

The Personal and the Political:
Canadian Lesbian Oral Histories, 1970 – 2010

by

Janet Lee Trainor
B.A., University of Victoria, 2008

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

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Based on first-person interviews and lesbian archival documents, this thesis explores the stories of eleven white, middle-class, self-identified lesbians who were born between 1949 and 1960 and who come of age beginning in the 1970s. It traces their life trajectories and examines such themes as the coming out process as it related to family, religion, and other life events; the cultural and political environment that influenced them; their involvement in various forms of lesbian feminist political activism; their varied professional contributions, and their reflections on the future of “the lesbian” as an embodied gendered, sexual, and political identity. In documenting their narratives, my aim is to add their voices and their experiences of struggle, survival, and accomplishment to the Canadian historical canon.

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Introduction

History, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in ... I read it a little as a duty but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars and pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing and hardly any women at all – it is very tiresome.¹

Scholarship in the field of lesbian history in Canada is growing, but continues to be relatively sparse. This situation offers historians an opportunity to historicize Canadian lesbians and supplement the historical ‘canon’. The oral histories shared by eleven self-identified lesbians born between 1949 and 1960, which serve as the main primary source for this study, contribute to the broader project of rendering lesbian lives, bodies, and desires visible in the Canadian historical narrative. As Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez have argued, “oral history with subaltern or historically undervalued communities entails making historical and generational discontinuities explicit. It necessarily disrupts historical paradigms that do not or will not acknowledge the existence of bodies, genders, and desires invisible to previous historical traditions.”²

The desire to examine lesbian oral histories emerged from a question asked by a retired Women’s Studies professor: “Are lesbians going extinct?”³ This question presupposed the existence of lesbians, while at the same time placed lesbians in a continuing spiral of going-to-extinctness. As a historian and ... wait a minute... a lesbian, her

¹ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1972), 123-4.

² Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, “Close Encounters: The Body and Knowledge in Queer Oral History,” in *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, ed. Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-2.

³ Debby Yaffe, “My Mid-term Exam in Lesbian Theory and Practice: Discuss the question ‘Are Lesbians Going Extinct?’ as if your life depended on it,” *Trivia: Voices of Feminism* 10 (February 2010): n.p., accessed August 26, 2013, <http://www.triviavoices.net/archives/issue10/index.html>.

question precipitated other queries. How will we know lesbians were here? Before they left, did lesbians leave a legacy?

Many of the Canadian lesbian historical studies produced to date by scholars in such fields as history, sociology, and cultural geography have examined such topics as lesbian identity politics and community dynamics, but the primary focus has been on urban lesbians and lesbian bar culture in the period between 1955 and 1975. Relying on oral accounts, the yellow press, and police and court records, historians have explored the intersections of class, sexuality, and gender in the bars and taverns of 'red light' districts in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. After reading the social histories of Canada's working-class lesbians who frequented these venues, you might assume that they were a dissolute and shiftless, yet mythical, lot whose lives were played out against the inelegant backdrop of the Vanport in Vancouver, the Coral Reef in Ottawa, the St. Charles in Toronto, the Mardi Gras in Winnipeg, the Cecil in Calgary, and Madame Georges in Montreal. As various scholars have argued, however, within the context of the entrenched heteronormativity of mid-twentieth-century Canada, these spaces were important sites of visibility, refuge, courtship, community building, employment, and sociability.⁴ While

⁴ The Canadian scholars who have examined public bars/private clubs as sites where lesbians went to meet each other and where, it is argued by some, that the lesbian community was formed include: in French Canada, Line Chamberland, "Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-75," *Journal Of Homosexuality* 25 (1993): 231-269 and *Mémoires Lesbiennes : Le lesbianisme à Montréal entre 1950 et 1972* (Montreal: Les Éditions du remue-ménage, 1996); in English Canada, Aerlyn Weisman and Lynne Fernie, *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1992); Becki Ross, "Dance to 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon', Get Churched, and Buy the Little Lady a Drink: Gay Women's Bar Culture in Toronto, 1965-1975," in *Weaving Alliances: selected papers presented for the Canadian Women's Studies Association at the 1991 and 1992 Learned Societies Conference*, ed. Debra Martens (Ottawa: Canadian Women's Studies Association, 1993), 267-87; Carolyn Anderson, *The Voices of Older Lesbian Women: An Oral History* (PhD diss., University of Calgary, 2001), <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk3/ftp04/nq64850.pdf>; Elise Chenier, "Rethinking Class in Lesbian Bar Culture: Living 'The Gay Life' in Toronto, 1955-65," *Left History* 9 (Spring/Summer 2004): 85-118, <http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/lh/article/viewPDFInterstitial/5608/4801>; Cameron Duder, *Awfully Devoted Women: Lesbian Lives in Canada, 1900-65* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Vivian Korinek, "A Queer Eye View of the Prairies: Restoring Queer Histories to the West," in *The West and*

the bars that served lesbians no longer exist and there are no plaques that mark their existence or legacy, both American and Canadian scholars agree that these women held space and remained visible until the emergence of gay and lesbian liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s. In the American context, Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis assert that bar lesbians had already developed a vibrant butch and femme culture before gay liberation groups such as Mattachine and the Daughters of Bilitis formed.⁵ According to Lillian Faderman, the public ‘coming out’ of New York gays and lesbians occurred on 28 June 1969 when they emerged from the Stonewall bar and rioted in response to persistent police harassment of the bar patrons.⁶ Elise Chenier and other Canadian scholars have made similar points in the Canadian context.⁷ At the same time, in Canada, a broader and, if you will, more fulsome history of lesbians remains to be told. My purpose is to add the voices of middle-class lesbians, who were born in the 1950s and 1960s, began to come of age in 1970, and asserted themselves as *out* lesbians, and who turned various causes, which often arose from personal commitments, into provincial and national achievements.

The lesbians interviewed for this study grew up in what various Canadian historians have described as the highly gendered and heterosexist milieu of the post-World War II period. Veronica Strong-Boag examined the experiences of women who

Beyond: Historians, Past, Present, and Future, ed. Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter and Peter Fortna (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2010), 278-296,

http://www.aupress.ca/books/120176/ebook/13_Finkel_et_al_2010-West_and_Beyond.pdf. There has also been work done on this topic in the US. Key texts include: Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin, 1994); and Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003).

⁵ Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, 112.

⁶ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 190-196.

⁷ Chamberland, “Remembering Lesbian Bars,” 231-269 and *Mémoires Lesbiennes*; Weisman and Fernie, *Forbidden Love*; Ross, “Dance to ‘Tie a Yellow Ribbon’, Get Churched, and Buy the Little Lady a Drink,” 267-87; Anderson, *The Voices of Older Lesbian Women*; Chenier, “Rethinking Class in Lesbian Bar Culture,” 85-118.

lived in white-dominated suburbs in Ontario during the post-war period. Women were geographically isolated in the suburbs, and relegated to home-making and child-rearing duties. Strong-Boag's narrators, many of whom identified as feminists, "claimed to find no contradictions between equality for the sexes and a gendered division of labour within marriage. Revealingly, not one indicated that alternatives, either to suburbia or wifehood and motherhood, were available or apparent."⁸ Robert Rutherford's social history of fathers' roles in the family in the 1950s and 1960s illustrates that fathers were subject to a barrage of ads that coached them on their roles as husbands and breadwinners, which could additionally be achieved through extra-domestic leisure activities and the purchase of leisure-oriented consumer products. As Rutherford wrote,

At last, after years of depression and war, able to acquire houses, cars, boats, and cottages, items often beyond the means of their own fathers, the men who shared their life stories with me equated certain forms of consumption with manful assertiveness and lay claim to it in representing themselves as breadwinners and as family men.⁹

Within this gendered, heterosexual, white, middle-class conjugal environment promoted by a resurgent post-war capitalism, what kinds of messages were conveyed to the children and youth of the 1950s and 1960s? Mary-Louise Adams argues that this post war boomer generation was imbued with the idea that "sexual object choice was the basis of a successful marriage, was a marker of maturity, a means of belonging or the ultimate conformity, and a marker of *national stability* (my italics)."¹⁰ She found this consistent theme in a range of prescriptive and popular publications and policies. While these

⁸ Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Their Side of the Story': Women's Voices from Ontario Suburbs, 1945-1960," in *A Diversity of Women: Women in Ontario since 1945*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 68.

⁹ Robert Rutherford, "Fatherhood, Masculinity, and the Good Life During Canada's Baby Boom, 1945-1965," *Journal of Family History* 24 (1999): 370, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://jfh.sagepub.com/content/24/3/351>.

¹⁰ Mary-Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997), 166.

