that disagreements often centred around pragmatic concerns like poor attendance at the regular collective meetings, a woman forgetting to write in the log during her shift, opening late or missing her shift entirely. The issue of finding women to fill shifts put considerable strain on the collective, especially as mounting economic pressure forced more women to find paid work outside of the store and meant they had less time to spend volunteering or attending long collective meetings. For a store with a practical

<sup>95</sup> Leith Leslie, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 12, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>96</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

focus, the logistics associated with computers and volunteers' varied levels of skill, experience, energy, time and commitment appeared to be greater sources of tension than traditional factors like age, race, class, religion and sexuality that beset bookstores in major urban centres.

These tensions might have also been reduced at Everywomans due to the small size of the feminist community in Victoria and greater need for women to work together despite their different types of feminism.<sup>97</sup> Because the bookstore was not constructed around one particular feminist issue, it attracted book lovers with a range of feminist analyses. Adamson, Briskin and McPhail suggested that groups like this with a predominantly personal rather than political orientation are more likely to serve as personal networks for women.<sup>98</sup> In order to create the kind of place that would be seen as a sanctuary in the community, as Everywomans was, these organizations tended to discourage conflict and reinforce their overarching purpose, common interests and cohesive identity. However, dissent and disagreement can be healthy for groups. As racialized and Indigenous women started challenging illusions of unity in the women's movement more broadly, they also began to take issue with the playing down of differences in individual organizations and urged them to emphasize the diversity in their groups and acknowledge how informal structures of power worked to exclude racialized and Indigenous women.<sup>99</sup> One woman I interviewed related that her friend left the bookstore because there were no other racialized women in the collective and she felt that her perspective was not taken seriously. "There was a lot of norming and this kind of intolerance for things that threatened togetherness and so even though there wasn't maybe an in your face denial, there was no way to escape kind of a dominant, well really hegemonic, discourse by people who were community leaders,"<sup>100</sup> she explained. With this in mind, we might consider if the collective's reluctance to get involved in certain issues was "neutral," or

<sup>97</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 166.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>100</sup> Sarratore, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, March 18, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

whether by soothing conflict and difference into a comfortable homogeneity, they may have in fact allowed for racism and exclusion.

## **Racism**

The bookstore collective was reflective of the majority-white demographic of Victoria in the 1970s and 1980s. Although there were First Nations communities in and around the city, the almost exclusively white appearance of the collective was probably alienating to racialized and Indigenous women and may have excluded potential participants. With few racialized or Indigenous volunteers, the collective rarely entered into discussions about racism inside or outside of the women's movement. As Frances Dearman put it, "race was not the issue from our perspective. From someone who felt they might have wanted to belong but didn't see someone who looked like them there, it might have been."<sup>101</sup> By the early 1980s, however, feminists were starting to become more aware of racial issues and more and more writing by racialized and Indigenous women was appearing on the shelves at Everywomans. As with any other material sold at the bookstore, collective members eagerly pored over this literature and engaged in discussions with each other and with customers about what they were reading. Whereas in the 1970s feminist bookstores had emphasized the universality of all women's experiences (take for example the store name Everywomans), newer work by racialized and Indigenous women offered a more nuanced perspective, focusing instead on how women faced multiple forms of oppression based on class, race and sexuality, simultaneously. This writing shaped the conversations taking place within individual organizations and collectives, but also marked a fundamental shift in the women's movement toward an increased acknowledgement of difference, particularly in terms of race. Yaffe claims that these transformations in the women's movement "made things more fraught, you

<sup>101</sup> Frances Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

know, it made us more aware of our differences and we weren't so good at working across those differences always."<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, beginning in the 1980s, the collective committed to doing anti-racist work and "including a diversity of women in the collective itself, in the books stocked, in the customers served, in the events promoted."<sup>103</sup> To implement these broad objectives, the women focused on highlighting diverse work at the bookstore by designing window displays and creating separate shelf sections as well as bringing in more racialized and Indigenous authors for readings and signings like Makeda Silvera, Shani Mootoo, Marie Annharte Baker, Beth Brant, Chrystos and Lee Maracle.<sup>104</sup> The collective also brought in a facilitator to run a workshop on "Unlearning Racism and Homophobia" in 1991. What prompted this workshop is hard to say, but it seems likely that anti-racist education was becoming more common in feminist circles and the collective was probably responding to the surge in discussion about racism and heterosexism taking place in the wider women's movement around this time. Yaffe admitted that while this intellectual exercise was very valuable in that it provided a "useful framework for getting things said," it did not go far enough in "bridging from the personal level to the political action level."<sup>105</sup>

Even after attending the anti-racist workshop, collective members still seemed oblivious to issues of racism affecting the bookstore. During a meeting in 1992, volunteers grappled with the issues addressed at the workshop and were asked to comment on racism and class inequality within the collective. Notes from this meeting reveal how these issues were generally seen by collective members: "doesn't know what the problem is," "nothing to say at the moment," "can't see it – may be so subtle," "doesn't see it and not feel it herself" and "what exactly are the problems?"<sup>106</sup> Another woman at the

<sup>102</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>103</sup> Yaffe, "Feminism In Principle and In Practice," 154-155.

<sup>104</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Posters 1982-1995, n.d.

<sup>105</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>106</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, September 1992-December 1993, Meeting Minutes, 15 October 1992.

meeting related that someone had told her the store was “only a toy for white women,”<sup>107</sup> and while she did not agree, she said it made her think. In addition to providing a general sense of how the store was perceived by outsiders, the disbelief and defensiveness conveyed by these comments suggest that the collective lacked an awareness of the ways in which their own organization could be exclusionary. In this way, Everywomans was out of step with their big city counterparts. Staff at the Toronto Women’s Bookstore, for example, attended carefully to broader debates around power sharing and affirmative action, leading to changes in the store’s organizational structure and to the creation of the *Women of Colour Bibliography* in 1989, a landmark document that dramatically enhanced the visibility of writing by and for racialized and Indigenous women.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, when the Toronto Women’s Press was accused of racism because of their list of titles, they splintered into two new presses in 1989 and an anti-racist strategy was developed that stated the Press would no longer publish material with characters whose experiences differed from the author “by virtue of race or ethnicity” or that appropriated a culture that was oppressed by the author’s own.<sup>109</sup>

The collective at Everywomans did actively try to recruit diverse women. They discussed advertising in *Monday* magazine and at the Native Friendship Centre as well as putting up notices at the Greater Victoria Multicultural Women’s Association. Though their efforts were well-intentioned, an entry in the logbook from 1989 suggests that they lacked a clear sense of the difference between tokenism and true integration: “Let’s make some specific efforts to recruit Black women, Native women, Asian women into the collective.”<sup>110</sup> It’s not surprising that joining the bookstore had little relevance or appeal for racialized and Indigenous women and despite their best efforts to build a more racially

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 128.

<sup>109</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson, “Experience, Difference, Dominance, and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women’s History,” in *Writing Women’s History: International Perspectives*, edited by Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 89-90.

<sup>110</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Minutes Jan.-June ‘89, Meeting Minutes, 15 June 1989.

diverse collective, there was never usually more than one racialized or Indigenous woman in the collective at a time. Alto wondered whether the collective did enough to support the racialized and Indigenous women who did become involved with the bookstore and may have experienced isolation within the collective:

Sometimes we didn't give enough time to nurture the diversity in the collective and I think there were times, honestly, when there were some women who came to the collective who didn't feel welcome who tried for a while and weren't sufficiently supported and left. I don't think that was common but I do think it existed and I don't think we paid enough attention to that.<sup>111</sup>

In October 1996, one woman described the racism and alienation she experienced within the collective in a disgruntled letter of resignation. She wrote: "As one of the few women of colour I am obligated to make my presence felt, my voice heard. There is a pathetic amount of culturally diverse representation with respect to this collective. Nevertheless, I feel I should leave because I believe I have been slighted on several occasions."<sup>112</sup> In the letter, she goes on to name one incident in which no one ate the food she brought to a potluck, which she felt was a personal attack. "Within this group, as I am perceived to be antithetic, I have no support for myself as I am an individual," she wrote, "I do not feel I have ever been a member, so it is easy for me to exit gracefully with my dignity intact."<sup>113</sup> The archives indicate that after talking to a number of other volunteers, the woman was persuaded to stay in the collective; however, her letter raised awareness about the need to develop anti-racist strategies that emphasized listening to and learning from racialized and Indigenous women.

Determined to be more inclusive, the group discussed how to make racialized and Indigenous women feel welcome and included in the bookstore as both collective members and customers. In 1996, they talked about ordering *Pigment* magazine for the store to sell and for collective members to read and stay informed, compiling and distributing a resource list of organizations important to racialized and

<sup>111</sup> Alto, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, February 20, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>112</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Letters of Resignation, Correspondence, 28 October 1996.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

Indigenous women, incorporating an anti-racist focus in new volunteer training and organizing a monthly racism awareness discussion group to talk about racism in the women's movement.<sup>114</sup> This discussion group would involve around two to three, preferably racially diverse, representatives from different feminist organizations, getting together to share the successes and failures of their anti-racist efforts.<sup>115</sup> In addition to information and strategy sharing, the goals of this meeting were to help women feel more comfortable speaking about racism and to build bridges between organizations that served women of different cultures.<sup>116</sup> Yaffe was particularly interested in why previous anti-racist efforts had been unsuccessful. In a letter addressed to various women's organizations in the city, she wrote:

All over Victoria, it seems that feminists are struggling to overcome the effects of racism in their organizations. Mostly, from what I gather, we are not being very successful in our efforts. Rather than understanding how we can work together to promote anti-racist strategies, we seem to be either evading the issues for fear of dissension, or adopting confrontational strategies that promote unresolvable conflicts, or just bumbling along not knowing exactly what we are, or should be, doing. My concern is that women are crawling away, feeling wounded, angry and in despair, and racism continues to structure our lives. Some individuals get targeted as trouble-makers, others get written off as hopeless...but you probably know the scenario as well as, or better than, I. It's been re-enacted for years, all over the place. So let's do something about it.<sup>117</sup>

Over 30 women of diverse backgrounds attended the first community discussion in January 1997.<sup>118</sup> Though this meeting represented a genuine attempt on the part of white feminists to bring diverse women together and begin to understand their issues, they were not successful in demonstrating to racialized and Indigenous women that they were able to take accountability for the racial inequality built into mainstream feminism and sometimes ended up exemplifying the racism they attempted to combat. Adamson, Briskin and McPhail pointed out that participation in anti-racist work could sometimes harden into a form of "open competition," with different groups thinking of

<sup>114</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Nov. '88-Dec. '96, Retreat Minutes, 7 December 1996.

<sup>115</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Jan. '96-Dec. '96, Meeting Minutes, 20 November 1996.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Log Dec. '96-June. '97, 7 April 1997.

themselves as competing in “a sort of hierarchy of oppressions.”<sup>119</sup> The woman who had previously considered resigning in response to the racism and lack of support she experienced within the collective noted how the various behaviours of white women she observed, from argumentation and defensiveness to silence and withdrawal, revealed their unwillingness to engage in difficult conversations and hold each other accountable for racism. She accused white women of dominating the conversation during the first community anti-racist discussion meeting and alleged that by leveraging their own concerns about religious discrimination and working-class or lesbian issues in an attempt to decentre the conversation and draw attention to their own victimization, they erased the experiences and “completely invalidated the voice of the handful of women of colour present.”<sup>120</sup> She also pointed out that one white woman withdrew from the process entirely, indicating that she was not committed to working against racism by tuning out of the whole debate.<sup>121</sup> She documented her concerns about racism in the logbook, writing that as a racialized woman, she felt that the way in which the first meeting was conducted was self-serving and “extremely alienating”<sup>122</sup> for the few racialized and Indigenous women in attendance and she had decided to boycott future meetings.<sup>123</sup> Three months after the first anti-racist discussion meeting, she turned in a final letter of resignation. In this letter, she urged collective members to use the books on the shelves to educate themselves and provided a list of key works to support them through the process, including *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde, *This Bridge Called My Back* by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *I Am Woman* by Lee Maracle and *Killing Rage* by bell hooks.<sup>124</sup> She also added that she did not feel it was her job to educate them. The disagreements feminists had while discussing racism were not unique to the bookstore. In fact, many racialized and

<sup>119</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 224.

<sup>120</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Log Dec. '96-June. '97, n.d.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Log Dec. '96-June. '97, n.d.