Canadian social historians show the concerted efforts to cement the roles of Canadian men, women, and youth in the post-war period, Annalee Gözl has pointed out that these processes were integral to the state's social policy initiatives which were designed to re-stabilize the post-World War II heterosexual family.¹¹

Douglas Owsram, in his book, *Born at the Right Time*, characterizes the 1950s as a *filiarchy* in which the state as well as white middle-class families and communities focused on children in the hopes that they would not know depression or war.¹² At the same time, he argues that, in the 1960s and 1970s, members of the baby boomer generation with all of their entitlements, began to challenge their parents' 'legacy'. As a result, many became involved in various social movements that focused on civil rights for gays and lesbians, racial equality, feminist struggles, Indigenous decolonization movements, and more. As Owsram notes,

the real significance of the counter-culture was the politicization of the non-political ... The real point is that they were all linked culturally—the symbols of music, of the romantic resistance to technocracy, of the desire to 'be free' reached across various sub-groups ... Further, the shared symbols and rhetoric made the concept of generational revolution all the more real in an uncertain adult world.¹³

Within this context, the lesbian participants in this study had options that were unavailable to their middle- and working-class lesbian predecessors. Many were exposed to the New Left politics of the 1960s and 1970s as they entered university and the labour force.¹⁴ Social movement organizations formed around the civil rights and the anti-war

¹¹ Annalee Gözl, "Family Matters: The Canadian Family and the State in the Postwar Period," *Left History* 1 (1993): 11-29, accessed January 2, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/61594141?accountid=14846>.

¹² Douglas Owsram, *Born at the Right Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 59-69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁴ Bryan D. Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). Palmer looks at the development of the New Left in Canada as does Dominique

movements in the US as they did in Canada. The 1969 Stonewall riots in New York pitched gays and lesbians against an oppressive police force that regularly harassed and arrested gays and lesbians because of their sexual orientation; these riots ignited a political response based on sexual identity which promoted pride and equality rights. Second-wave feminism, as part of the New Left, emerged with an explosion of publications, many of which graced the bookshelves of my interview participants.¹⁵ All of these books were readily available in Canadian women's and university bookstores. The *Report of Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* was released in 1970 and it presented a snapshot of the situation of Canadian women. As Doris Anderson noted, the Commission "was ideally suited to the double purposes of getting the necessary information about fully integrating women into the workforce while also appeasing and, if necessary, defining feminist complaints."¹⁶ In Canada, university students agitated for more say in the running of their universities and in forming a relevant curriculum. Universities sprouted homophile societies such as those at Queen's in Kingston and McGill in Montreal. This was the Age of Aquarius—"when the moon

Clément's "Generations and the Transformation of Social Movements in Postwar Canada," *Social History/Histoire Sociale* 42 (2009): 361-387, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://pi.library.yorku.ca.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/ojs/index.php/hssh/article/viewFile/38845/35250>.

¹⁵ Germinal books on feminism included: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1983); Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970); Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful* (New York: Random House, 1970); Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971); and The Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Our Selves* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1973), to name a few. Lesbians had their own philosophers and dreamers to guide them, such as Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman* (New York: Stein & Day, 1972); Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman* (San Francisco: Bantam, 1972); Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1973); Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974); Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence," *Signs* 5 (1980): 631-660; Charlotte Bunch, *Passionate Politics* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987); and Sarah Lucia Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics: Towards new value* (Palo Alto, CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988).

¹⁶ Doris Anderson, "Reorganizing for Change," in *Canadian Women: A History*, 3rd edition, ed. Gail Cuthbert Brandt and Naomi Black (Toronto: Nelson, 2011), 528.

was in the Seventh House and Jupiter aligned with Mars.”¹⁷ In Quebec, the *Front de Liberation du Quebec* (FLQ) fought for a distinct Quebec francophone identity and independence from a theocratic state and an English-dominated country. Abortion and homosexuality were decriminalized in 1969 by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who stated that “there is no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nations.”¹⁸ A dramatic increase in post-war education participation rates for men and women and the formation of single-issue movements, such as a women’s right to choose or gender pay equity and equity in employment, produced a body of leftist theory and advocates that radicalized or, at least liberalized, a generation coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s.

My participants entered their public lives well aware that, as lesbians, they were eschewing a socially constructed and widely-approved place in society, while garnering the disapproval of family, church, and state through their sexual-object choice. This social inequality based on gender and sexual identity motivated some of them to find their voice within feminist and lesbian organizations in the New Left,¹⁹ while others followed a more individualized path. This thesis, then, explores what effects, if any, did immersion in such a gendered and heteronormative environment have on my eleven research participants who grew up in 1950s and 1960s and 1970s. Within the context of political and social change beginning in the 1970s, to what extent and in what ways did they challenge the normative scripts?

¹⁷ Gerome Ragni and James Rado, *Hair, the Musical* (New York: Tams Witmark Music Library, 1967).

¹⁸ [“Omnibus Bill: ‘There’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation’.”](#) *CBC News* (Toronto: CBC Digital Archives, December 21, 1967), accessed August 24, 2012.

¹⁹ If you lived in Ontario during the 1970s, you would have found women’s liberation groups in many towns and cities across that province. In addition, women established rape crisis centres, women’s shelters, and self-help lines. Nancy Adamson examined this phenomenal growth of women’s organizations in her article, “Feminists, Libbers, Lefties, and Radicals: The Emergence of the Women’s Liberation Movement,” in *A Diversity of Women: Women in Ontario since 1945*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 252-280.

Methodology

My analysis in this thesis relies on the oral histories of eleven self-identified lesbians who were born between 1949 and 1960²⁰ and covers the period of their lives between the 1970s and 2010. Of those who participated, I recruited four interviewees directly: my partner, Nancy Poole; a longtime friend, Judy Lightwater; and Roberta Benson and Miriam Kaufman who were featured in a 2011 *Globe and Mail* article on lesbian families.²¹ The other participants responded to a notice I posted on a BC lesbian list-serve that operates out of Vancouver and those who met the three main eligibility criteria (self-identified lesbian, born between 1949 and 1960, and living in Canada) were interviewed (see Appendix A: Recruitment Script). With the exception of Nancy Poole and Judy Lightwater, I did not know the participants prior to embarking on this oral history research project. Given that the recruitment notice indicated that the purpose of the study was to “explore the lives, activism, and legacy of self-identified lesbians” born in and around the 1950s and to “examine the current debate on whether or not lesbians are becoming ‘extinct’,” it is perhaps not surprising that many of the women who responded were actively involved in lesbian and feminist politics beginning in the 1970s; hence, the extent to which the participants’ lives and experiences are representative of lesbians of that generation is indeed an open question (See Appendix D: Participant Reference Chart). The semi-structured interviews were conducted in person or via

²⁰ This time frame was selected as it would have the informants coming of age (twenty-one years) starting in 1970; twenty-one years was the age of majority in Canada until 1971-1972, when it was reduced to eighteen years in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan and to nineteen years in British Columbia, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia.

<http://canadaonline.about.com/od/canadianlaw/g/ageofmajority.htm>, accessed June 22, 2015.

²¹ Denise Balkissoon, “The seven habits of highly effective lesbian families,” *Globe and Mail*, November 5, 2011, F1.

telephone/Skype between October 2011 and January 2012 and were digitally recorded. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist.

Prior to each interview, each participant was asked to sign a consent form. This document covered such issues as anonymity and confidentiality, possible risks related to the interview process and appropriate remedies, and how the interview data would be used (see Appendix C: Participant Consent Form). I also forwarded a standardized set of questions to each participant for their review before the interview. The questions covered a range of topics, including basic personal data, their definition of what a lesbian is, key influences in their lives, their coming out process, their political and other involvements, and their perspectives on past and current issues pertaining to lesbian rights and identity (see Appendix B: Interview Questions). While the structure and content of the interview questions posed and the themes covered did shape the narrative arc of the participants' stories, the interviewees were encouraged to add any other relevant information and they could, if they wished, decline to answer any of the formulated questions. As the interviews progressed, it was evident that the interview process facilitated an awakening for some of the interviewees, as if they warmed to their subjectivity and their unrealized contribution to social change, like "lives awaiting a narrative."²² Finally, participants were given the opportunity to receive an audio copy of their interview (three did so) and all received a copy of the typed transcript. All were encouraged to review their interview data and correct the record. None provided me with any corrections.

²² Ian Grosvenor, "'Seen but not heard': City Childhoods from the Past to the Present," *Paedagogica Historica* 43 (June 2007): 403, accessed August 28, 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00309230701363765>.