Indigenous women involved in predominantly white feminist organizations had similar experiences and felt that they were expected to educate white feminists about their cultures and issues of racism.<sup>125</sup>

The woman's decision to leave the bookstore was painful for collective members. It brought to light the tenuous relationship between white women and racialized and Indigenous women in feminist organizing and revealed the emotional intensity of anti-racist work and activism, more generally. Even if they failed to include women of every race, class and sexuality, the name Everywomans Books, which deliberately eschewed the use of a possessive comma, emphasized access for all women. Many white women found it hard to deal with the combative stance of racialized and Indigenous women and accusations of internalized racism when they had devoted so much of their time and energy to providing a safe and inclusive community space for everyone. White lesbian feminists might have had a particularly hard time responding to anti-racist challenges given their preoccupation with their own struggles with sexism and homophobia. As Adamson, Briskin and McPhail suggested, anti-racist efforts within feminist organizations could quickly turn into a "ranking of oppressions," preventing meaningful and effective action when different groups started thinking about their own oppression in relation to others.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, the collective at Everywomans made a conscious effort to educate themselves and attend anti-racist workshops. Sarita Srivastava has studied the anti-racist efforts of various Canadian feminist organizations to find out why despite being interested in engaging in discussions about racism, their efforts rarely resulted in meaningful changes in practice or structure. According to Srivastava, many white women felt that charges of racism were implicit criticisms of "their moral identity as feminists."<sup>127</sup> As feminists, their whole effort to construct alternative communities was guided by ethical, egalitarian principles, which helps to explain why being called racist often provoked emotional

<sup>125</sup> Nancy Janovicek, *No Place to Go: Local Histories of the Battered Women's Shelter Movement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 11.

<sup>126</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 224.

<sup>127</sup> Sarita Srivastava, "'You're Calling Me a Racist': The Moral and Emotional Regulation of Antiracism and Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 1 (2005): 30.

responses from white women such as those described above.<sup>128</sup> Srivastava also points out that it was a common practice for feminist organizations to engage in consciousness-raising and conflict-resolution and to privilege women's personal experiences and knowledge.<sup>129</sup> For this reason, discussions about racism tended to encourage women to look inward and be completely self-preoccupied rather than focusing on how they could make changes in their organizational structure and practices. Women who had faced racial discrimination all their lives were frustrated by what they felt was a lack of accountability on the part of white women and understandably wanted to see changes happening faster and more dramatically. For them, the emotional toll involved in pointing out the racial discrimination they saw and experienced could be draining. The process of negotiating between the needs and concerns of both groups of women was stress-inducing, at the very least. Nevertheless, the racism awareness discussion group continued attempting to work in a meaningful way against racism in the community by holding ongoing meetings in February and March of 1997 and by sending out another invitation to reach more organizations in the city in April.<sup>130</sup> Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, feminist authors, publishers, distributors and booksellers from across the world were coming together at conferences, conventions and book fairs to discuss similar issues and turning their attention toward issues of racism in publishing that had a direct impact on their community.<sup>131</sup>

## **Voice Appropriation**

In June 1988, Yaffe and her partner Donna Murray, who was also a member of the collective, attended the third International Feminist Book Fair in Montreal with six hundred other feminist authors,

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>130</sup> VWMA, *Everywomans Books*, 95-050, Box 3, Log Dec. '96-June '97, 7 April 1997.

<sup>131</sup> Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 125, 140.

publishers, distributors and booksellers.<sup>132</sup> This large, international event provided them with an opportunity to meet and build relationships with women from other feminist bookstores like Carol Seajay, editor and publisher of the *Feminist Bookstore News* (FBN). At the book fair in Montreal, Seajay stood behind the FBN table<sup>133</sup> and it is reasonable to assume that this is where Yaffe and Murray met Seajay and started talking with her about the lack of information on Canadian bookstores in the FBN, leading Murray to take up the critical project of writing a regular column in the FBN called Canadian Content.<sup>134</sup> In addition to networking, the book fair provided the women from Victoria with the background needed to meaningfully engage in broader debates around issues like voice appropriation at their own store.

That year in Montreal, a group of Indigenous authors, including Sto:lo author, Lee Maracle, demanded that Anne Cameron, a white woman writing about the lives and stories of Indigenous women in Canada, recognize the ways in which her unearned privilege guaranteed her priority of place on the shelves at most bookstores and contributed to the invisibility of Indigenous women's writing.<sup>135</sup> Cameron vowed to move over and make room for Indigenous authors, affirming the necessity of Indigenous peoples' intellectual sovereignty over their own lives and cultural identities. Voice appropriation was a central focus again at the American Booksellers Association Convention in Las Vegas in 1990, largely because Seajay circulated a paper by Andrea Smith titled "A Position Paper on Indian Spiritual Abuse," which addressed the problematic practice of white woman authors like Lynn Andrews co-opting Indigenous spiritual traditions as a means to make a profit.<sup>136</sup> In this paper, Smith called attention to the unintended ways white women writing about Indigenous spiritual practices erased Indigenous voices: "Today, many white writers, such as Lynn Andrews, are continuing the practice of

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>134</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>135</sup> Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 126.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 140.

destroying Indian spirituality. They trivialize Native American practices so that they lose their spiritual force. They have the white privilege and power to make themselves heard at the expense of Native Americans. Consumers like what many of these writers have to tell them and do not want to be concerned with the facts presented by Native Americans. Our voices are silenced as a result."<sup>137</sup> Smith was explicit that even those who sold this work in their stores were contributing to the problem and urged feminist booksellers to use the power they wielded as distributors to promote the work of Indigenous authors.<sup>138</sup>

Since small stores with limited budgets like Everywomans often could not afford to send a representative to out-of-town meetings of feminist booksellers, and most women could not afford to go at their own expense, the FBN became an important means of connecting individual collectives isolated from the larger movement. From 1976 to 2000, the FBN reached far to include more than one hundred local women's bookstores in conversations with each other about their observations, ideas, strategies, successes and failures.<sup>139</sup> Although Seajay wrote the majority of the publication, local women like Murray were invited and encouraged to make contributions. Hogan argued that the FBN played a crucial role in women's bookstores, publishing information about feminist bookstores and distributors, book lists of available feminist texts and news about the book industry.<sup>140</sup> The FBN also became a political tool for influencing publishers and sustaining feminist literature. For example, the FBN recommended that women pre-order copies of books so that publishers would see there was an interest in them and increase the publicity for these books, thereby enhancing their visibility and sales.<sup>141</sup> They also encouraged women to write letters to publishers to get out-of-print books re-issued.<sup>142</sup> Given that the

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 140. Readers should be aware that in 2015, Andrea Smith was accused of not actually being Indigenous as there was no evidence of her Cherokee background, and thus was guilty of what she accused others of here.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 49.

FBN seemed to play a critical role in other women's bookstores, it was surprising to find that the majority of collective members I interviewed only had vague recollections of the FBN, did not remember it at all or said they had never heard of it. However, when I asked Yaffe what role the FBN played at Everywomans, she explained that it helped them stay connected to the network of feminist bookstores in other small towns and major cities as well as the larger feminist movement: "Here we are on this island so it connected us to the other bookstores, to what else was a problem in the world, to what other feminists were doing about it, what everyone was talking about, it let us know who there was in the world of feminism, where all these stores were when we were traveling."<sup>143</sup> It seems probable that those women who were more political in focus and those who were more active in the bookstore were also more likely to follow current debates in the FBN.

Through the pages of the FBN, booksellers entered into the discussion surrounding voice appropriation and the possibility of influencing publishers' decisions regarding the promotion and distribution of Indigenous authors as well as their own customers' decisions about what titles to buy.<sup>144</sup> It became clear that as booksellers and distributors, they were responsible for making political choices that had important consequences. These discussions had a direct impact on buying and selling practices at the Toronto Women's Bookstore, where the staff worked closely with Indigenous communities to develop a deeper understanding of the Indigenous material they carried in their store.<sup>145</sup> Along with the Toronto Women's Bookstore, Everywomans Books agreed to take Lynn Andrews' books off their shelves and to use that space to centre the work of Indigenous authors instead. However, Anne Cameron's *Daughters of Copper Woman* (1981) continued to be a bestseller at Everywomans even after discussions surrounding voice appropriation at book fairs and in the pages of the FBN had raised booksellers' awareness about their ethical obligation to promote and distribute material that amplified the voices of

<sup>143</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>144</sup> Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 143.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

Indigenous women. The bookstore even invited her to give a reading at the store's 13<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1982<sup>146</sup> and co-sponsored a reading by Cameron at the university in 1988,<sup>147</sup> the year of the International Feminist Book Fair in Montreal.

*Daughters of Copper Woman* is a collection of short stories that recounted the mythology of a society of women on Vancouver Island. In this work, a thread that started from the arrival of the first human, Copper Woman, extends to a fictional family of women living in contemporary Nootka society. Cameron claimed to have collected these stories from women all over Vancouver Island.<sup>148</sup> When I asked why the store continued to carry Cameron, Hutkin stated, "we weren't politically tuned into that sort of stuff [voice appropriation]."<sup>149</sup> And Greenhough admitted that "we were certainly, I guess, naïve differently but a lot of these appropriation issues were not issues back then."<sup>150</sup> And yet the fact that the store had decided to stop selling Andrews indicates that these issues were relevant and the collective must have had some awareness of them. Why did the collective decide to stop selling one author and not the other? "Lynn Andrews was just making money,"<sup>151</sup> said Yaffe, whereas Cameron had a family connection to Indigenous people and thus some entitlement to retell their stories.<sup>152</sup> In her article evaluating the authenticity of *Daughters of Copper Woman* and ethics of telling other women's stories, UVic feminist Christine St. Peter points out that "one source of [the book's] authenticity is Cameron's superb rendering of the beauty and power of the North Pacific coast landscape of Vancouver Island."<sup>153</sup> Women from the bookstore I interviewed stressed that as a lifelong resident of the island, Cameron was

<sup>146</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Posters 1982-1995, n.d.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Some still argue that white writers like Cameron that have the privilege of publishing should not retell Indigenous myths and stories because they are more likely to find mainstream success, making it more difficult for Indigenous writers to sell their work and in effect, silencing them.

<sup>149</sup> Hutkin, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 13, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>150</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>151</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>152</sup> Anne had Indigenous children and was a grandmother to Indigenous children.

<sup>153</sup> Christine St. Peter, "'Woman's Truth' and the Native Tradition: Anne Cameron's 'Daughters of Copper Woman'" *Feminist Studies* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 500.

a local author, and as such, Everywomans was committed to supporting her. “We were just interested in bringing voices forward,” Greenhough explained, “and Anne Cameron’s was one of those voices.”<sup>154</sup>

Many justified the store’s decision by pointing to the general lack of writing by women in this period. For example, Frances Dearman was clear that “in those days, to get any voice at all was hard enough.”<sup>155</sup>

Since they did choose to remove Andrews’ books from their shelves, it is difficult to say whether the bookstore’s decision to continue selling Cameron’s books is an example of their naiveté or neutrality on issues of racism or whether the bookstore simply continued to support Cameron because she was a local woman, well-known in the community and known personally by many of the collective members. As St. Peter has pointed out, however, there did seem to be degrees of acceptance of white women writing about Indigenous experiences and cultures. While the Indigenous women with whom St. Peter discussed Cameron’s work had different attitudes toward her woman-centred retelling of Indigenous myths, variously expressing their approval or condemnation, they “categorically dismissed” Andrews’ work as racist.<sup>156</sup> In the case of Andrews, there was little to discuss; her writing was inauthentic and appropriative and transparently racist. The question of whether or not to carry Cameron was more open-ended and yet neither the archives nor interviews suggest that there were any debates within the collective about Cameron’s work in terms of its ethical credibility. In its own efforts to survive and to support all women’s writing, the collective was (quite understandably) wary of engaging in endless political dialogue that could turn into personality conflicts within the collective, leading them away from their larger goals. Rather than risking internal divisions over fraught questions of racism and voice appropriation, their attention stayed focused on establishing a public presence for the women’s movement in their community and providing local women with information and resources. However, it is also probable that issues like voice appropriation did not resonate with the mostly white collective as

<sup>154</sup> Greenhough, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>155</sup> Frances Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>156</sup> St. Peter, “‘Woman’s Truth’ and the Native Tradition,” 514.

much as other issues like censorship, which will be addressed in the next chapter. The collective's decision to focus on those debates that related directly to their experiences and priorities was inevitable, but it also created exclusions for racialized and Indigenous women with divergent interests.

## **Summary**

This chapter has examined how Everywomans Books responded to broader debates in the feminist movement. Aside from some generational divides and tension over computerization, the collective was often too occupied with the daily tasks of running the bookstore to get involved in the movement's major political struggles. Many of the women I interviewed seemed to suggest that they were able to avoid internal conflicts because their mission to make feminist books available was unifying and exhilarating and inherently less divisive than that of other more overtly political groups, which were riven by tensions over racism and homophobia and the competing interests and priorities of their members. Though they were political as feminists, for the most part, the volunteers at Everywomans did not see themselves as being as politicized as others. These women of divergent backgrounds, experiences and perspectives were bound together by their shared passion for books and their driving motivation to create and maintain an information centre in their community where like-minded book lovers could come to educate themselves on issues of sexism, racism, homophobia, classism and ageism.

Everywomans was also different from other feminist organizations because of its location in a smaller, in many ways, less diverse and less politically charged city. Whereas in the U.S., the conversation around racism had started in the early 1970s in response to writings by and about black feminists, racism had only become a serious topic of conversation in the women's movement in Canada in the early 1980s. As racism was being discussed more generally by feminists around this time, the collective members at Everywomans attempted to find ways of being more inclusive and developed anti-racist strategies like the women's anti-racist awareness group. However, the predominantly white

collective in Victoria were not as politicized around racial issues as the more racially diverse group of women running the Toronto Women's Bookstore, for example, who were known for their explicit efforts to develop anti-racist practices and hold each other accountable for internalized racism. Though the group in Victoria was certainly aware of issues related to voice appropriation, as evidenced by their decision not to carry outright racist material like Lynn Andrews' books, they did not engage in the voice appropriation debate in any great detail and decided to keep Anne Cameron's books on their shelves in the interest of supporting local women writers.

There are a number of reasons why the collective might have avoided these issues. It might be as simple as the fact that racism was a nascent issue in the women's movement and the collective was still unsure how to approach it. Moreover, as a group of predominantly white women, they were not forced to politically engage in debates about racism in the same way as the women at the Toronto Women's Bookstore, who felt duty-bound to discuss these issues. It is also understandable that they wanted to remain as neutral as possible to avoid the division and disagreement that accelerated the disintegration of other feminist organizations and bookstores and to be able to continue making books available for the women who urgently needed them. The effort it took to keep the bookstore open left the collective little time or energy to discuss these issues the way they may have wanted to; it boiled down to a basic survival strategy. Indeed, this pragmatic self-preservation strategy may have helped them survive and preserve their structure longer than many other feminist bookstores. This is also part of the reason why organizations in smaller communities tended to keep themselves small, safe and comfortable: to avoid fractious infighting and to maintain their status as a haven for women in the community. The collective at Everywomans was so preoccupied with the daily activities involved in running a community resource centre, they spent most of their long collective meetings debating practical concerns and probably wanted to avoid getting sidetracked by issues that were seen as peripheral, especially those that were as difficult and complicated to talk about as race and racism.

Nonetheless, as will be seen in the final chapter, the collective did not shy away from debates around pornography and censorship that deeply divided the women's movement. Given that the majority of the collective was white, it is likely that racial issues were not as salient for them as some other issues that affected them more directly.

## Chapter Four: Taking a Stance on Pornography and Censorship

Anti-pornography feminists of the 1980s warned about the dangers of pornography to women. They argued that real-world violence against women was an inevitable result of the violent and degrading images of women found in pornography.<sup>1</sup> Pornography, they said, was the central problem in women's oppression: it affirmed the hierarchy of male dominance and female submissiveness.<sup>2</sup> Because of this ideology, they argued that pornography and anything that looked like it should be prohibited and advocated for state censorship.<sup>3</sup> Pornography was eventually regulated in Canada in 1992 with the *Butler* decision.<sup>4</sup> The new obscenity law used language that suggested it would prevent harm to women.<sup>5</sup> Anti-porn feminists declared it a success.<sup>6</sup> Anti-censorship feminists, however, rightly predicted that the *Butler* decision would be unevenly and unfairly applied to stifle the very group that had ushered in the anti-pornography law: feminists, including many lesbian feminists.<sup>7</sup> While the *Butler* decision did not have serious adverse consequences for most mainstream sellers of heterosexual pornography,<sup>8</sup> it put enormous pressure on vulnerable, independent retailers, like Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium in Vancouver, threatening to put them out of business. Canada Customs was frequently condemned for using the *Butler* decision to target sexually explicit material bound for gay and lesbian bookstores.

This chapter will explore how difficult it was for authors and booksellers to defend themselves from a Customs' policy that discriminated against them and how Everywomans Books entered into the debate around pornography and censorship, neither firmly on the side of anti-pornography nor anti-censorship. Instead, they formulated a statement that served as a sort of third way out of the battle

<sup>1</sup> Brenda Cossman and Shannon Bell, "Introduction," in *Bad Attitude/s on Trial: Pornography, Feminism and the Butler Decision*, eds. Brenda Cossman, Shannon Bell, Lisa Gotell, and Becki Ross (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

between anti-pornography and anti-censorship feminists. As always, Everywomans focused on keeping literature for women in circulation and allowing women to make their own decisions about what to read. In this chapter, I take a position closely aligned to the bookstore collective: in opposition to harmful heterosexual pornography, yet firmly anti-censorship. The approach I take, which values queer erotic representation and lesbian sadomasochism (SM) visibility, is based on an understanding that texts and images can have a thousand different meanings, created in the imagination of the consumer.

## **The Sex Wars**

Led largely by feminists, including many lesbian feminists, the anti-pornography movement emerged in the 1980s and with it, an ethos that degrading representations of women in pornography led to real violence against women. The pioneers of this movement were Catharine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin and Susan Brownmiller, joined by their ideological counterpart, Susan Cole, in Canada.<sup>9</sup> These women forged a political argument premised on the idea that pornography was an expression of power relations, in which men were inherently violent and dominant and women passive and subordinate.<sup>10</sup> They argued that pornography was the single most important factor contributing to violence against women. This thinking sounded an alarm for radical feminists whose work revolved around supporting the victims of rape, wife battering, and sexual harassment.<sup>11</sup> Radical feminists had been working on what seemed like a Sisyphean task of ending violence against women and advocating for censorship streamlined everything into one problem and gave them a tangible goal. Anti-pornography feminists put

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>10</sup> Brenda Cossman, "Feminist Fashion or Morality in Drag? The Sexual Subtext of the *Butler* Decision," in *Bad Attitude/s on Trial*, eds. Brenda Cossman, Shannon Bell, Lisa Gotell, and Becki Ross (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 1997), 128.

<sup>11</sup> Ann Bar Snitow, "Mass Market Romances: Pornography for Women is Different," in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, edited by Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons with Robert A. Padgug (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 272.

forward with rhetorical fervor the argument that by normalizing and embedding images of violence against women in everyday life, pornography would cause real harm to women.<sup>12</sup> They crystallized this ideology with the slogan: “Pornography is the theory and rape the practice.”<sup>13</sup>

Anti-censorship feminists took a very different position, arguing that anti-porn feminists were too hardline and ignored the complexity of sexuality in women’s lives. In addition to constraining women to conservative sex roles, anti-censorship feminists argued that anti-pornography work fortified beliefs about the need to control women’s sexual freedom and expression. As pro-censorship feminists grew more fervent, anti-censorship feminists began to worry that their passion and energy were misplaced and that such a narrow point of view ignored the larger, wide-ranging causes of violence against women in society.<sup>14</sup> This not only prevented anti-pornography feminists from engaging in a more rigorous, nuanced understanding of violence against women, but also obscured the importance of erotic material for women who read pornographic literature or practiced consensual SM.<sup>15</sup> For these women, pornography could be creative, empowering and life-affirming; it could invoke feelings of recognition, identification, desire and attachment. Anti-censorship feminists argued that like fiction, pornography inhabits a world of fantasy and escape that can be positive, productive and necessary.<sup>16</sup>

Patrick Califia’s work,<sup>17</sup> which advocated lesbian SM, was particularly vulnerable to censorship. Califia responded to anti-pornography feminists, who criticized lesbian SM as a form of violence against women that reproduced the gendered power dynamics of heterosexual relationships, by writing erotic

<sup>12</sup> Daphne Read, “(De)Constructing Pornography: Feminisms in Conflict,” in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, edited by Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons with Robert A. Padgug (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 277.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>16</sup> Cossman and Bell, “Introduction,” 22-23.

<sup>17</sup> Califia has authored and edited over twenty books centred around BDSM, from safety and how-to manuals to political essays to erotic novels and collections of short fiction. I use the pronoun he to reflect Califia’s current gender identification; however, during this period, Califia identified as female and went by Pat.

fiction that affirmed SM as a legitimate form of lesbian romantic desire.<sup>18</sup> Califia felt that women who practiced SM were owed validation and better visibility, which he attempted to offer with his writing.<sup>19</sup> Califia commented that arousal was only one reaction he intended his work to provoke in readers, in addition to other strong emotional responses like anger, grief or disgust.<sup>20</sup> “[I]n that process of getting the reader very deeply emotionally engaged with the fiction,” Califia explained, “I hope to encourage them to think about some of the ideas in these pieces,” like, for example, the nature of unequal power relations in dominant culture.<sup>21</sup>

Kathy Acker also wrote very explicitly about sexuality and violence and experimented with form and content to provoke a range of complex emotional responses from her readers and jolt them into awareness. Unsurprisingly, she too was stifled by *Butler* for her pornographic depictions of sexual violence. In 1989, when Acker’s novel *Empire of the Senseless* was banned by Canada Customs, the collective wrote: “the author of six novels, published in various languages and on Women’s Studies’ as well as Contemporary Literature course lists, has now been declared a pornographer by a customs agent.”<sup>22</sup> Parochial Customs agents might not have recognized violence as a deliberate technique, yet “many of Acker’s critics credit her with using formal techniques to yank readers out of complacency,”<sup>23</sup> and draw their attention to normalized instances of sexual violence in everyday life. In describing Acker’s work, Anna Ioanes writes that her intentional use of shocking representations of violence had the potential to “move audiences in ways that a more straightforward rehearsal of injustice might

<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Bronstein, “The Political Uses of Lesbian Romance Fiction: Reading Patrick Califia’s *Macho Sluts* as a Response to 1980s Anti-Pornography Feminism,” *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Janine Fuller and Stuart Blackley, *Restricted Entry: Censorship on Trial* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1996), 56.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Everywomans Booklist (mail-order) 1989-1993, Everywomans Booklist for Bookish Women Vol 1, No Three, June 1989.

<sup>23</sup> Anna Ioanes, “Shock and Consent in a Feminist Avant-Garde: Kathleen Hanna Reads Kathy Acker,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42, no. 1 (2016): 176.

not,”<sup>24</sup> similar to the ways in which anti-pornography feminists used a “politics of outrage” to galvanize women.<sup>25</sup> Many women connected deeply with Acker’s work. For them, it was profound to see representations of their own experiences and shocking to finally feel acknowledged. Not only did this writing affirm the value of women’s experiential knowledge, but also, as Ioanes suggests, reading about explicit violence against women had the potential to turn a private experience into a collective experience of recognition, identification and validation. She terms this “an ethic of identification and attachment that forms the foundations of community.”<sup>26</sup> Califia also used his work as a means to build community. In addition to serving as a valuable resource for the lesbian leather community, Califia’s writing brought together uninitiated readers and women who already practiced SM but had no resources to learn about safe and fulfilling practices and have their desires affirmed.<sup>27</sup> As Califia has pointed out, controlling what we can read about limits our potential for social change.<sup>28</sup> If women had no knowledge that Califia’s or Acker’s work even existed, they couldn’t debate it between bookshelves, pass it along to friends, underline sentences and make exclamation points in the margins. A woman might not have felt emboldened to attend a Take Back the Night march if she never got to read Acker; she might not have felt courageous enough to admit her desire if she couldn’t read Califia.

Despite such arguments, fears about pornography intensified and so too did anti-pornography campaigns. Anti-porn feminists aggressively called for censorship, helping usher in the *Butler* decision in 1992. The premise of *R. v. Butler* (1992) was to prevent harm toward women and to promote equality and dignity by eliminating what were deemed to be degrading and dehumanizing images of women.<sup>29</sup> Anti-pornography feminists trumpeted the *Butler* decision as a victory, but other feminists were wary of

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>25</sup> Cossman and Bell, “Introduction,” 9.

<sup>26</sup> Ioanes, “Shock and Consent in a Feminist Avant-Garde,” 176.

<sup>27</sup> Bronstein, “The Political Uses of Lesbian Romance Fiction,” 58.