As feminist and other historians have argued, it is important for researchers to situate themselves in their work and particularly in the oral interview process.²³ In the latter context, my position was, in most respects, that of an “insider.” As a self-identified and politically active lesbian feminist and as a member of the same generation as the participants, I witnessed and participated in many of the events they described and had intimate knowledge of the lives of two interviewees. Given my location and the fact that I actively sought to create a welcoming and inclusive dynamic during the interviews, it is possible that the interviewees felt comfortable sharing what they considered to be “insider” knowledge about people, places, and events with me, information to which I could readily relate. In answering questions that had them reflecting on their early lives, family, sexuality, politics, and accomplishments, these participants supplied additional resources such as personal artifacts and written works that supported their stories and illustrated their energy, activism, and accomplishments. In other words, there appeared to be a dialogic and collaborative interaction at work, given our commonalities of language, community, and culture.²⁴ I was also a go-between and a facilitator, as I brought the experience and voices of the previous participants to the next interview as a prompt or a clarifying reference. In addition, I salted the conversations with interviewees with tidbits of information that I had gleaned from the primary and secondary sources I had researched, often as points of clarification. As Lynne Abrams has noted, “there is no such thing as an unmediated narrative, [and] intrinsic to almost all oral history interviews is the

²³ See, for example, Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge: 1991); Valerie Yow, “‘Do I like Them Too Much?': Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa,” *The Oral History Review* 24 (1997): 68, accessed June 22, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3675397>.

²⁴ Boyd and Roque Ramírez, “Close Encounters: The Body and Knowledge in Queer Oral History,” 1-20.

interplay between individual memory and collective or social memory.”²⁵ Even though my presence and interventions may have shaped the participants’ perspectives on the “collective or social memory” of lesbian histories between 1970 and 2010, my main purpose was to give the interviewees an opportunity to share how they understood and interpreted their lives as lesbians.²⁶

Historians talk about provenance of a source, the authenticity of a source, and the reliability of sources as building blocks of their profession. A live subject who is willing to share their experiences and observations during and about specific events, people, or period(s) of time has authenticity and their ‘provenance’ can often be tracked. Reliability of the source is more difficult to ensure. Just as written sources can be selectively chosen by a historian to influence history’s perspective on a person or events, so can oral history sources. Rather than guile or error in writing about an oral history source, the wild card in oral history is our ability to remember all, parts, or none of our lives. Memory, in conjunction with the historian’s other skills such as researching, evaluating, and selecting additional primary and secondary sources, and a skilled and sensitive analysis of the narrator’s narrative, can produce authentic and valuable new history featuring new historical players.²⁷

Historians are drawn to oral histories as a source because they are accessible and the pool of potential participants is virtually limitless. Yet, in Canada, oral history has not been wholly accepted as a method within the discipline of history. Some of the complaints about oral history include questions about the importance of the subject

²⁵ Lynne Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York & London: Routledge 2010), 55.

²⁶ Elizabeth Lapvosky Kennedy, “Oral History and the Construction of Pre-Stonewall Lesbian History,” *Radical History Review* 62 (Spring 1995): 61.

²⁷ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 131.

matter and/or its narrator-subjects, the vagaries and inaccuracies of remembering, the incomplete and selective memories of narrators and interviewers, the questionable professional skills of the historian, and more.²⁸ The benefits of oral history, however, are many and various. As a historian, you can sit down with live people who often share stories that are full of surprises; subsequent analysis of these narratives can yield a value-added historical product. Canadian history is indeed enriched by reading about the lives and work of the eleven women featured in this thesis.

What emerged from my interviews, then, were the stories of a group of women who are all white, middle-class professionals of Christian or Jewish backgrounds, with rural or urban roots, married to same-sex partners or unmarried. Raised in small towns and cities, these women suffered rejection and pain at the hands of friends, family, Christian churches, employers, and the state. Fueled by feminism or radical lesbianism, or driven by a need for justice, they were highly active in the pursuit of equality rights across a range of legal, social, political, economic, religious, and cultural issues. In other words, through their narratives, we hear from middle-class lesbians who were out, educated, middle-class, mostly feminist, professional, confident, and accomplished, and they told their stories in an eloquent, thoughtful, funny, modest, and ironic manner.²⁹

Their oral histories also provoked new questions: Was their lesbianism essential or

²⁸ Canadian historian Michael Bliss has been vocal in his opinions on oral history as a legitimate historical source. Bliss was both elegiac and assertive in his treatise on the state of Canadian history in which he lamented the move away from 'great man' and national history to social history. See "Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History, the Sundering of Canada," *The Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'Etudes Canadiennes* 26 (1991): 5-17. In contrast, Joan Sangster has talked about the sundering of women's history by The Royal Commission on the Status of women as it ignored the thousands of letters sent by individual women in 1968-1969. The letters were minimized because "women's personal evidence [was seen] as more subjective and of less value than the empirical data of social science research." Joan Sangster, "Invoking Evidence as Experience," *Canadian Historical Review* 92 (March 2011): 159, accessed January 2, 2015, <http://www.metapress.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/content/8g85158111182810/>

²⁹ The transcriptionist remarked on the participants' clarity of thought and verbal flow and the punctuated transcripts are remarkably accurate. I urge readers to listen to the digital interviews; the quality is excellent and the conversations engaging.

serendipitous to their achievement(s)? Has success in achieving equal rights for gays and lesbians in Canada been the death of lesbian and gay identity and identity politics? Can you be a lesbian without being a feminist? Did lesbians make history? And, if so, what history?

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter One, the relevant historical literature is reviewed. With a focus on Canadian scholars, the literature review is organized by clustering works together under common themes, such as lesbian bar cultures and geographies, lesbian political organizing and knowledge production, lesbians as represented in the mainstream print media, and lesbians and the state. The works of American scholars, such as Lillian Faderman as well as Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis, are discussed given their influence on Canadian historians.

Chapter Two is entitled “The Personal.” Drawing on the participants’ oral histories, we learn about their early lives. The chapter examines such topics as coming out and sexual identity, relationships with family and friends, and the process of politicization around lesbian and/or feminist issues. Their stories involve love and hate, belonging and exclusion, revolution and complacency, serendipity and strategy, and ultimately, success. Chapter Three is entitled “The Political.” It documents the participants’ involvement in political activism at the local and national levels, much of which was shaped by lesbian and feminist politics. They also had an opportunity to assess their own actions. When asked about how they made history, there was a remarkable, if modestly stated, outpouring of accomplishments. “I got same-sex benefits put in my union contract.” “I helped start BC on the road to approving same sex marriage.” “I legally adopted my same-sex partner’s children.” Other talked about accomplishments

that did not make the headlines. The Conclusion offers an assessment of this group of lesbian historical actors and their achievements and presents their thoughts on 'lesbian extinction'.

Chapter One Historiography

The lesbian is never with us, it seems, but always somewhere else: in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight, out of mind, a wanderer, in the dusk, a lost soul, a tragic mistake, a pale denizen of the night. She is far away, she is dire.³⁰

Writing a historiography to uncover who wrote what about lesbians in English Canada, a historical project that began in 1990, is a relatively finite task. This chapter focuses on lesbians as unearthed and described by primarily Canadian scholars working in such fields as history, historical sociology, urban geography, journalism, and the law – most of whom relied on such primary sources as archival materials and first-person oral histories in their work. It examines various historiographical areas of scholarly focus, including lesbian bar cultures, lesbian lives in diverse geographies, lesbian political organizing, lesbian knowledge production, lesbians in the mainstream print media, and lesbians and the state. The work of finding the shadowy lesbian begins here.

While no Canadian historian has, to date, written a comprehensive historical overview of Canadian lesbians, perhaps the most appropriate historiographical starting point is Lillian Faderman's highly influential work, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, which was published in 1991. Drawing on oral interviews with 186 women of all ages and regions and situating lesbians within the changes of the twentieth century, Faderman did much to ameliorate the spectral presence of lesbians as described by Terry Castle in the book, *The Apparitional Lesbian* as quoted at the outset of this chapter. She focused on class and how it divided and separated lesbians geographically, socially, economically, and in

³⁰ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 2.

terms of lifestyle. Faderman tracked women-loving women from the middle- and upper-class romantic friendships of the late nineteenth century through WWII (where lesbians congregate *en masse* in the cities, factories, and armed services), the paranoid 1950s (lesbians expelled by the state from work and the services as security threats), and through the rebellious 1960s and 1970s (lesbians found and embraced feminism; some rejected it). While her perspective on butch-femme representation, as “a sub-cultural conformity in an America unashamedly heterosexual,”³¹ was controversial, she understood middle-class lesbians’ concerns and the rift between middle-class and working-class lesbians.³² More importantly, her work was highly significant in that it introduced lesbians to each other and to the academic world. Faderman’s work made lesbian lives and stories possible and accessible.

Lesbian Bar Cultures

Published in 1993, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis’ study, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* was a seminal piece of work which examined of the lives and loves of butch-femme lesbians in Buffalo, New York in the period between the mid-1930s and the early 1960s.³³ Based on research conducted over a thirteen-year period, which included compiling the oral histories of forty-five women and direct collaboration them in the book’s production, this study constituted the first comprehensive history of a working-class lesbian community. Class and race as interpretative categories drive the analysis; for example, with respect to

³¹ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1991), 174.

³² Rita McLoughlin, “An Interview with Lillian Faderman: Chronicles of LGBT Struggles,” *Socialist Review*, (February 2009): 333, accessed September 18, 2013, <http://www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=10710>.