<sup>28</sup> Pat Califia, “Dangerous Tongues,” in *Forbidden Passages: Writings Banned in Canada*, edited by Pat Califia and Janine Fuller (Pittsburgh, PA: Cleis Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>29</sup> Cossman, “Feminist Fashion or Morality in Drag?,” 107.

the strong moral undertones guiding Canada's new obscenity law.<sup>30</sup> Although they opposed the explicitly sexist images found in most straight pornography as much as the other side, anti-censorship feminists accurately anticipated that those responsible for administering the new law would ferret out and suppress lesbian, gay, feminist, SM and other non-normative materials, rather than mainstream heterosexual pornography.<sup>31</sup> Ironically and regrettably, despite being spearheaded by lesbian feminists, the first target under *Butler* was the gay and lesbian bookstore, Glad Day Bookshop in Toronto.<sup>32</sup> The seizure of a lesbian SM magazine from Glad Day Bookshop was an early portent of a new trend in censorship that inordinately targeted transgressive sexualities. Brenda Cossman argues that while the new obscenity law was "dressed up in feminist discourse, that of preventing harm towards women, of equality and dignity,"<sup>33</sup> the dismal reality of the *Butler* decision was the legal repression of gay and lesbian novels, short story collections, magazines, comics and any other sexually explicit gay and lesbian material. Behind its reassuring promises to protect women, *Butler* upheld traditional conservative mores, or as Cossman puts it, "The *Butler* decision and its discourse of harm against women is really just sexual morality in drag."<sup>34</sup> The *Butler* decision conferred upon Canada Customs the power to decide which books were acceptable, giving officials winking approval to pursue deviant sexualities. In the wake of the *Butler* decision, Canada Customs exercised their clout with a bloodless ferocity felt acutely by gay and lesbian bookstores.

### **Little Sister's Struggles with Censorship**

In December 1986, literature coming from the U.S. bound for Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium, a gay and lesbian bookstore in Vancouver, was halted by Canada Customs gatekeepers at the

<sup>30</sup> Cossman and Bell, "Introduction," 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Cossman, "Feminist Fashion or Morality in Drag?," 108.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

border.<sup>35</sup> The first shipment, seized by Customs' officials at the peak of the AIDS panic, contained safer-sex literature. Just as with Everywomans, Little Sister's served as much more than a bookstore, providing the gay and lesbian community in Vancouver with vital life-and-death information. Little Sister's co-owner, Jim Deva, was outraged by this seizure: "It was not just a business thing, it was like how dare they take this from us."<sup>36</sup> The seizure of the gay news magazine, *The Advocate*, in 1987, provided the impetus for Little Sister's to challenge Canada Customs' discriminatory censorship practices.<sup>37</sup> Before the trial could be heard, however, Canada Customs decided that the two issues of the magazines that had been seized were not obscene and the case was dismissed, leaving Little Sister's bereft of its shipment (the magazines had already been destroyed) and its chance to be heard in court.<sup>38</sup> In 1990, the bookstore, joined by the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, filed a Statement of Claim in the Supreme Court of British Columbia. They said that prior restraint of materials on the grounds of obscenity precluded any kind of conversation about what was obscene and violated freedom of expression.<sup>39</sup> They also claimed that Canada Customs enforced *Butler* in a way that discriminated against gay and lesbian bookstores, scrutinizing them more closely than other bookstores in Canada<sup>40</sup> and thus violating the right to equality.<sup>41</sup>

After being delayed three times over a period of four and a half years, during which they continued to have their shipments opened and inspected by Customs, the trial finally began in October 1994. Academics and activists, booksellers from other gay and lesbian bookstores as well as authors whose work had been banned were called to testify at the Little Sister's trial.<sup>42</sup> Califia, whose work had

<sup>35</sup> In December 1986, more than 600 books and magazines were seized.

<sup>36</sup> *Little Sister's vs. Big Brother*, DVD, directed by Aerlyn Weissman (Moving Images Distribution, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Cossman and Bell, "Introduction," 35.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>39</sup> Janine Fuller, "The Case Against Canada Customs," in *Forbidden Passages: Writings Banned in Canada*, edited by Pat Califia and Janine Fuller (Pittsburgh, PA: Cleis Press, 1995), 31.

<sup>40</sup> The manager of one of Vancouver's biggest bookstores ordered the same books that had been seized on their way to Little Sister's from the same supplier and received the shipment without any issues.

<sup>41</sup> Fuller, "The Case Against Canada Customs," 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

endured relentless scrutiny from Customs, described the harrowing (and humiliating) task of having to defend his books and explain his writing “almost page by page,”<sup>43</sup> to a group of predominantly straight men: “It just feels so very desperate, you know, it feels like having your back against a wall to say oh, please, let my books live.”<sup>44</sup> Califia spoke with a sense of diminishment that many found familiar. Indeed, Califia’s plea to let his books live was echoed by Sarah Schulman, who went to Vancouver to testify on behalf of her friend, the banned author John Preston, who had died of AIDS only months before the trial began.<sup>45</sup> Schulman spoke about the heart-wrenching experience of seeing “the writers dying and their books being forgotten at the same time.”<sup>46</sup> The lesbian author, Jane Rule, was also called as an expert witness in the Supreme Court of British Columbia. Rule related the cultural significance of SM materials as well as the powerful and undeniable value of this kind of writing for gay and lesbian audiences. When asked to discuss which metrics should be considered in deciding whether a book has literary merit, Rule emphasized tone and cultural context. Unfortunately, however, most Customs agents were tone-deaf, lacking the profundity and perspective needed to decode the artistic and social intent of queer literature. As Rule said to the court: “Great errors in judgement can be made when a person who is judging a work for perhaps banning reasons is missing the cultural context of the book [...]”<sup>47</sup>

In preparation for the trial, Rule was asked to read *Tell Me What You Like* by Kate Allen, which had been detained by Customs and eventually released, and *Bushfire* edited by Karen Barber, which was detained and prohibited entry.<sup>48</sup> Banned books like these were measured by the norms of the heterosexual majority. In describing *Bushfire*, a collection of erotic short stories by lesbian authors, to

<sup>43</sup> Califia, “Dangerous Tongues,” 16.

<sup>44</sup> Fuller, “The Case Against Canada Customs,” 32.

<sup>45</sup> *Little Sister’s vs. Big Brother*, DVD.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Jane Rule, *Detained at Customs: Jane Rule Testifies at the Little Sister’s Trial* (Vancouver: Lazara Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 9.

the court, Rule drew attention to the purpose of such collections to create lesbian visibility and affirm lesbian sex and experience. She articulated to a court of mostly straight men how such a book could be an oasis for lesbian readers:

[W]hat I'd like to say about this book is that it may not be something as clearly understood for a heterosexual audience as it is to, say, a lesbian audience. A great many lesbians discovering that they are lesbians in this homophobic culture, feel bad enough about how they feel to think maybe they're the only person in the world who feels like this. They're young and coming into their own sexuality, or they find other people who are, they're all ashamed together, and sex is not a happy or fun thing, but a thing that is hungered after and shamed. [The audience is comprised of] people who are very ambivalent about their own sexuality [and the book is] a series of stories which deal not only positively with eroticism for lesbians, but bring up a lot of the issues that trouble lesbians in their sexual lives.<sup>49</sup>

Rule was also asked to read Califia's banned book, *Doc and Fluff* (1990). Her reading of this novel, which she admitted contained "a great deal of violence,"<sup>50</sup> understood it as a text with a clear moral vision of the world; its purpose was to serve as a moralizing lesson about the nature of power. She traced a path between *Doc and Fluff* and pillars of this kind of SM writing like Pauline Réage's<sup>51</sup> *The Story of O* (1954) to reinforce her point about the importance of understanding cultural and literary context in order to make fair judgements about a book's aesthetic value.<sup>52</sup>

When asked about her own books, *The Young One in Another's Arms*, which won the Canadian Authors Association Award for best novel of 1978 and *Contract with the World*, which were both detained by Canada Customs and subsequently released,<sup>53</sup> Rule told the court that misconstruing her work as pornographic had the unfair consequence of cutting her off from general audiences by creating the pejorative assumption that her work was pornographic.<sup>54</sup> Rule explained how frustrating it was to have such a label fixed to her work, determining the course of her professional life:

I have to carry a reputation created by this charge from which I have no way of defending

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>51</sup> This is a pen name used by the French author Anne Desclos.

<sup>52</sup> Rule, *Detained at Customs*, 16.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 18.

myself. Every time this issue comes up, whether I was testifying in this trial or not, my name would come up over and over again as that woman whose books are seized at the border, and I have no defense against it. And I bitterly resent the attempt to marginalize, trivialize and even criminalize what I have to say because I happen to be a lesbian, I happen to be a novelist, I happen to have bookstores and publishers who are dedicated to producing my work. The assumption is that there must be something pornographic [in my writing] because of my sexual orientation is a shocking way to deal with my community.<sup>55</sup>

It was already incredibly hard for women authors to find mainstream recognition. As Rule said herself here, she was fortunate enough to have publishers and bookstores dedicated to producing and promoting her work. Rule was a respected and admired author so if one of her books was detained, there was usually some public outcry and the book had a good chance of getting through Customs. Even if the book was held only temporarily, however, having her work undeservedly lumped together with “pornographic” writing had a negative effect on her career. It was even more difficult for less prominent authors to separate themselves from the labels forced upon them and there was not the same degree of awareness or outrage when their work was detained, damaged or destroyed at the border, ensuring that many of their stories were forgotten.

Customs continued to seize books up until the trial concluded in January 1996 with a judgement for the plaintiffs. The Supreme Court of British Columbia recognized that Little Sister’s shipments had been wrongfully targeted by Customs, thus violating both the right to equality and freedom of expression.<sup>56</sup> However, this hard-won admission was eclipsed by the fact that the Supreme Court reaffirmed the *Butler* definition of obscenity and ruled that the administration of the Customs Tariff by Canada Customs was constitutional.<sup>57</sup> Little Sister’s launched an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada in 1996, hoping for a reconsideration of the *Butler* rationale for censorship of obscene materials.<sup>58</sup> The case was heard in the Supreme Court in 2000 and a decision was reached the following year: costs were

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>56</sup> Fuller and Blackley, *Restricted Entry*, 188.

<sup>57</sup> *Little Sister’s vs. Big Brother*, DVD.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

awarded to the bookstore, but the Supreme Court upheld the *Butler* decision and with that, Customs officials' right to seize books at the border.<sup>59</sup> Rule put it plainly: "They didn't get justice in the Supreme Court, they got a confession in the Supreme Court that they had been very badly mistreated and illegally mistreated by Customs."<sup>60</sup>

### **Everywomans Enters the Debate**

Ahead of the Little Sister's trial, Everywomans Books was contacted by the B.C. Civil Liberties Association to ask if they would be willing to provide a statement about their own experiences with Customs' seizures. Alto took up the task of writing a submission and traveling to Vancouver to testify in a preliminary hearing, acknowledging that they had received damaged goods and giving an account of how inconsistent seizures of materials that had been received previously - and were still available at the comic book store next door - had affected their business.<sup>61</sup> Everywomans also supported Little Sister's costly court case against Canada Customs by carrying Little Sister's t-shirts in-store and holding a raffle with the Queer Rights Alliance to raise money to help Little Sister's defray more than two hundred thousand dollars in legal costs.<sup>62</sup> Individual collective members also made personal donations to the Little Sister's defence fund. In 1994, SWAG held an event as part of Freedom to Read Week to raise awareness about censorship issues and invited local authors like Yaffe to read from banned books. Half of the proceeds from this event also went to the defence fund for Little Sister's.

Although Everywomans was primarily a women's bookstore and was not harassed to nearly the same extent as gay and lesbian bookstores, the store did carry some lesbian erotica and certain publications were delayed, seized or returned damaged by Customs, including the comic *Hothead*

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Meeting Minutes, Minutes Sept. '92 – Dec. '93, 2 September 1993.

<sup>62</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Meeting Minutes, Minutes Sept. '92 – Dec. '93, 5 August 1993.

*Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist*, *Califia's Macho Sluts* and *Doc and Fluff: The Dystopian Tale of a Girl and her Biker*, *Bushfire: Stories of Lesbian Desire* edited by Karen Barber, *Herotica: A Collection of Women's Erotic Fiction* edited by Susie Bright, *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*, an anthology edited by members of the lesbian SM group SAMOIS, and a book called *Changing Men and Lovers*.<sup>63</sup> When a shipment containing one of these texts failed to arrive, the bookstore would receive a notice with a terse, ambiguous description, explaining why it been confiscated: "sexually violent," "bondage," "sexually depraved" or "anal penetration."<sup>64</sup> Sometimes the store would receive no notification at all and the shipment would simply be sent back to the distributor. In particular, the comic *Hothead Paisan* attracted the ire of Customs officials for its portrayal of a gritty "lesbian terrorist" violently taking action against her male and heterosexual oppressors. The irreverent tone and intentionality of this publication was lost on Customs agents (as well as many feminist readers), who were put off by its use of violence as a means of combatting homophobia. However, Customs agents seemed to pay an inordinate amount of attention to shipments of the comic heading to the women's bookstore. While *Hothead Paisan* was stopped on its way to Everywomans, it was shipped to the comic book store next door without any problems.<sup>65</sup> This example illustrates the vastly unfair and uneven way that Customs exercised its power.

Following the first seizure of *Hothead Paisan* in 1993, CBC interviewed the senior communications manager for Customs, Excise and Taxation, Don Lebel, and one of the owners of the American distribution company, Inland Books, David Wilk, about shipments that had been detained on their way to Everywomans Books and Colophon Books in Vancouver.<sup>66</sup> The interviewer confronted Lebel

<sup>63</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Meeting Minutes, Minutes Sept. '92 – Dec. '93, Summer Retreat Minutes, 14-15 August 1993.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Meeting Minutes, Minutes Sept. '92 – Dec. '93, 2 September 1993.

<sup>66</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Audio Recordings, CBC Interview with Inland Customers re Everywomans Books, 2 September 1993.

about Customs' screening process, asking if books were banned based on their titles alone. Lebel denied this and equivocated that as part of the pre-screening process, a computer flagged titles that had been prohibited previously, but these books were always then subjected to further review to determine if the ban was justified. His answer calls to mind a *Royal Canadian Air Farce* sketch, featured in the documentary *Little Sister's vs. Big Brother* (2002), about Canada Customs and an "unnamed" gay and lesbian bookstore in Vancouver. "I'll tell you why you haven't got your books," says the Customs agent to the owner of the bookstore, who is asking Customs to release the books. "We take our time over anything going to a gay and lesbian bookstore. And look at this piece of filth - Bobby Orifices Off," he says. Here's the twist - it's a book about hockey. The title is actually Bobby Orr Faces Off. The bookstore owner, incredulous, responds, "What I don't understand is why you hang on to these books so that every owner of a gay bookstore in Vancouver has to come down here *personally* to pick up his books?"<sup>67</sup> The tongue-in-cheek sketch is an attempt to satirize Customs' harassment, particularly its dubious habit of seizing books like *Hot, Hotter, Hottest*, a cookbook about chilies, *Sexual Politics of Meat*, a feminist analysis of vegetarianism and meat producing, and *Strokes*, a book about rowing.<sup>68</sup> These egregious examples, which the women I interviewed delighted in telling me about, added up to a pattern that brought to light Customs' preoccupation with regulating what they believed to be deviant sexualities.

In addition to exacerbating financial difficulties, it was particularly maddening for collective members to have material seized or returned to them damaged or outdated, while adult bookstores, X-rated video stores and even newsstands seemed to be spared and continued to sell mainstream heterosexual pornography. The women meditated on how to express their frustration, but had to reckon with the amount of time, energy and money it would take to fight the issue. As Carol Sherwood explained, "sometimes it's a question of energy, like if you put your energy into that other stuff, can the

<sup>67</sup> *Little Sister's vs. Big Brother*, DVD.

<sup>68</sup> Fuller, "The Case Against Canada Customs," 27, 32.

bookstore keep up?”<sup>69</sup> The bookstore was caught in a very particular dilemma, in which they, once again, had to pinpoint where they were on the continuum between practical and political. As a small bookstore, their potential to respond was limited. They knew that taking on an arduous and costly court case of Little Sister’s proportions was untenable. Instead, they sent letters to the FBN and *LesbiaNews* to let other bookwomen know which publications were being seized<sup>70</sup> and invited Vancouver’s Kiss and Tell collective, whose photographs had been stopped at the border,<sup>71</sup> to perform at the store’s 20<sup>th</sup> birthday party.<sup>72</sup> They considered making a bigger, more aggressive statement by sending a letter to the local radio and press, but were afraid that if they did this, it might seem like they were carrying violent publications.<sup>73</sup> Instead, they attempted to navigate around the issue by ordering from another distributor and through other booksellers in the city to evade Customs.<sup>74</sup> They also considered advertising banned books with “Banned in B.C.” stickers but worried that if an undercover officer came in and bought a book on the banned list, they could be charged for it,<sup>75</sup> as had been the case with Glad Day Bookshop.<sup>76</sup>

With the Little Sister’s case against Canada Customs gaining widespread media attention, local newspapers, newsletters, TV and radio wanted to hear from Everywomans about how the censorship issue was affecting them. This, together with customer enquiries about the store’s policy on stocking material that advocated lesbian SM, seems to have galvanized the collective to enter into in the debate

<sup>69</sup> Carol Sherwood, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 7, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>70</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Meeting Minutes, Minutes Sept. ‘92 – Dec. ‘93, Retreat Minutes, 29-31 January 1993.

<sup>71</sup> Fuller, “The Case Against Canada Customs,” 31.

<sup>72</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Posters 1982-1995, 25 February 1995.

<sup>73</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Meeting Minutes, Minutes Sept. ‘92 – Dec. ‘93, Retreat Minutes, 29-31 January 1993.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Meeting Minutes, Minutes Sept. ‘92 – Dec. ‘93, Summer Retreat Minutes, 14-15 August 1993.

<sup>76</sup> An undercover officer bought a copy of the lesbian SM magazine *Bad Attitude* from Glad Day Bookshop in 1992, returning a few weeks later to arrest the owner of the store.

surrounding pornography and censorship. In 1993, the collective wrote a statement, reproduced here at length, asserting their position:

Everywomans Books is a feminist bookstore dedicated to selling feminist literature by, for, and about women. We are part of the international feminist community which is diverse and constantly changing; any statement about pornography & censorship is subject to change as our own understandings develop and with changing material conditions.

Traditionally, feminist arguments have spanned a polarity between anti-pornography and anti-censorship. From our position as sellers of feminist books, we take a stand which is both anti-pornography and anti-censorship, while being in favour of erotic representation of women, by women, for women. This apparent anomaly requires some brief explanation.

We accept the argument that male-centred heterosexual pornography is degrading to and dangerous for women. We believe that this is the case because male-centred heterosexual pornography relies on, duplicates, and strengthens the class power of men over women. Such pornography only exists in a context of male domination; it glorifies and sexualises male domination; and it closes off possibilities for women to explore their sexuality in ways that could help us break free from that domination. Male-centred pornography functions as a justification for male dominance and presents male dominance as an essential part of human sexuality.

One of the ways in which male dominance has been maintained is that female sexuality has been assumed to be a response to male sexuality. Women have no cultural support for exploring their own sexualities. Part of the strength of the women-in-print movement over the past 20 years has been the creation of a diverse literature of sexual exploration among and between women. Rather than being a symbolic celebration of dominance of one group over another, women-centred (produced by women for women) sexual writing is a symbolic celebration of women's freedom from male dominance.

We are anti-pornography not because male-centred heterosexual pornography discloses some truth about women's sexuality which we want to keep hidden, but because it obscures and forecloses many truths about women's sexuality which we want to disclose and create. This is why we distinguish between male-centred pornography and female-centred sexual imagery. We feel they represent objectively different social phenomena. In male-centred heterosexual pornography, men are dominant over women in the sexual sphere, as they currently are in the social, political and economic spheres of society. There is no such system of dominance of women over men in the objective world in which women-centred pornography could be anchored.

There is, similarly, no systematic dominance of some groups of women over other women, except through the mechanism of class, ethnic, and racial privilege. Consequently, women-centred lesbian erotica which explores sexual power relations between women does not mirror, reproduce and strengthen dominance of one group of women over another in society. Of course, lesbian-produced erotica could celebrate racial dominance. In that case, we would decline to sell it, as it would contravene our policy against stocking racist materials.

To recapitulate, we are against male-centred heterosexual pornographic representation because of its relationship to male dominance generally. We are in favour of women-centred heterosexual, bisexual and lesbian sexual representation because of its relationship to women's liberation generally. The difference is not in the imagery itself, but in the social meanings of the imagery. The social meanings are produced by the objective social conditions surrounding the production, sale, and use made of the sexual representations. As the objective conditions change, so do the meanings.

As far as censorship is concerned, we reject censorship by the state because we see it is as ineffective in eradicating the demand for misogynistic pornography. Our experience with the enforcement of pornography laws is that they are used more against women-centred lesbian pornography than against male-centred heterosexual pornography. We find it intolerable that decisions about what women are allowed to read should be made by men, that decisions about what lesbians are allowed to read should be made by non-lesbians. The women's community standards are different from those of the dominant community.

Censorship is part of the same system as misogynist pornography, and we reject both. We feel that the best way to eliminate male-centred heterosexual pornography is to change the social conditions which creates the demand for it. One way to change these conditions is to give women the possibility to create strong, positive sexual expression which does not feed into the patterns of dominance and submission found in the wider male-dominant society. If women are to create new forms of sexual expression, we must have the freedom to communicate with each other. Books exploring female sexuality from a woman-centred point of view are a vital form of communication which we, as booksellers, are committed to promoting.

There is no real inconsistency in our position: we want what is best for women, based on the relationship of what is produced to the society within which it functions. The inconsistency is in the censorship position: created supposedly to protect women from male violence, the laws instead are used to keep women from communicating with each other, while male-authored pornography is freely available.

For these reasons we urge Canada Customs to stop harassing feminist bookstores. We can make our own decision about what materials fit our community standards.<sup>77</sup>

In the above statement, the collective is seen tugging back and forth on a rope with brutal mainstream heterosexual pornography at one end and positive women-centric sexual expression at the other. Radical feminists' firm belief in the harm pornography caused women was non-negotiable. Other feminists put forward their critique against censorship with just as much force and righteousness, arguing that positive sexual expression would increase women's power. The collective's statement on pornography and censorship emerged as a "voice of reason" that tried to stake out a reasonable place between these polarities, taking a position both anti-porn and anti-censorship, yet in favour of erotic representation. With their judicious statement, the collective mediated between anti-pornography and anti-censorship feminists. In our interview, Yaffe characterized the collective as including women who were "solid committed ideological radical feminist crazy people" and some who were "just nice ladies

<sup>77</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Statement on Pornography & Censorship, Statement on Pornography & Censorship, n.d.

who wanted to do a little volunteer work with women.”<sup>78</sup> She told me that this diverse group naturally had different values and opinions: “some people are more concerned about sexual violence, other people are more concerned about expressive freedom.”<sup>79</sup> These two poles of opinions are clearly negotiated in the collective’s statement on pornography and censorship. While anti-porn and anti-censorship feminists were only interested in that which corroborated their viewpoints, the collective, in part due to their varied interests, was able to recognize both perspectives and formulate a more nuanced statement. The statement makes note of the apparent anomaly of being both anti-porn and anti-censorship, while in favour of erotic representation, and addresses this contradiction by explaining that they are against male-centred heterosexual pornographic representation, but in favour of women-centred heterosexual, bisexual and lesbian sexual erotica because they believe that positive sexual expression is needed to create a distinct shift in the culture that demands dangerous and degrading representations of women.

It is necessary to add that the collective was not alone in trying to stake out a middle ground. Although the early years of the sex wars were rigid and unflinching, the debate lost some of its force in the 1980s as “it became very clear that there was no unanimous opinion within feminism about this, about the nature of pornography, about the degree of sexism in it, about whether it constituted a special danger.”<sup>80</sup> Like the bookstore collective, other more moderate feminists were skeptical of models that attended exclusively to sexuality as a site of danger or pleasure and argued that such a binary opposition ignored the infinite gradations of women’s sexuality.<sup>81</sup> They reached similar conclusions as the bookstore, recognizing both the potential for liberation and exploitation inherent in pornography and sexuality. Nonetheless, in the midst of what Ann Bar Snitow has called a “moral panic

<sup>78</sup> Debby Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Fuller and Blackley, *Restricted Entry*, 39.

<sup>81</sup> Cossman and Bell, “Introduction,” 22.

focused on pornography,”<sup>82</sup> the bookstore strove to serve as an oasis, carefully navigating around the harshness of the anti-porn feminists. The collective approached this debate the same way they approached other decisions about what belonged on the shelf; they wanted to carry feminist books that empowered women and they saw erotica as something that promoted women’s sexuality without violence, excluding that which depicted racial dominance. The collective was generally reluctant to engage in the internecine debates that divided the second wave, but they were drawn into the pornography debate because it directly affected their mandate to make feminist books available. The statement they wrote in response to state censorship reflected their core values, which included supporting all women’s writing, as well as their willingness to participate in polarizing political debates when they undermined their ability to sell books and keep the store open. It was also probably true that this issue, which affected the store and women’s writing in general, resonated with the predominantly white bookstore collective more than issues of racism and voice appropriation, for example.

The collective members I spoke to indicated that opinions within the collective were not so varied as to create major internal rifts. The general attitude was “if it’s female produced, for women, what the hell?”<sup>83</sup> said Yaffe. Some collective members recalled being sensitive about the issue of pornography in those years. However, in light of Canada Customs’ discrimination and their driving motivation to make books available, they decided to keep this literature in stock because they believed that women should be allowed to make their own decisions about what they wanted to read and draw their own conclusions from it. Censorship, as Hutkin said, “wouldn’t really be in our best interest.”<sup>84</sup> In 1996, Califia stirred up controversy in the collective with his book *Doing it for Daddy: Short and Sexy Fiction About a Very Forbidden Fantasy* (1994). Slatkoff noted in the logbook that this and another book, Réage’s *The Story of O*, disturbed her so she was taking them home to review and determine whether or

<sup>82</sup> Snitow, “Mass Market Romances,” 272.