³³ Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin, 1993).

lesbian bar culture in Buffalo, elite and working-class white lesbians patronized different bars in different parts of town, while African-American lesbians were not welcome in the bars so they socialized at house parties. Kennedy and Davis further argued that, “this new history of tough bar lesbians also suggests the need for revision in the general history of the 1950s.” Because of the agency and resistance they exhibited, “Lesbians should be placed alongside civil-rights and labor activists as forces representing a strong radical resistance to the dominant conservatism.”³⁴

Canadian lesbians and/or historians and other scholars have also produced a significant body of work on lesbian bar culture in the period between the 1950s and 1970s. In fact, Canadian lesbian history ‘came out’ on a grand scale in 1992 with the critically acclaimed, Oscar-nominated documentary, *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives* by Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie.³⁵ In a 2014 interview, Weissman discussed how the directors had insisted on “having the word ‘lesbian’ in the subtitle”: “We were so out and in your face about it. This is something we learned from Jane Rule: you have to put ‘lesbian’ in the title or it will be buried.”³⁶ As one scholar has noted, the film’s strength is the “thoroughness of the research,” which contributes to its “credibility” and “to its confident stance on the subject matter it depicts.”³⁷ Featuring interviews with eleven engaging and articulate lesbians from diverse class and to some

³⁴ Ibid., 112.

³⁵ Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie, *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives* (Montreal: National Film Board, 1992). Historians Line Chamberland and Ross Higgins acted as consultants on the film.

³⁶ Matthew Hays, “Interview with Aerlyn Weissman,” *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 22 (January/February 2015): 32, accessed January 26, 2015, http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?retrieveFormat=PDF_FROM_CALLISTO&accesslevel=FULLTEXT_WITH_GRAPHICS&inPS=true&prodId=LitRC&userGroupName=uvictoria&tabID=&workId=PI-0KBV-2015-J-F00-IDS127.JPG&docId=GALE%7CA397579264&callistoContentSet=PER&isAcrobatAvailable=true.

³⁷ Jean Bruce, “The ‘Strange Case’ of *Forbidden Love*,” in *Candid Eyes: Essays on Canadian Documentaries*, ed. Jim Leach and Jeanette Sloniowski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 165.

extent, racial backgrounds, the film explored the post-World War II bar culture that catered to both lesbians and gays in cities like Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. Lesbian spaces were often shared with straight and gay men and geography, class, and race determined whether and where, and with whom lesbians drank and socialized. The narrators, for example, described the schism within the community as pink-collar and elite lesbians favoured private house parties and stayed away from the bars that butch-femme lesbians frequented. These latter bars, as discussed in the film, were simultaneously spaces of *containment*, which were supervised by police and other regulatory bodies, and were sites of eroticism for the women who frequented them. The narrators' stories are interspersed with screen shots of headlines from the tabloid yellow press, including *Hush* and *Flash*. While being featured in the tabloids was a source of embarrassment for some of the interviewees, these same newspaper stories were one of the only sources of information on where gays and lesbians congregated. Finally, the film offered another text within the film – the fictional story of Mitch and Laura set in the 1960s. Framed by lesbian pulp novel themes of lust, remorse, and punishment, this fictional narrative presents a story of lesbian love where the lesbian lovers are not doomed to shame. In the final scene after a night of love-making the women gaze unashamedly into the camera's lens.

In her 2004 study of lesbians who lived and worked in Toronto's Red Light district, entitled "Rethinking Class in Lesbian Bar Culture: Living 'The Gay Life' in Toronto, 1955-1965," Elise Chenier examined the post-World War II gendered economic normalization strategies that displaced them from their industrial jobs. Drawing on a wide range of historical sources, including eye-witness narrators, the tabloid press, and police

and court records, Chenier analyzed this group of lesbians through the lenses of class *and* criminality.³⁸ Resembling some of the lesbians described by Kennedy and Davis in Buffalo, these women called themselves ‘downtowners’ with attitude and pride and many were engaged in the criminal world of drugs, prostitution, thievery, and other crimes. Chenier argued that “class and sexuality were mutually constitutive” in shaping their lives, as this intersection formed the basis their identity, determined their employment options, and often heightened their reliance on illicit income.³⁹ Chenier also sketched the differences between the downtowners and their pink-collar and closeted uptown counterparts, suggesting that they were separated by skill levels, geography, social and economic aspirations, and raw courage especially in the face of a corrupt judiciary and the persistent surveillance activities of violent police.⁴⁰ As such, Chenier gave voice to a groups of lesbians, who by maintaining butch identities were *gay at all times* and hence were different from other working-class and lower middle-class lesbians who led divided lives; who lived on the periphery of the law as a means of survival; who were abused by the police, the bar owners, and each other; and who survived to talk about it.

In 1993, Line Chamberland also published a study, entitled “Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975, on lesbian bar culture, with a specific focus on Montreal in the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s.⁴¹ Drawing on oral interviews with eleven lesbians who regularly frequented the bars and three who did not, she found that class as well as francophone/anglophone divisions shaped who socialized where and with whom –

³⁸ Elise Chenier, “Rethinking Class in Lesbian Bar Culture: Living ‘The Gay Life’ in Toronto, 1955-1965,” *Left History* 9 (Summer 2004): 86, accessed January 23, 2015, <http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/lh/article/viewPDFInterstitial/5608/4801>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴¹ Line Chamberland, “Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 25 (1993): 242-254.

whether in the working-class bars on The Main or in the chic bars and clubs in the downtown area. Chamberland examined the life cycle of two bars in two different decades: *Pont de Paris*, a working-class butch-femme bar open during the 1950s and 1960s in Montreal's old Red Light District; and *Face de bébé*, with its androgynous dress code, that opened in the early 1970s and was located in a 'better' neighbourhood - first on Dorchester/*boul. René-Lévesque* and then on *rue St Denis*. Covering a twenty-year period, this exploration traced the evolution of lesbian visibility, geographical relocation, as well as class, language, and community politics. In addition to francophone and anglophone divisions among lesbians in Montreal, Chamberlain maintained that in the 1960s and 1970s, "working-class and professional lesbians had different ways of recognizing each other, of manifesting their lesbian identity and constituting their social networks."⁴² Given these divisions, she argued that bars constituted inadequate venues for cohesive lesbian community formation.

In 1993, Becki Ross also contributed to Canadian scholarship on lesbian-friendly and lesbian-only bars and focused with on Toronto in the period between 1965 and 1975. In her article, "Dance to 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon, Get Churched, and Buy the Lady a Drink: Gay Women's Bar Culture, 1965-1975,'" she cautioned historians to read the ten narrators' stories and discourses produced in the straight and tabloid press of the period with a critical eye. Despite the police surveillance of and discursive opposition to gay and lesbian bars in Toronto, she argued that "The lives of bar women—their complicity in heterosexist, racist, and patriarchal hegemony and their active subversions of it—teach us to reconsider definitions of 'the political' and 'being political,' as well as answers to

⁴² Ibid., 252.

questions of who's political, who is political enough, and who decides."⁴³ Ross captured the negotiation of space in bars catering to elite, mixed groups, and working-class lesbians in different parts of downtown Toronto. She also documented the tensions between the older and younger generations of lesbians as the latter began to frequent the Blue Jay bar, a private weekend club that enforced a dress code that privileged butch-femme style. Younger lesbians, who adopted an androgynous dress code, considered the butch-femme style as "regressive heterosexual mimicry," while older lesbians "felt offended and angered by the narrow, self-serving vision of lesbian feminists" of the younger women.⁴⁴ Ross quoted a woman who was well aware of the style established in the Blue Jay: "we were heterosexual homosexuals."⁴⁵ Given these tensions, the Blue Jay owner was cited as stating that, "...the bar represented a contradictory site of pleasure and danger, a place that lesbian bar owners and patrons fiercely defended, and yet one that was a site of intense ambivalence, heated territoriality and self-negation."⁴⁶ Ross' work is valuable in that she examined spaces where inter-generational interaction and conflict over style, politics, and culture played out. As Ross concluded, "Women used the bar to find each other and to build meaningful relationships ... at the same time, the rebellious spirit and practice of second wave feminism and gay liberation signified change."⁴⁷

Beginning in 2000, Canadian scholars, many of whom were trained in historical and comparative geographical analysis, began to focus on the spatial contours of gay and

⁴³ Becki Ross, "Dance to 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon', Get Churched, and Buy the Little Lady a Drink: Gay Women's Bar Culture in Toronto, 1965-1975," in *Weaving Alliances: selected papers presented for the Canadian Women's Studies Association at the 1991 and 1992 Learned Societies Conference*, ed. Debra Martens (Ottawa: Canadian Women's Studies Association, 1993), 281.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 276-277.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 280.

lesbian spaces, including bars. In her 2006 article, “Gone ‘underground’?: Lesbian visibility and the consolidation of queer space in Montreal,” for example, geographer Julie Podmore relied on documents in the Quebec gay and lesbian archives and mapped the location of lesbian bars and gay districts in Montreal in the period between 1950 and 2003, the year when the last lesbian-only bar closed.⁴⁸ Arguing that “historical geography has been shaped through shifts in the cultural foundations of the public community, spatial and political relationships between lesbian and gay men and, finally, broader shifts in the urban economy,”⁴⁹ she identified four phases in the spatial history of lesbian bars: the Red-Light era (1950-1970) concentrated near *Boul. St-Laurent*; the Age of the ‘Underground’ (1968-1979) which was situated near *Plateau Mont-Royal* and *Boul. St-Laurent*; the Golden Age (1982-1992) with locations on *Plateau Mont-Royal* and *rue St-Denis*; and the Queer Era (1992-2001) concentrated in *Le Village gai*.⁵⁰ By taking gender, class, and language into account, she analyzed the changing patterns of lesbian territoriality, identity, and visibility over time and place. Podmore also created a historical geography specific to Montreal lesbians between 1950 and 1990 that included the bars, the neighbourhoods, commercial entities and services, and other constituents that made community; she traced a lesbian community that moved from the working-class East End of the 1950s to the more fashionable Plateau district and a revitalized Main. By 2003, she maintained that the lesbian bar and the lesbian disappeared wraithlike into the queer universe.