<sup>83</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>84</sup> Reva Hutkin, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 13, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

not they belonged on the shelves.<sup>85</sup> In the collective, everyone had a say in what books felt right for them to carry. But working from a place of consensus meant that every decision had to feel good to everyone. When Slatkoff took these books off the shelves, this raised concerns for another collective member who felt that was a form of censorship. Slatkoff responded to the criticism from this collective member, clarifying her position on censorship and initiating a measured exchange in the logbook as the two members attempted to reflect on their own ideas about censorship and navigate differences in their ideologies:

My understanding of what censorship is that one person bans publication of something. I don't believe in censorship – in fact it scares me to death! However, as a volunteer in the store, I am here to empower women and to promote them. Therefore, we don't carry books written by men – it's not censorship, but a choice. We also don't carry books that degrade women – although many other stores are free to do so. I advocate and promote strong women – that's why I volunteer. I don't wish to donate my time to promote things which denigrate women. Thus, the store is very selective about which books we carry. I don't think selection is censorship. We don't carry children's clothing either – it's a choice. The books I noted literally made me sick. One glorified incest and eroticized it. The other was classical sexual degradation of a woman. I'm interested in what you think so...let's keep up the dialogue.<sup>86</sup>

The other collective member reasoned that she was not defending the content of either book, but thought it was important to keep them on the shelves nonetheless in order to allow for fruitful dialogue. She felt uncomfortable about one individual deciding for others what they had the right to read: "People must have the right to decide for themselves and you have deprived me of the right to make up my own mind about it by confiscating them. As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I certainly don't advocate pornography, yet I am not anti-sex or anti-expression of sexuality, which is the stance of militant anti-porn feminists."<sup>87</sup> This statement highlights the politically important role of booksellers in making decisions about what people got to see on the shelves. The collective was acutely aware that the decisions they made had consequences: if they decided Califia's book did not belong on the shelf, many

<sup>85</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Log Books, Log Dec. 96 – June '97, 23 December 1996.

<sup>86</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Log Books, Log Dec. 96 – June '97, 26 March 1997.

<sup>87</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Log Books, Log Dec. 96 – June '97, n.d.

women would not get to read it. Though neither collective member liked the focus of these books, both agreed that keeping the books in the store opened the possibility of discussion around difficult topics like sexual abuse. They ultimately decided to put the books back on the shelf since they had made it their mission to create the kind of space where it would be possible to have difficult conversations about these issues. When I asked Hutkin about the tenor of conversation in the collective around Califia's books, she told me it seemed counterintuitive to work on getting gay and lesbian books past the gatekeepers at Customs only to then keep them out of the bookstore. Califia's *Macho Sluts* (1988), for example, had already surmounted a set of obstacles by the time it reached Everywomans.<sup>88</sup> "[T]he consensus was reached that we'll carry the book and it's not right to make a judgement for other people so it ended up on the shelves," explained Hutkin. "I don't even know if we ever sold one," she admitted. "Truthfully, I don't know."<sup>89</sup> Clearly, they were more focused on making a book available for the one woman who might come looking for it than on making a profit.

Collective decisions were often swiftly followed by challenges from the store's politically astute customers, interrogating the collective on their decisions about what literature was acceptable. The conversation between bookstore volunteers and customers that resulted was at once exhilarating and exhausting and contributed to the sense that the discourse surrounding the books was just as important as the book themselves. The collective clearly placed faith in the capacities of their customers and strongly encouraged them to read and discuss everything. In some cases, customers took issue with the collective's stance on censorship and objected to the collective's decision to carry certain SM material. In 1992, for example, some steady customers took issue with the store carrying *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M* (1981), when it had been prohibited previously by the collective.<sup>90</sup> A collective member explained that the store's policies were mutable and changed as the make-up of

<sup>88</sup> Fuller, "The Case Against Canada Customs," 27.

<sup>89</sup> Hutkin, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 13, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>90</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Minutes June – Sept. '92, 25 June 1992.

the collective changed and as their understandings of pornography developed.<sup>91</sup> Current collective members did not have to adhere to past collective members' ideas of what was correct; those who did the work made the decisions. Another customer stated her outrage at an issue of *Hothead Pisan*, in which the cartoon protagonist brandishes a "Het-Away" spray can that she uses like bug spray to repel homophobes. The customer was offended by the violence depicted in this comic, telling the collective in a note: "I feel upset about this Het Away Spray Can idea – I'm het and I'm a feminist and I'm angry so to have the image of a sister spraying some kind of poison into the eyes of human beings is to be very unfeminist and very violent." She went on, "I would not want my daughters to see this and I'm shocked that hate literature has been seen by this author and some of your volunteers as a legitimate outlet for anger."<sup>92</sup> This customer's criticism is valid and valuable but it assumes that every woman who sees this comic will have the same reaction and should be protected from it; a similar line of thinking had absorbed anti-porn feminists when they called for a government crackdown on pornography. Even if the comic was unpalatable to one woman, it might have resonated with someone else. The comic itself did not strike Yaffe as offensive; what was problematic was that it was stopped at the border, while really harmful heterosexual pornography continued to get through.<sup>93</sup> Others might have found it funny and some probably just thought it was stupid. The bookstore believed that every woman should inform herself and build her own politics. It was not expected that customers would hew to the politics of the bookstore or the collective.

In our interview, Hillyer spoke about the bookstore as offering a sort of catalogue of perspectives and arguments that women could explore, deciding what to take and what to leave:

You can get from it what you're looking for as opposed to having to take the whole package. You don't have to buy every book I tell you to, you don't come in the store and I don't tell you, you have to read that in order to be a customer, you don't have to join, you don't have to be a

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Minutes March '91 – Dec. '91, Nov. 30 – Re Hothead Mag, 30 November 1991.

<sup>93</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

member, you're a customer and so you can make that relationship fit what you're looking for and so that's just a softer sell, I think, of ideas than many other organizations who are trying to sell their politics, advance their politics, not even sell but advance their politics and change the world in a different way. And I think there's lots of room for many different approaches to changing the world, but the bookstore did want to change the world.<sup>94</sup>

Indeed, that was the conceit of the bookstore: the store provided the literature that raised women's awareness about feminist ideas and the women took them in all kinds of different directions. As the bookstore wanted to provide women with the necessary space to explore, draw their own conclusions and build their own political identities, it positioned itself as "inherently less confrontational politically"<sup>95</sup> than some other, more politicized second-wave organizations. Hillyer explained:

[Bookstores] bridge a lot of things that make it easier for people to relate without conflict arising and so that was part of the role that we played. I'm not sure that we were all politically benign people by any stretch of the imagination, but we understood the role of the store to be a place that bridged a lot of different things and it wasn't inherently controversial.<sup>96</sup>

Hillyer clearly understood the broader role of the bookstore to make bridges between things, like, for example, anti-pornography and anti-censorship or women and books. The collective embraced this role, providing their customers with access to women's writing in a safe and comfortable space. But make no mistake, the process of carving out a public space for women was implicitly political; the collective organization of the bookstore was effectively a socialist-feminist strategy and the statement the collective crafted on pornography and censorship articulated a very clear political imperative. The radical potential of the bookstore resided in the books on the shelves as much as in the store's structure and the message it delivered.

In line with their core feminist values, their statement on pornography and censorship declared the collective's decision to support and promote erotic writing and SM material produced by and for women in the store. Though some of this material was controversial and upset the store's customers,

<sup>94</sup> Ann Hillyer, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

the collective purposefully sold literature that was, as Hillyer put it, “intended to be challenging.”<sup>97</sup> The animating principle behind the bookstore was the belief that feminist literature could raise women’s consciousness about their rights and the structures of their oppression and mobilize them to take action. I think Waelti-Walters said it best: “The whole purpose of the bookstore was to provide people with ammunition to go out and stir up the world, right? So anything that wasn’t controversial, we weren’t really interested in.”<sup>98</sup>

## Summary

In the 1980s, anti-pornography feminists were convinced that men abused sex as a means to maintain their dominance over women and ensure women’s oppression. They articulated their critique that the violent and degrading images of women in pornography gave a physicality to this power hierarchy and caused real harm to women. Anti-pornography feminists believed that state censorship would provide a single fix to the broader issue of violence against women and presumed that the benefits of regulating porn would far outweigh the harm to women. In contrast to the views of anti-porn feminists, anti-censorship feminists were deeply concerned with the likelihood that state censorship would be used to stifle voices attempting to express any form of deviant sexual identity or desire. Indeed, the potential benefits of state censorship, namely, preventing harm to women, were almost entirely eclipsed by Canada Customs’ imprecise, inconsistent and often unpredictable interpretation of the *Butler* decision, which focused an inordinate amount of attention on gay and lesbian bookstores, like Little Sister’s in Vancouver and Glad Day Bookshop in Toronto. Little Sister’s experienced Customs’ harassment more acutely than Everywomans because they catered to an explicitly gay and lesbian audience, but Everywomans also found itself taking stock of which shipments had arrived damaged and

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Jennifer Waelti-Walters, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 6, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

which shipments had not arrived at all. As the owners of Little Sister's courageously went to the Supreme Court to defend the rights of all Canadians to read whatever they wanted, the Everywomans Books' collective that was generally averse to political action found itself sending one of its members to Vancouver to testify in a preliminary hearing in support of Little Sister's, thus entering directly into one of second-wave feminism's headiest and most polarizing debates. In an attempt to preserve their presence as a neutral, safe space for women, the collective urged a feminist reimagining of pornography that valued women's erotic writing. In contrast to anti-porn feminists who saw sex exclusively in terms of oppression and victimhood and anti-censorship feminists who maintained that sex granted women power, the position the bookstore took was never so narrow or limiting; it was inclusive of all women-centred writing and erotica, be it good or really bad. The collective's decisions about what to stock put them in dialogue with each other and with the broader community about what books meant and what was acceptable, but this ongoing dialogue had the larger goal of relentlessly challenging women to engage critically with literature, form their own relationships to it, derive their own meanings from it and build politicized identities.

## Conclusion

Since their emergence in the mid-1990s, chain bookstores like Chapters and Indigo in Canada threatened to destabilize independent bookstores. The shadow of these chains loomed large over feminist bookstores whose main purpose was to sell literature that was hard to find anywhere else. As feminism gradually made its way into the mainstream, big bookstores started to display a limited selection of the most popular feminist titles, leaving feminist bookstores to traffic in more obscure, less profitable material. Publishers bolstered the rapid expansion of chains by offering them sweetheart deals and paying them to promote their books by placing them in the most prominent locations in the store.<sup>1</sup>

In 1997, the rise of Amazon.com permanently changed the way people browsed and bought books. Amazon pressured publishers into offering deep discounts, better shipping terms and paying “co-op” or co-operative promotional fees and pledged to provide incentives in return for advertisements on their home page. If publishers refused their terms, however, they threatened not to promote their books, to delay the expected shipping times or even limit the visibility of titles in search results.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to feminist bookstores, which were committed to enhancing the visibility of women’s writing, Amazon limited the visibility of books without compunction. In a 2014 *New Yorker* article, George Packer chronicles Amazon’s ambitious ascent to the top of the book industry and paints a portrait of the company’s founder, Jeff Bezos, as bloodless and methodical. He writes that Bezos did not start an online bookstore out of a love for books.<sup>3</sup> Selling books, for him, was a strategy to gather the names and data

<sup>1</sup> In the U.S., independent bookstores came together under the American Booksellers Association to file lawsuits against both big publishers and chain bookstores, accusing them of egregious trade violations, which they believed were part of a strategy to exacerbate their most pressing problems and drive them out of business. See Kristin Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 146, 162.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>3</sup> George Packer, “Cheap Words,” *The New Yorker*, February 17 & 24, 2014, n.p.

of shoppers that could then be used to algorithmically find out what other products Amazon could sell.<sup>4</sup> The site generated recommendations based on the data and promotional fees it collected. In stark contrast to women's bookstores, algorithmic targeting was used to recommend books to customers, without really knowing them or caring.