⁴⁸ Julie Podmore, “Gone ‘underground’? Lesbian visibility and the consolidation of queer space in Montréal,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 7 (2006): 599, 601, 603, accessed January 24, 2015, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rscg20>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 598.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 605.

In general, the scholarly work done in Canada on lesbian bar culture has tended to lack the richness of Kennedy and Davis' long-term engagement with their participants. While they maintained contact with their participants for over ten years, Fernie and Weissman, Ross, and Chenier all dipped into the same pool of sources in the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives and Lesbians Making History Archive, while Chamberland interviewed women who were active in Montreal. Between 1955 and 1980 in particular, the 'lesbian bar' constituted a significant social space for lesbian patrons, bar owners, and often tourists. Yet the history is not yet complete; there are more stories from other towns and cities and both within and beyond the bars to add to the history.⁵¹

Beyond Bar Cultures: Lesbian Lives and Geographies

The thirty-two lesbians interviewees featured in Cameron Duder's *Awfully Devoted Women: Lesbian Lives in Canada, 1900-65* had specific opinions on working-class lesbians who frequented the bars in the seedier neighbourhoods of Toronto and Montreal. As Duder pointed out, "Openly sexual, transgressing gender norms, and fighting for public space, these [lower class] women became the symbol of all that was wrong with lesbians - both to heterosexual society and to middle-class lesbians who did not approve of their openness and of their links to crime and drugs."⁵² Particularly during 'the red scare' and homosexual panics of the 1950s and 1960s, these mainly pink-collar or professional lower and middle-class women did not frequent bars lest they be exposed

⁵¹ For example, the work of Valerie Korinek on bars that lesbians frequented in Winnipeg in the mid-twentieth century indicates a similar split along class and race lines, which included downtown 'middle class' bars with 'tourist' facilities and North End taverns where First Nations and working-class lesbians socialized. See: "'We're the girls in the pansy parade': Historicizing Winnipeg's Queer Subcultures, 1930s - 1970," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 45 (May 2012): 117-155, accessed June 12, 2015, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/histoire_sociale_social_history/v045/45.89.korinek.html.

⁵² Cameron Duder, *Awfully Devoted Women: Lesbian Lives in Canada, 1900-65* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 231. Duder's participants are similar to Weissman and Fernie's middle-class narrators in *Forbidden Love* and Faderman's middle-class American informants in *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*.

and lose their government, teaching, or nursing jobs. Lesbians in the military also sought to avoid detection by remaining closeted and keeping a small discreet coterie of friends. As such, Duder's work focused on the impact of heterosexual norms on the lives and attitudes of lower middle- and middle-class lesbians. Like their middle-class gay counterparts and the pink collar lesbians in Toronto that Elise Chenier discussed, they lived in secrecy, felt compelled to "maintain an image of heterosexual respectability,"⁵³ and engaged in the process of separating, negotiating, and living out two distinct lives."⁵⁴ Despite their divided lives, Duder engaged in an analysis of their stories of coming out, their domestic and work lives, and their sexual practices. He captured the tenderness and the volatility of their relationships with lovers, the loss of and formation of families, and the creation of a community through house parties, sport teams, and clubs. In the end, Duder examined another group of lesbians who sought to form community outside of lesbian bar culture. While he argued that, "lesbians found community wherever they could," he added that, "community in the way we usually understand it was not necessarily sought by all lesbians and should not be seen as crucial to lesbian identity and survival."⁵⁵

Carolyn Anderson's 2001 Ph.D. dissertation focused on the lives of older lesbian women living in the mid-sized Prairie city, Calgary, and its surroundings in the period between 1950 and 1975. She interviewed fifteen women over the age of forty-seven and using a flexible definition of a lesbian as having "an essence of desire for the same sex ...

⁵³ Ibid., 244.

⁵⁴ Chenier, "Rethinking Class in Lesbian Bar Culture," 86.

⁵⁵ Duder, *Awfully Devoted Women*, 260.

an essence that cannot be defined by the language we currently have available,”⁵⁶

Anderson collaborated with her participants to identify six common themes in their lives: their growing awareness of their difference; their search for information and other lesbians; experiences of isolation and distrust; coming out to family and friends and the consequences on these relationships and their faith; and community building. In the latter case, lesbians and gays sought to create a community when they formed the Scarth Street Society in 1968.⁵⁷ This society, which grew to over 650 members, hosted lesbian and gay dances, sporting events, and group trips; its members also contributed to the greater Calgary community by contributing to the United Appeal and volunteering at city events.⁵⁸ At the same time, Anderson, in referring to Calgary in the 1960s and 1970s, argued that, while “the experiences of the participants in this project are consistent with much of the present literature” [ca.2000], “it would appear that the Calgary experience seemed to be ten to twenty years behind the experience of those living in the US or larger urban areas in Canada such as Toronto or Vancouver.”⁵⁹ This was largely attributed to the fact that gays and lesbians were less visible and ‘out’ in Calgary and did not, for example, produce their own publications that would have facilitated the circulation of important information about the community. In the end, Anderson’s work is invaluable in expanding lesbian history to include the Prairies and a small conservative city like Calgary.

⁵⁶ Carolyn A. Anderson, “The Lives of Older Women: An Oral History” (PhD diss., University of Calgary, 2001), 24, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk3/ftp04/nq64850.pdf>. This definition is less concrete than Arlene Stein’s: “Put simply, if they agree on anything, lesbians tend to agree that are not straight and they are not male.” Arlene Stein, “The Incredible Shrinking Lesbian World and other Queer Conundra,” *Sexualities* 13 (2010): 25, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/37279680?accountid=14846>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 191-200.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

Lesbian scholars have also examined lesbian urban geographical settlement in the context of the 1990s. In their 2000 article, “Flagrantly Flaunting It?: Contesting Perceptions of Locational Identity Among Urban Vancouver Lesbians,” Jenny Lo and Theresa Healey, for example, found that income had a great influence on where lesbians lived in Vancouver in 1997-1998. Depending on income, political engagement, and visibility, lesbians preferred to live in either the East or West End. The authors demonstrate that the West End lesbians thought the East End lesbians were too visible, while the East End lesbians, who connected identity, economics, and neighbourhood, saw their cross-town peers as unengaged and invisible in the gay male dominated world of the West End.⁶⁰

Julie Podmore’s 2001 article, “Lesbians in the Crowd: Gender, Sexuality, and Visibility along Montreal’s Boul. St-Laurent,” similarly focused on the geographical location of lesbians in Montreal in the mid-1990s. Drawing on interviews with eighteen participants, Podmore focused on Montreal’s *Boul. St-Laurent*. She challenged the idea of the essentialist lesbian living in a lesbian nation and as such, her findings were consistent with those of Lo and Healey, who located lesbians in a space that was not specifically lesbian and one that was more diverse than gay male enclaves. With reference to *Boul. St-Laurent*, Podmore argued that it allowed “people to integrate the multiple aspects of their own identities.”⁶¹ While *Boul. St-Laurent* lacked lesbian businesses and institutions, it “was described by these women as site of intensive sociability and visibility”;⁶² that is, a

⁶⁰ Jenny Lo and Theresa Healey, “Flagrantly Flaunting It?: Contesting Perceptions of Locational Identity Among Urban Vancouver Lesbians,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2000): 40-42, accessed January 24, 2015, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wjls20>.

⁶¹ Julie Podmore, “Lesbians in the crowd: gender, sexuality and visibility along Montreal's Boul. St-Laurent,” *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 8 (December 2001): 343, accessed January 23, 2015, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgpc20>.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 345.

street where lesbians recognized each other as they frequented the shops and cafes. As Podmore maintained, “For the lesbians in this study, this accessibility facilitates patterns of sociability and communality, place-making strategies and even expressions of desire - despite the fact that it is not a ‘lesbian territory’.”⁶³ Thus, in this later period, the connections between lesbian identity, community, and the need for segregated lesbian spaces were called into question. As Podmore noted, “sharing the space with counter-cultural communities blurred gender and sexual identities.”⁶⁴

In their 2002- 2003 article, “‘You’re freer if there’s nobody around’: ‘Gay Women’s’ Space in Small-Town Ontario,” Liz Millward and Sarah Paquin moved beyond the preoccupation with urban lesbians and examined how *gay* women (their word) produced spaces in a small Ontario town. Drawing on interviews with nine women, the authors noted that these women were not politicized back-to-the-land lesbians, but gay women who elected to live and work in a small town.⁶⁵ Millward and Paquin considered three main geographical sites: the body, the home and yard, and the town. They argued that gay women regulated their bodies in town as a way “to manage heterosexist and homophobic situations and ultimately to create gay women’s spaces.”⁶⁶ Home (interior) was gendered female, while the yard was not; the yard was also a more complex realm in that the women considered it to be their own private space, but they felt they needed to adjust their behavior because it was simultaneously semi-public and subject to potential surveillance.⁶⁷ Finally, the town was coded heterosexual and the gay women were well

⁶³ Ibid., 351.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 350.

⁶⁵ Liz Millward and Sarah Paquin, “‘You’re freer if there’s nobody around’: ‘Gay Women’s’ Space in Small-Town Ontario,” *Torquere: Journal of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Studies Association* 4-5 (2002-2003): 86.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 97.

aware of this context. As the authors suggested, they utilized “the rigid boundaries of small-town life to create a relatively safe and supportive space for women from which men are excluded.”⁶⁸

Lesbian Political Organizing

The very first scholarly works on lesbians produced by Canadian historians focused on independent lesbian-feminist political organizing and more specifically, on the histories of Toronto- and Vancouver-based organizations: the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT) and Lesbians Against the Right (LAR). Becki Ross’ articles, “The House That Jill Built: Lesbian Feminist Organizing in Toronto, 1970-1980” (1990) and “How Lavender Jane Loved Women: Re-figuring Identity-based Life/Stylism in 1970s Lesbian Feminism” (1995) examined LOOT, an organization established in 1976. In this work, she connected the emergence of US lesbian separatist radicalism in the 1970s, which included such groups as The Furies and the Radicalesbians, to the birth of LOOT. She argued that LOOT promoted a strong form of identity and life/style politics with its relatively homogeneous membership of white women of Jewish or Christian background, who were middle-class, educated, and radical lesbian feminists.⁶⁹ While LOOT, with its own building and its lofty aspirations to be a centre for all lesbians, sought to promote the possibility of living out loud as a lesbian, Ross maintained that, “well-intentioned claims to openness, consensus, and diversity were quickly buried under the push to homogeneity.”⁷⁰ For example, LOOT members demanded conformity to a prescribed androgynous lesbian feminist life/style, which translated to a highly exclusionary politics:

⁶⁸ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁹ Becki Ross, “The House That Jill Built: Lesbian Feminist Organizing in Toronto, 1970-1980,” *Feminist Review* 35 (Summer 1990): 88, accessed July 25, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1395402>.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 88.

“On occasion, a straight or bisexual feminist, an older lesbian, a punk dyke, a gay bar-goer, a lesbian mother, a lesbian transsexual or a sex trade worker passed through the LOOT centre and wider lesbian feminist circles, but almost never stayed.”⁷¹ In addition, women of colour felt unwelcome, butches and femmes were considered to be “apolitical heterosexual mimics,” female-to-male transsexuals were seen as “masquerading men,” and male-to-female transsexuals were perceived as displaying “exaggerated femininity.”⁷² Riven by internal ideological tensions and other issues, LOOT only survived for four years. Ross considered the LOOT experience to be the basis for a critical analysis of lesbian political practice and life/style politics.⁷³

In 1995, Ross published a monograph, entitled *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation*, which provided a fuller history and analysis of LOOT. As she noted, the interviews she conducted with thirty-seven full- and part-time LOOT members then between the ages of thirty-one and forty-eight (the oldest would be in her 70s now) constituted the only means to “‘tap my subjects’ often emotional recollections of a time they equate with unparalleled exuberance and growth, as well as vigorous, sometimes immobilizing, controversy.”⁷⁴ These extensive interviews were supplemented by other primary sources, including LOOT’s written records, interviews with members of other gay, lesbian, and left organizations active in Toronto in the 1970s, and documents produced by them. In examining LOOT, its structure and role in the politics of Toronto gay, lesbian, and left activism in the 1970s, she concluded that LOOT was comprised of

⁷¹ Becki L. Ross, “How Lavender Jane Loved Women: Re-figuring Identity-based Life/Stylism in 1970s Lesbian Feminism,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 30, no. 4 (1995): 116.

⁷² Ross, “The House That Jill Built,” 88; Ross, “How Lavender Jane Loved Women,” 118.

⁷³ Ross, “The House That Jill Built,” 89.

⁷⁴ Becki L. Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 17.

bright, energetic, political lesbian-feminists who were steeped in radical left political theory, remained leaderless, and in effect, was closeted twice - once as a solely lesbian-feminist organization and once as a homogeneous 'lesbian-by-decree' organization. Given that LOOT was invisible outside of Toronto's gay and lesbian groups, Ross offered an important history of an organization that was intent on creating and maintaining a lesbian nation, but was incapable of doing so because of its lack of inclusive politics.

In 1991, Sharon Dale Stone published an article on another lesbian-feminist organization called Lesbians Against the Right (LAR), of which she was a member from 1981 to 1983. She noted that, "LAR was founded by lesbians who had considerable experience in alternative organizations, and were well-versed in the politics of protest."⁷⁵ In discussing LAR's politics and activities, she revealed that the organization experienced significant challenges in reconciling the various political perspectives within the group in its efforts to initiate effective political action. In part, LAR's demise after three years was a symptom of the women who founded it; some had left LOOT to form LAR and were riven with the same political divisions. In addition, Stone identified other factors, including the absence of leadership to guide the organization, a situation that, according to Ross, also weakened LOOT; she further argued that, "LAR's biggest problem was the lack of a clearly articulated ideology - a manifesto ... While LAR's 'basis of unity' provided a sense of group identity, it did not go far enough in identifying problems and outlining solutions."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Sharon Stone, "Lesbians Against the Right," in *Feminist Activism in Canada*, ed. Jeri Wine and Janice Ristock (Toronto: James Lorimer and Co. Publishers: 1991), 237.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

In her article, “Lesbian Conferences in Canada in the 1970s: Sexual and Erotic Spaces?,” Liz Millward examined how lesbians expanded their political spaces by organizing local, regional and national conferences beginning with the first conference held in Toronto in 1973. Through these conferences, she argued, lesbians raised their public profile as a collective identity nationally and created spaces where they could be visibly and loudly lesbian. Based on a review of conference reports and interviews with conference attendees and organizers, Millward identified seven features of the conferences which helped to make the space lesbian: the spaces’ spatial, temporal, and emotional intensity and the emotion generated by being surrounded by lesbians seeking lesbians and talking about being lesbians; the expectation that these lesbian spaces would be sexual and erotic; the workshops which examined a variety of topics, such as sexuality and mothering; billeting arrangements in private homes (as women rarely had money for hotels), where emotional and spatial themes played out; the evening social event (most often a dance and perhaps additional performers), where the social space allowed a woman’s lesbianism to be expressed as an eroticized communal identity; the charismatic leaders who drew women to these events as organizers and sent them home energized; and finally, the limited alternative sexual or erotic spaces - in other words, lesbians could be lesbians, but in segregated spaces.⁷⁷ What Millward missed is the difficulty lesbian organizations had in booking and renting space to hold conferences and dances as site owners had no qualms about not renting to lesbians. That said, Millward’s study adds insight into lesbian attempts to create and form a lesbian nation by meeting, exchanging ideas, and creating a distinct culture in the 1970s. For over a decade, without the aid of

⁷⁷ Liz Millward, “Lesbian Conferences in Canada in the 1970s: Sexual and Erotic Spaces?,” in *Sapphists and Sexologists: Histories of Sexualities, Volume 2*, ed. Sonja Tiernan and Mary McAuliffe (Newcastle-on-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 129.

email, e-registrations, and electronic calls for papers, organizers did successfully bring lesbians together in cities across Canada.