All of this was a harbinger of what was to come and contributed to increasing exhaustion and economic hardship for feminist bookstores. The Toronto Women's Bookstore sought course book business from the University of Toronto to alleviate some of their financial pressure.<sup>5</sup> Everywomans Books had already been receiving crucial support from the newly formed Women's Studies department at the University of Victoria since the mid-1980s, largely thanks to the efforts of Christine St. Peter, who was the chair of Women's Studies for many years. St. Peter saw her colleague in Women's Studies, Yaffe, struggling to keep Everywomans Books going and thought that if she could send students from the department to the bookstore to buy their course texts there, it would be a good way of sustaining the bookstore and shepherding their students to a place in the city where they could see feminist principles in action.<sup>6</sup> This arrangement provided the bookstore with a vital injection of cash for a while; however, their orders subsided as the UVic library started steadily bringing in more feminist material and the Women's Studies department focused on cultivating a good relationship with the university bookstore.<sup>7</sup> Some students also complained that it was inconvenient for them to go downtown to buy their course texts and others had gone only to find the store closed because someone had not showed up for their shift.<sup>8</sup> Other customers also noticed that more and more often when they would go downtown to visit the bookstore, it would be closed. The early energy and enthusiasm for the bookstore had devolved into fatigue. Organizing was draining women's energy and finding volunteers had become

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 164.

<sup>6</sup> Christine St. Peter, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, January 23, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Debby Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

increasingly difficult. Many women were working full-time jobs and had less time for volunteering. As Yaffe explained, “it was harder to get enough women with enough free time to staff the store properly. The fact that it was harder to keep a stable collective meant that we often had people that often weren’t that well trained and couldn’t give good customer service.”<sup>9</sup>

This thesis has already discussed some of the factors that contributed to the store’s decline. Though there were no profound tensions in the collective, some seemed to think that their troubles started after they got a computer in the store, which was not only expensive, but also created some divisions between older women and younger volunteers who were more comfortable with technology. Even more significant was the fact that mainstream bookstores had started selling feminist books. Hillyer explained that it was not as challenging in the 1990s to find feminist material as it had been in the 1970s, when “it was hard to come by *Rubyfruit Jungle* anywhere but our store. By 1997, any regular bookstore had a really good selection of feminist material and you could buy things online.”<sup>10</sup> And as Slatkoff put it, “there wasn’t this sort of screaming need [as there was] when we first started.”<sup>11</sup> At this point, big bookstores were still only carrying feminist bestsellers, leaving Everywomans “stuck with the non-lucrative end”<sup>12</sup> of obscure, eccentric and specialized books.

In our interview, Frances Dearman optimistically pointed out that the greater availability of feminist books in the mainstream “was a good thing, we worked ourselves out of a job.”<sup>13</sup> At the surface level, it seemed promising that mainstream bookstores were incorporating feminist texts on their shelves and in their displays, reaching massive numbers of readers who might have been alienated by feminist bookstores. Some women I interviewed, both collective members and customers, maintained that they thought these changes were overdue and positive. But many also noted that these changes

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ann Hillyer, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>11</sup> Susan-Rose Slatkoff, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 14, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>12</sup> Yaffe, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 11, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>13</sup> Frances Dearman, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, November 25, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

were double-edged. It remained an open question whether the inclusion of feminist literature in big bookstores was indeed a triumph for feminism or just a marketing ploy and superficial gesture of solidarity on the part of chains. Hogan claims that the visibility chain bookstores offered to feminist books was deceptive in the sense that these stores only carried a small fraction of the bestselling titles in women's writing as a profit strategy rather than a genuine lasting commitment to a diversity of feminist literature.<sup>14</sup> Unlike feminist bookstores that carried important books even if they hardly ever sold, mainstream bookstores were quick to return books that were not profitable enough and replace them with new titles. This shift had a broader impact on literary culture as small, alternative publishers who were unable to find a market for their books went out of business, which in turn made it more difficult for many writers to find publishers, effectively forcing back into obscurity and silence the range of ideas and voices that feminist bookstores had brought forward.

With mainstream bookstores selling feminist books, the assumption tended to be that there was no longer a need for bookstores dedicated exclusively to this material. But the purpose of many feminist bookstores, like Everywomans, had always been more complex than simply selling feminist reading material not available anywhere else. Their ancillary purpose was to provide a place for women to network, find friends, accommodation, activities and support services in the women's community, to sell and buy tickets for women's events, to host readings by women authors and raise awareness about political events like December 6 and Take Back the Night. The fact that Everywomans Books was able to serve as both bookstore and community resource centre was what made it unique in the local women's community.

At feminist bookstores, women were surrounded by a broad array of books. They were welcome to explore freely, picking up and putting down books for hours. They could engage with the store's smart and sympathetic volunteers who might tell them about their own favourite book or just linger in

<sup>14</sup> Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 164.

their presence, if they were too afraid to talk. And there were always interesting women stalking the shelves. The opportunity to observe and interact with other feminist and lesbian women in such spaces was vital for helping customers solidify a burgeoning sense of self and community belonging. That impulse toward identity and community building was missing in mainstream bookstores. Unlike with feminist bookstores, bookstore chains were mostly disconnected from any notion of community and tended to minimize interactions between booksellers and customers, which made it difficult for them to offer a similar kind of friendly, intimate and meaningful encounter.

By 1997, most feminist bookstores had vanished completely. Everywomans Books was the last remaining non-profit, all-volunteer feminist bookstore in Canada.<sup>15</sup> This thesis has argued that it was able to survive longer than other feminist bookstores largely because the collective never lost sight of its goals. For the bookstore's entire existence, the collective prioritized their mandate to make books available and faithfully adhered to their feminist values and organizing principles. Unfortunately, however, the values that created and sustained the store were no longer tenable to compete with the profit-driven business models of the bookstore chains opening in Victoria.<sup>16</sup> Meeting minutes indicate that by April 1997, the collective was facing financial trouble.<sup>17</sup> Many suppliers had suspended their ordering until the bookstore could pay off its debts. Given their precarious financial position, it became clear that Everywomans was struggling and needed a new strategy. The collective formed a plan to expand sections that sold well, including their lesbian fiction, women of colour, sexuality and children's literature sections, and to widely disperse a questionnaire in local newsletters like the *Times Feminist*, *LesbiaNews* and the *Pink Pages* that would help them assess the needs of the community and determine

<sup>15</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Closing of Store 1997, Everywomans Books fundraising advertisement, n.d.

<sup>16</sup> Marianne Alto, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, February 20, 2018, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>17</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Minute Meetings, Minutes Jan '97 – Nov '97, Minutes – April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 3 April 1997.

their options for the future direction of the store.<sup>18</sup> They also turned to their loyal community for support, asking them to buy more books, donate their time, skills and money and to fill out the questionnaire. At this point, the collective was seriously considering the possibility of converting to a feminist library or restructuring as a worker-owned co-op. This model would have offered a community-based membership option. The bookstore would still be based on a feminist model in the sense that it would be non-profit and organized by consensus, but there would be hierarchies between the operational collective that ran the store and was responsible for day-to-day decision-making, an administrative collective that dealt with the business and management side of the store and the general membership.<sup>19</sup> Concerns were raised about how a co-op could exist when a collective could not. Ultimately, the collective realized it was only staving off the inevitable and made the difficult decision to close at their collective meeting on August 14, 1997.<sup>20</sup>

The final months of the bookstore's existence were preoccupied with the logistics of closing - dissolving as a society, notifying publishers and distributors, cancelling orders, paying off their debts and dismantling the store. Because of their structure, each member was equally liable for the business affairs of the store, as well as its debt. The collective wanted to ensure that no woman would be saddled with the debt of the bookstore, so they planned the Everywomans Books "Feminists to the Rescue" auction with the goal of raising \$10,000.<sup>21</sup> Jane Rule donated a signed first edition copy of her novel *Desert of the Heart*. Other women from the community stepped up to help the bookstore, contributing a wide variety of items and services, including their artwork, handmade jewellery, birdhouses and chocolates, résumé services, interior design consultation, tarot card readings, composting lessons,

<sup>18</sup> The questionnaire asked questions like do you see a need for a feminist bookstore? Can Victoria support a non-profit, collectively run feminist bookstore? Would you be willing to provide support for a non-profit, collectively run feminist bookstore through annual membership with a fee?

<sup>19</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Closing of Store 1997, Ebooks: the Community Member Option, n.d.

<sup>20</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 3, Log Dec. '96-June. '97, 14 August 1997.

<sup>21</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Closing of Store 1997, Ideas for Fund-Raising Spiel, n.d.

aromatherapy, henna tattoos, massages, graphic design services, herbal consultation, stress management workshops, dream interpretation sessions and a laundry basket left at Slatkoff's house by Sheila McCarthy, star of the 1987 film, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*.<sup>22</sup> The item that probably provoked the most intense bidding war was the stained glass sign made by Heather Hestler that hung in the window of Everywomans Books. A group of women at the auction pooled enough money between them to outbid another buyer and win the sign for the archives. In the end, enough money was collected from the auction for the bookstore to pay off its debts and close with integrity.

Hogan proposes measuring the success of feminist bookstores in terms of the longevity of their influence rather than their physical presence. Everywomans Books educated and inspired an untold number of women. The customers I interviewed described the bookstore as a place that nurtured their obsessions and explorations, affirmed their desires and formed their feminist worldviews. When I asked the collective members what they had gained from their experience with the bookstore, their responses revealed a deep sense of nostalgia and disappointment in the store's closure but they also indicated its continuing importance in their lives. Many collective members were thankful to the bookstore for the deep, lasting friendships they forged there. Walls said, "it gave me the courage to live my life."<sup>23</sup> And for Hillyer, "it cemented the importance of literature in playing a part in changing the way the world works."<sup>24</sup> Today we are able to count on the majority of the population to have a baseline understanding of women's issues and taken-for-granted feminist ideas that were once inconceivable to think and talk about are much more mainstream than they were in the 1970s, in no small part because of women's writing and the feminist bookstores like Everywomans that distributed it.

This thesis has argued that the bookstore carved out a unique and necessary space in its

<sup>22</sup> VWMA, Everywomans Books, 95-050, Box 4, Closing of Store 1997, Feminists to the Rescue Auction: a fundraiser for everywomans books, 27 October 1997.

<sup>23</sup> Rosalie Walls, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>24</sup> Hillyer, interview by Taylor Antoniazzi, December 15, 2017, Victoria, B.C.

community and left a void when it shut down. Some scholars have suggested that women's alternative creative spaces like bookstores focused inward and thwarted the political momentum of the women's movement. However, I attribute the bookstore's closure to the rise of chain bookstores and wider availability of feminist titles in the mainstream. The bookstore played a significant role in enabling early feminist voices to be heard and disseminating feminist values and ideas outward into mainstream culture, which may be read as evidence of its lasting success.

This thesis has sought to highlight the pioneering efforts of the intrepid women who created an oasis for women and for diverse, alternative literature in their small community. I maintain that more studies should mine local archives for what they can reveal about how feminism took shape every day on the ground in smaller cities and the contributions of women working at the local level. Demonstrating the broad range of their everyday activities gives us a better understanding of the historical resonance of seemingly small acts. Feminist organizations of all kinds in smaller communities had unique characteristics that affected their vision and priorities, the way they organized, did business and responded to conflict. More research is needed to explore the similarities and differences between women's bookstores in smaller communities. Comparing bookstores in two different provinces, for example, might offer new insight into the varying ways in which women's bookstores operated and how conflicts played out in different contexts. Victoria was particularly homogenous in terms of political values. How have other feminist bookstores in smaller cities and towns negotiated differing political viewpoints or feminist perspectives? To what extent were their efforts complicated by differences that have not been considered in this study? And how did they tackle these conflicts? A comparative analysis of feminist bookstores in smaller cities and their urban counterparts might also be useful in terms of developing a deeper understanding of how a store's distance or isolation from the centre of the women's movement affected its principles and strategies.

Future researchers should also endeavour to reach out to the racialized and Indigenous women whose voices and perspectives are largely missing from this study. Employing a “snowball” method to find participants for my study ensured that the women I talked to were still connected to some degree. The fact that I did not find any racialized or Indigenous women to participate in my study by using this method suggests that the ongoing friendship networks from the bookstore were mostly all white, perhaps because racialized and Indigenous women tended not to stay in the collective for very long. It is also true that the population of Victoria was not particularly diverse, then or now. However, the archives indicate the presence of racialized and Indigenous women in the bookstore collective and provide some peripheral insight into their concerns and priorities. While the archives offer some insight to disputes that arose around anti-racist efforts at the bookstore, more research is still needed in this area to be able to understand racialized and Indigenous women’s experiences with the bookstore and to evaluate anti-racist initiatives at Everywomans Books and in bookstores in smaller, less diverse cities across Canada. Was similar anti-racist work being done in other stores? How effective was it? What possibility of dialogue did it open up between communities of women? How comfortable did racialized and Indigenous women feel visiting or volunteering at feminist bookstores? Future studies may also want to consider the role and value of feminist literature for racialized and Indigenous women and the extent to which they embraced it in the service of their own self-affirmation, identity work and community building. Finally, some women I interviewed also suggested that the book clubs to which they now belonged felt similar to their earlier experiences with women’s bookstores; others disagreed. It would be interesting to explore this question further. In their prime, feminist bookstores were places where like-minded individuals crossed paths and found community validation. To what extent can we look to women’s book clubs as similar venues for like-minded women to get together to engage with feminist literature and build feminist networks and communities? And how has attending book clubs allowed women to continue constructing the politicized identities that were born in feminist bookstores?