In her 2012 article, “Making a Scene: Struggles over Lesbian Place-Making in Anglophone Canada, 1964-1984,” Liz Millward built on her work on lesbian conferences and examined the multiple means that lesbians (as well as gay men) employed as they struggled to connect with each other across the vastness of Canada in the period between 1964 and 1984. As Millward noted, “Women found ways to position themselves in relation to the concept of a ‘lesbian’ and to demand more diverse places to spend their time and explore ‘being’ a lesbian who did not (or not only) frequent bars. They experimented with different kinds of places, sometimes in tandem with heterosexual feminists and sometimes with gay men.”⁷⁸ Drawing on primary sources such as private gay and lesbian club documents and newsletters, Millward documents how, once established at home, lesbians sought to reach out and find each other across the country, including in rural areas.⁷⁹

Lesbian Knowledge Production: Lesbian Newsletters/Feminist Periodicals

In addition to examining lesbian-feminist organizations in Toronto and Vancouver and lesbian conferences across the country in the 1970s, Canadian scholars, like Becki Ross, also studied lesbian periodical publishing in the 1970s and 1980s. In her 1992 article, “Tracking Lesbian Speech: The Social Organization of Lesbian Periodical Publishing in Canada, 1973-1988,” Ross focused on newsletters produced in small

⁷⁸ Liz Millward, “Making a Scene: Struggles over Lesbian Place-Making in Anglophone Canada, 1964-1984,” *Women’s History Review* 21 (September 2012): 555, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwahr20>.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 561. See also Valerie Korinek, “‘The most openly gay person for at least a thousand miles’: Doug Wilson and the politicization of a province,” *Canadian Historical Review* 84 (2003): 517-550. In this article, Korinek talks about the work of Doug Wilson, a local and very out gay liberation activist, who managed to unite Saskatchewan gays and lesbians by setting up outreach initiatives designed to specifically engage rural and ghettoized urban gays.

communities, including Hornby Island, BC's *A Web of Crones* (1983-1988) and Kenora, Ontario's *Voices, for Lesbian Survival* (1980-1988), as well as more substantial newspapers produced in larger centres, such as Vancouver's *The Pedestal* (1975-1980) and Halifax's *Pandora* (1985-1994). According to Ross, lesbian periodicals (often devoid of lesbian content!) were, "an educational, survival, and organizing tool as well as the fruit of dedicated, unremunerated and collective hard work for social change."⁸⁰ She further indicated that, "the content of lesbian periodicals since the early 1970s has been largely devoted to the self-empowering narratives and observations of individual, middle-class, white radical lesbian feminists."⁸¹ She applied this critique to *Broadside*, a lesbian-feminist review published independently (with some Ontario government funding) in Toronto between 1979 and 1989; however, *Broadside* was recently digitized and my review of the on-line issues indicated more diverse coverage, including discussions of issues confronting women in poverty, women of colour, older women, immigrant women, and lesbian youth. That said, Ross also identified a distinct shift to the political right in Canada by 1990, as federal funding for women's groups including the National Action Committee for the Status (NAC) and for women's research and scholarly journals had disappeared.

In 2011, Barbara M. Freeman built on Becki Ross's work and undertook an analysis of lesbian content in three feminist periodicals. These included: *Kinesis* (1974-2001), published in Vancouver, which, until 1989, had Secretary of State Women's Programs funding; *Broadside* (1979-1989), produced in Toronto, which relied on

⁸⁰ Becki Ross, "Tracking Lesbian Speech: The Social Organization of Lesbian Periodical Publishing in Canada, 1973-1988," in *Women's Writing and the Literary Institution/L'écriture au féminin et l'institution littéraire*, ed. Claudine Potvin and Janice Williamson (Edmonton, AB: Research Institute for Comparative Literature, 1992), 183.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

provincial funding; and *Pandora* (1985-1994), published in Halifax, which lost its funding in 1989.⁸² For her study entitled, “Collective Visions: Lesbian Identity and Sexuality in Feminist Periodicals, 1979-1994,” Freeman interviewed the editors of each of the publications and found that all of them had lesbian editors and/or lesbians on the editorial collectives. In reviewing the issues for themes related to lesbian identity and sexuality, she further found that the percentage of lesbian content included the periodicals was relatively modest, with *Kinesis* ranging from 12 to 21 per cent, *Broadside* averaging between 4.5 and 15 per cent, and *Pandora* averaging between 8 and 10 per cent.⁸³ (According to Kelly Phipps, the lesbian content in *The Body Politic* (1972-1987), a primarily gay men’s publication produced in Toronto, averaged about 12 per cent.⁸⁴) In terms of substantive content in the three feminist publications that Freeman examined, she uncovered various analyses of lesbian identity (covering such topics as label versus names, choice versus essentialism, inclusion versus exclusion), sexual politics (butch-femme, sexual mimicry, pornography versus erotica), and feminist politics (lesbian rights, workers’ rights, abortion rights, immigrant women’s rights). Freeman maintained that the lesbians on the editorial collectives operated like their straight counterparts and acted as gatekeepers when it came to talking about lesbian issues. They were often reluctant to promote lesbian content out of fear or because of internalized homophobia.⁸⁵ Freeman’s work, in conjunction with Ross’ 1992 study of lesbian newsletters, highlights lesbian-

⁸² Barbara M. Freeman, “Collective Visions: Lesbian Identity and Sexuality in Feminist Periodicals, 1979-1994,” in Barbara M. Freeman, *Beyond Bylines* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2011), 159.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

⁸⁴ Kelly Phipps, “Lesbians and *The Body Politic*,” Unpublished paper presented at the conference, “We Demand”: History/Sex/Activism in Canada/« Nous demandons »: Histoire/Sexe/Activisme,” August 26, 2010.

⁸⁵ Freeman, “Collective Visions,” 164, 182.

feminist engagement with the broader feminist movement; statistically, however, lesbianism remained in the margins even in their own publications.

Lesbians in Mainstream Print Media

Unlike Canadian historians who have relied on oral interviews with lesbians, the comprehensive tabloid holdings housed in the Canadian Gay and lesbian Archives, or feminist periodicals,⁸⁶ Valerie Korinek, in her 1998 article, “‘Don’t Let Your Girlfriends Ruin Your Marriage’: Lesbian Imagery in *Chatelaine* Magazine, 1950-1969,” focused on lesbian representations in *Chatelaine* magazine in the 1950s and 1960s. Acknowledging that, in 1998, “recent works about lesbian and gay history in the post-war era point to the importance of bar culture, house parties and friendship networks and, much less frequently, pulp novels of the era as the means by which lesbians and gay men discovered each other and forged identities,”⁸⁷ the stated aim of her research was to uncover “explicit and implicit references to lesbians in Canada and provide a unique, alternative reading of a conventional Canadian women’s history source.”⁸⁸ As Korinek found, *Chatelaine’s* representations of lesbians shifted as magazine changed. In the 1950s and 1960s, lesbians were constructed as abnormal/sexually dysfunctional and then were constructed as a threat to marriage; in this context, *Chatelaine* cautioned heterosexual women to not let a girlfriend come between them and their husband, because “female friendships were adolescent, not adult, and could put considerable strain on a marriage.”⁸⁹ By the late

⁸⁶ These have included such publications as *Flash*, *Hush Free Press*, *Justice Weekly*, *Tab*, and *True News Times*. See “Tabloids - A Homosexual’s Best Frenemy,” *Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives*, <http://thestoriesproject.weebly.com/equality>, accessed January 24, 2015.

⁸⁷ Valerie J. Korinek, “‘Don’t Let Your Girlfriends Ruin Your Marriage’: Lesbian Imagery in *Chatelaine* Magazine, 1950-1969,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 33 (Autumn 1998), 84.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

1960s, lesbians were being represented as an example of Canadian women's diversity.⁹⁰ Apart from her splendid and concise lesbian historiography, Korinek engaged in a particular methodology which considered who or what was missing in a historical source and what was implied by the absence. Valerie Korinek built on this research in her 2000 book, entitled, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*.⁹¹ Using critical theory and feminist cultural analysis, she expanded the scope of her reading and analysis of *Chatelaine* magazine. Korinek documented the increasing but subtle feminist tone in the magazine, which she attributed to a responsive editorship. She mined readers' letters to the *Chatelaine* to uncover the breadth of the magazine's reach, Canadian women's reactions to the magazine, and how and to what extent the editors' responded to readers' opinions and comments in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹²

Building on Valerie Korinek's work, Barbara M. Freeman also conducted an analysis of *Chatelaine* in her 2006 article, "From No Go to No Logo: Lesbian Lives and Rights in *Chatelaine*." Combining "historical media analysis with cultural and critical theory," she focused "on the ways in which *Chatelaine* magazine represented lesbians' lives and their rights from 1966-2004."⁹³ She asserted that it is important that we "see lesbians of any era as they saw themselves at the time and as the media and society

⁹⁰ Ibid., 103-104.