In many ways, Everywomans Books reminds me of what punk music used to be. Like the bookstore collective, the four women who formed *The Raincoats* in 1977 operated on a limited budget and essentially no training or technique. Nonetheless, they worked together and when they shout collectively on a chorus, the sound is raw, visceral and altogether moving. In Jenn Pelly's history of *The Raincoats*, she writes that when you hear *The Raincoats* "shouting out loud in unison, it is powerful and beautiful. It is a particular euphoria. It is a miracle. It is the rare sound of women destroying isolation together."<sup>25</sup>



Figure 9. Members of the Everywomans Books collective in a parade<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Jenn Pelly, *The Raincoats* (Bloomsbury, 2017), 135.

<sup>26</sup> *Members of the Everywomans Books collective in a parade, Victoria, B.C.*, n.d., VWMA, Everywomans Books, 97-177, Box 1, Newspaper Clippings – Memorabilia #1, n.d.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Interview Questions for Collective Members

##### Biographical Details

1. What is your name?
2. When and where were you were born?
3. How would you identify yourself in terms of class, race, gender and sexuality?
4. When and why did you decide to become involved with Everywomans Books? How long were you a collective member?
5. During the period when you were involved with Everywomans Books, how did you see the work you were doing? (Prompts: Did you consider working at the bookstore a way to practice feminist ideology? A political act?)
6. At the time, were you involved in other women's groups or feminist activist organizations? Can you name them? Are you presently involved in any women's groups or feminist activist organizations?

##### General Information about the Bookstore

7. What were the guiding values of the collective and the bookstore? What particular issues were you most passionate about?
8. What was it like to visit the bookstore? Can you describe what it looked like outside/inside? How did it change over time and in the different locations?
9. How would you describe the energy at the bookstore? How did it change over time?
10. Who did you envision as your core clientele?/Who did the store attract? (Prompt: Curious women or women who were already committed feminists?)
  - a) Was anyone excluded in terms of customers? (Prompts: Men? Transgender women?) Were there any debates about this?
11. Can you describe what a typical shift was like?
12. Was it difficult for you to spend time and energy on unpaid activism? Why or why not?
13. Beyond selling books, what other resources and services did the bookstore provide to women in the community?
14. Did the bookstore ever experience harassment? Can you tell me about any incidents of harassment? (Prompt: Anti-feminist or anti-lesbian attitudes or behaviour?)
15. What was the greatest impediment to keeping the bookstore running?
16. What was the most helpful to keeping the bookstore running? (Prompts: loyalty of community, relationship to universities, dedicated/skilled volunteers)

##### Reading and Engaging with Feminist Literature

17. Was reading important to you growing up? Did it become a passion for you and if so, when?
18. Do you remember falling in love with a particular feminist book growing up? What was it? Why was it important to you?
19. Do you remember reading a book or books from Everywomans that had a significant impact on your life? What was it/were they? Why was it/were they important to you?
20. Were you typically more drawn to fiction or non-fiction feminist literature? Which authors were you most influenced by during this period?

21. Can you tell me about events the bookstore organized? Do you remember any big or notable events? What were they? What were they like?
22. How did the bookstore find out about new feminist books or authors?
23. What kinds of books did you carry at the bookstore?
  - a) Did you carry second-hand books?
  - b) Did you carry writing by local unpublished authors?
  - c) Did you carry male authors? Can you describe any debates about this?
24. How did you decide which books you would carry? Were buying decisions made as a group?
25. What kind of writing was popular? How did this change over time? What were some of your bestsellers? Were any books controversial? What were they?
26. Were all books written by women deemed suitable? If not, what books by women were not considered suitable? How did this change over time? Were there ever any tensions surrounding what literature you should/shouldn't carry? Can you give some examples?
  - a) Do you remember getting into debates about voice appropriation? (Prompts: Whether or not to carry Anne Cameron and Lynn Andrews? How did you decide whether or not to continue carrying these authors?)
27. Do you remember having discussions about whether or not to carry literature for gay men? What did you think of this idea?
28. Did the expansion of writings by women of colour lead to the expansion of customers in terms of race?
29. Do you remember having issues with censorship? (Prompt: Canada Customs seizing literature and comics you had ordered from Inland Books in the States) Why do you think this material was confiscated? Did you respond to this and if so, how? How did you work around this?
  - a) What was your policy on carrying erotica and S&M titles? Can you tell me about the debates the collective had about whether or not to carry this material? How did the store's customers respond to this policy?
  - b) Do you remember supporting Little Sister's in Vancouver in their court case against Canada Customs? In what ways did the bookstore provide support to them?
30. Did you often discuss the books you were reading with other collective members? Did this often lead to political discussions surrounding feminist thought? Can you think of some examples?
31. In what ways was the bookstore affected by changes in the broader women's movement? Did you see these changes reflected in the titles on the shelves? Can you give some examples?

### **Membership in the Collective**

32. What was your job at the bookstore? What were some of your related duties?
33. Did you usually work a shift alone or with other collective members? Would you say that you experienced a sense of isolation or collectivity working at the bookstore?
34. Can you give some examples of when the collective worked well or didn't work well? (Prompt: Did you ever become frustrated by the different level of skills, energy, commitment?)
35. Did the organizational structure change over the years or were there discussions about the possibility of changing the organizational structure?
36. Could anyone volunteer? Who was seen as an ideal or appropriate member? Was there a sense that anyone might have been excluded? Why might some trainees have been deemed unsuitable to join the collective?
37. Were there any tensions within the collective? What were they based on? (Prompt: age, race, sexuality, religion). Can you describe these tensions? How did this change over time?
38. Were their points of division with the collective because of different political views or different senses of what the bookstore should be/do?

39. How did you address/respond to internal conflicts? Did any women leave the collective as a result of conflict or disagreements? Can you tell me anything about that?
40. How did your organization deal with critiques of racism in the women's movement? Was it ever a priority to recruit racialized women as members?
41. Do you remember attending any workshops organized for the collective members? (Prompt: Unlearning Racism and Homophobia/Power Sharing) What was the purpose of these workshops? Were they useful? Were there any issues that came up at these workshops?
42. Were your bi-weekly meetings usually centred around business-related issues or political/theoretical issues? Did tensions arise between those who wanted to focus on running the store and selling books and those who were more political in focus? When you became involved with the collective, did you expect more politically/political activism?

### **Relationship to Other Organizations**

43. How well were you connected and how did you stay connected to the larger transnational network of feminist bookstores, bookwomen, presses and publishers? Did you subscribe or contribute to the Feminist Bookstore Newsletter later News? Did women read the FBN? In what ways was it an important resource for you?
44. Was the bookstore a member of Victoria Independent Booksellers Association (VIBA) or Canadian Booksellers Association (CBA)? In what ways did these connections help the store?
45. Did you attend any national conventions, conferences or gatherings? (Prompt: Woman and Words Conference in Vancouver in 1983 or the International Feminist Book Fair in Montreal in 1988) What was it like? What did you take away from this experience?
46. Can you describe the relationship between the bookstore and other feminist organizations and causes in Victoria? Did the bookstore play a political role in advocating for or working with other feminist organizations? Did that relationship change over time?
47. Can you describe your partnership with UVic and Camosun? How did it come about that you would order books for their women's studies courses? Was this an important source of income for the bookstore? Would students visit the store seeking academic resources?

### **Reflection**

48. Was there a point when you noticed a decline in overall enthusiasm within the collective? When would you say this was? What do you attribute that to?  
(Follow up: Do you remember discussing the possibility of turning the bookstore into a worker-owned co-op? Or a Feminist Library? Can you explain what this would have looked like?)
49. Why did the bookstore close? I know there were money problems near the end, but can you say anything more about why you think that might have been? (Prompt: Was the relationship between the bookstore and the feminist community changing? Was feminism changing or declining?)
50. How did you feel when the bookstore closed?
51. Do you still read (feminist material) often?
52. Can you tell me what role the bookstore played in your life from the '70s to the '90s?
53. Did your involvement with the bookstore change you? If so, can you say how?
54. What did you gain from the experience? (Prompt: skills, lifelong friendship, networking)
55. Was this work rewarding for you?
56. Any other thoughts?
57. Is there anyone else who was involved with Everywomans Books as a collective member or any women from the community who were loyal customers who you think might be willing to participate in this study?

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions for Customers

#### Biographical Details

1. What is your name?
2. When and where were you born?
3. How would you identify yourself in terms of class, race, gender and sexuality?
4. During the period from the '70s to the '90s, did you consider yourself to be a feminist? Did you belong to any women's groups or feminist activist organizations? What were they?

#### General Questions about the Bookstore

5. When and how did you discover the bookstore? What was your primary motivation for visiting the bookstore? (Prompt: Were you seeking out something specifically or did you just wander in out of curiosity?) Were you already involved in the local feminist community/a committed feminist at this time?
6. Can you describe your first visit to the bookstore? Can you explain the feelings you had? (Prompt: Was it nerve-racking or did you immediately feel at ease?) After that, how many times in a year would you say you visited the store?
7. What was it like to visit the bookstore? Can you describe what it was like inside? How did it change over time?
8. How would you describe the energy at the bookstore? Was it similar in 1975 and 1997? If not, how did it change over time?
9. Do you think the bookstore had a clear political purpose? If so, what was it? How did it change over time?
10. What did you like about the bookstore? What didn't you like? Were there any changes made to the bookstore that you weren't comfortable with? Can you give some examples?
11. Did you feel accepted at the bookstore? Did you ever feel excluded? Can you name and describe a time or an event when you felt included/excluded?
12. Did you ever attend any workshops, author readings, discussion groups or other events that the bookstore organized? If so, can you say more about this? If you didn't, why not?
13. What was the focus of the workshop(s) or discussion group(s) you attended? What was discussed? Were there any arguments that you can remember? What were they about? How did they get resolved?
14. Did you ever visit any other feminist bookstores? How did they differ from or how were they similar to Everywomans Books? How did it differ from non-feminist bookstores? Would you feel comfortable browsing and/or buying the same literature at another bookstore in Victoria?
15. How do you think the local feminist community thought of or saw the role of the bookstore?
16. What other materials and/or services did the bookstore provide you?
17. Did you meet other women or build a personal network through the bookstore? Can you say more about this?
18. Would you say that the bookstore helped you shape your sense of identity? If so, in what ways?

#### Reading and Engaging with Feminist Literature

19. How did you find out about new feminist books and authors before the bookstore opened? After it opened?

20. Was reading important to you growing up? (Follow up: Would you consider it a passion and if so, when did it become a passion?)
21. Do you remember falling in love with a particular feminist book growing up? What was it? Why was it important to you?
22. Do you remember reading a book or books from Everywomans Books that changed your life? What was it/were they? Why was it important to you? (Follow up: Were any of them novels? Were there any that had good female role models?)
23. Approximately how much of the literature you read during this period was feminist? (Prompt: feminist themes or written by women authors as opposed to men?) Did it come from Everywomans Books? If not, where did you get it?
24. What kinds of books could you find at the bookstore? Where else could you find this literature at the time? How difficult was it to find?
25. Were you typically more drawn to fiction or non-fiction feminist literature? Which authors were you most influenced by during this period?
26. When you visited the bookstore, did you usually seek out books for the purpose of pleasure, education or guidance on a specific subject matter?
27. Did you ever disagree with some of the books the store carried? Did you let the volunteers know? Can you say more about this?
28. Did you ever want them to carry books that they didn't carry? Would they order them in for you? Was there ever any debate about this?
29. Would you say that the bookstore politicized you? Did it help you develop your feminist consciousness? In what ways? (Prompt: workshops or books?) Can you give some examples of books?
30. Did you discuss the books you were reading with other women (outside the store or with volunteers)? Did this often lead to political discussions or debates surrounding feminist thought? Can you think of some examples?
31. Did you notice that changing titles on the shelves reflected shifts in the broader women's movement? Can you give some examples?

### **Reflection**

32. Why did the bookstore close? I know there were money problems near the end, but can you say anything more about why you think that might have been? (Prompt: Was the relationship between the bookstore and the feminist community changing? Was feminism changing or declining?)
33. How did you feel when the bookstore closed?
34. Can you tell me what role the bookstore played in your life from the '70s to the '90s?
35. Do you still read (feminist material) often? Where do you get it?
36. Given the greater accessibility of feminist books, do you think feminist bookstores are still necessary? Why or why not?
37. Any other thoughts?