⁹¹ Valerie Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

⁹² In contrast, Joan Sangster noted that the letters from individual women sent to the Royal Commission of the Status of Women in Canada in 1966-1967 went largely unread by the Commission. "Women's private letters to this royal commission offered an array of observations, opinions, and life histories that often invoked women's own experiences as evidence, which they contrasted in turn with the experience and views of male employers and lawmakers, and occasionally with those of more privileged women ... the commission staff tended to see women's personal evidence as more subjective and of less value than the hard empirical data of social science research." Joan Sangster, "Invoking Experience as Evidence," *Canadian Historical Review* 92 (March 2011): 159, accessed February 12, 2014, <http://www.metapress.com/content/8g85158111182810/fulltext.pdf>.

⁹³ Barbara M. Freeman, "From No Go to No Logo: Lesbian Lives and Rights in *Chatelaine*," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 21 (2006): 816, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/219616411/fulltextPDF?accountid=14846>.

regarded them, if we want to understand the historical context of their struggles.”⁹⁴ What Freeman found was that any lesbians featured were white, middle-class or aspiring, able-bodied, and between the ages of 25 and 55.⁹⁵ Most were given pseudonyms. She tracked the evolution of lesbians featured in the magazine, from the coverage of a middle-class and passing-as-straight lesbian in a 1966 article,⁹⁶ a semi-out femme professor in 1977,⁹⁷ two United Church ministers who were lesbians and partners in 1989,⁹⁸ and an out-at-work federal civil servant in 1995, to a post-modern, identity-free woman in 2000.⁹⁹ She argued that the growing visibility of lesbians was, in part, due to the changing perspectives of the magazine’s editors. By the time Rona Maynard left the magazine in 2004, according to Freeman, lesbians had become chic; however, “Politically speaking ... they had lost their sexual and racial identities. Sexual ‘fluidity’ gave *Chatelaine*’s readers a new ‘sexy’ subject to consider - heterosexually appropriated and reconstituted lesbianism - to help sell its magazines ... it rendered real-life lesbian and bisexual women, regardless of their race or any other elements of their identities, safe, unlabelled subjects.”¹⁰⁰ Freeman’s work, then, addresses the appropriation and production of a lesbian identity by a straight middle-class magazine and the simultaneous deconstruction of that identity.

Lesbians and the State

In their book, *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation*, published in 2009, Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile describe the post-

⁹⁴ Ibid., 816-817.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 831.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 820-821.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 822-823.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 827.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 833.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 833.

World War II period as an era when fear of the state was normal for lesbians and gays in and out of government. Drawing on diverse national security documents and over fifty interviews, including ten with lesbian participants, and combining Canadian social and political history,¹⁰¹ the authors examined the voices of those who were positioned *outside* the gay and lesbian organizational infrastructure. With respect to lesbians, the authors examine women in the military who have not been the subject of sustained historical inquiry. They also argue that lesbians in the civil service were perceived as less threatening than gay men as women in this sector held clerical and secretarial positions and in the civil service hierarchy, they were not considered important enough or seen as too powerless to endanger the state as traitors.¹⁰² Yet, outside the civil service, lesbians, as feminists/political activists who dared to publicly voice their political concerns in the 1960s, were subjected to state surveillance which included RCMP surveillance of the proceedings of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada.¹⁰³ Between the 1970s and 1990s, the RCMP labelled women's political campaigns, such as the Abortion Caravan and Wages for Housework, as subversive. The RCMP also characterized lesbians as "'Born Losers' who in appearance and attitude are both lower working class and welfare cases, and involved in living an alternative lifestyle."¹⁰⁴ It is in

¹⁰¹ Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 1-4.

¹⁰² Ibid., 54. Margot Canaday, an American scholar writing in 2009 supports this claim: "Gendered ideologies of citizenship, in other words, shaped the gendered regulation of perversion - male pervers mattered so much to the state because male citizens did ... Such tools were deployed against women only as they were more fully incorporated into the arena of first-class citizenship - most visibly, when they were permanently integrated into the military during the early years of the cold war. As women were more completely drawn into citizenship, then, state officials became more focused on lesbianism." Margot Canaday, *The Straight State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 12-13.

¹⁰³ Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*, 292.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 291.

this work that the oppressive tactics of the Canadian state directed to gays and lesbians is fully revealed.

In his 2002 book, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada*, Tom Warner holds that gays and lesbians growing up in twentieth-century Canada got a full dose of heterosexism, which he described as follows:

Heterosexism - the social supremacy of compulsory heterosexuality acceptably manifested in only certain prescribed ways - is thus systemic. Its supremacy is predicated on rigid gender roles (that is, sexism), the division of labour based on gender, the apportioning of social and economic benefits according to sex and marital status and the exclusivity of privatized, monogamous, heterosexual sexuality. All people are indoctrinated with heterosexism from birth, which fosters, socially, a formidable totalitarianism.¹⁰⁵

Based on an exhaustive and systematic review of primary sources, such as eyewitness accounts as well as gay and lesbian organization records and newsletters from across the country, Warner periodized the history of queer activism in Canada over the twentieth century as follows: the period between 1900 and 1974 was marked by lesbian and gay oppression and saw the development of a Canadian gay and lesbian liberation movements; the period between 1975 and 1984 saw the growth of the liberation movement as indicated by the proliferation of ever-changing acronymic organizations and was characterized by active police repression and the appearance of a conservative movement that was rabidly anti-gay; and finally, the period between 1985 and 1999, when organizations and leaders shifted their attention to the possibilities created by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which went into effect in 1985.

Warner is balanced in his treatment of lesbian engagement in mixed and separate lesbian-feminist groups. He expands our understanding of the context in which LOOT

¹⁰⁵ Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 12.

emerged, by examining the evolution of activist groups in Toronto and other cities as they sought to respond to changing social attitudes and legislation. He interviewed lesbian leaders from across Canada who were active in the 1970s and 80s; they indicated that one of the reasons why they chose to build separate lesbian organizations was because lesbian voices and issues tended to be marginalized in mixed gay and lesbian organizations. As Warner noted, “The priority for the new lesbian groups was on creating spaces free of the sexism and preoccupation of men, and the homophobia of women.”¹⁰⁶ This was a common theme articulated by lesbians who he interviewed in Kingston, Regina, Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton, and Calgary. In his work, Warner also charted the various discrimination cases that went before human rights tribunals and the Canadian courts; in addition to interviewing some of the plaintiffs, he documented how an elite group of gays and lesbians in Toronto and Ottawa shifted from pursuing individual cases of discrimination to focusing on the argument that lesbians and gays were persons and entitled to equal *citizenship* (regardless of sexual orientation), under the young Charter of Rights and Freedoms.¹⁰⁷ For Warner, this move toward a focus on equal citizenship supplanted cultural issues of interest to gays and lesbians, including sexual practices and representations, and marked the death knell of queer politics in Canada.¹⁰⁸ He wrote, “even if marriage rights are granted to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, what then? It is hard to see any other equality issues on the horizon.”¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, Warner remained optimistic that gays and lesbians would not be wholly assimilated and maintained that

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 346-347.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 214-216.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 357.

additional work was needed in the area of queer cultural and sexual issues, including censorship of reading materials and age-of-consent laws.¹¹⁰

In her 1999 book, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, Miriam Smith documented the legal history of the gay and lesbian *movement* in Canada between 1971 and 1995 based on first-person interviews, court decisions, the gay and lesbian press, as well as the mainstream print media.¹¹¹ She started from the premise that, “new social movements such as lesbian and gay rights may produce new political identities; rather than assuming a commonality of interest and identities, such movements may also make demands of the state and public policy.”¹¹² Smith showed that the law, like the dominant discourse, could “shape the politics of the ‘lesbian and gay rights lobby’.”¹¹³ As such, the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution and the passage of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 shaped lesbian and gay rights initiatives across the country. Like Warner, Smith’s work also demonstrated a shift in strategy from the fight (often by the individual) for social and cultural tolerance to *equality* rights; she hinted that this shift might have ‘straightened’ the movement in favour of litigated rights claims.¹¹⁴

Writing a historiography on Canadian lesbians is indeed a finite task. The lesbian subject (butch, femme, androgynous, respectable) of the past could be found in sleazy and chic bars and at house parties in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver in the 1950s and 60s. In the 1970s and 80s, we saw lesbians leaving the segregation of the bar

¹¹⁰ Warner followed up on the theme of a job left undone in his book, *Losing Control: Canada’s Social Conservatives in the Age of Rights* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2010). Warner argues that the ‘age of rights’ has benefited middle-class lesbians and gays and arguably, has assimilated them into a liberal politics. Meanwhile, abortion rights are under attack, prostitution laws endanger sex workers, and sex education curricula only recognizes heterosexuality.

¹¹¹ Miriam Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

and organizing for change (within and outside LGBT groups) and becoming visible and loud as they formed and re-formed left-wing lesbian, LGBT, and feminist organizations. Lesbians produced newspapers, held national conferences, made and promoted music, art and literature. Geographers placed lesbians in time, place, and space; sociologists examined our organizations and our social movement(s), and journalists parse our publications and our place in mainstream publications and media. We *were* here.

Chapter Two

The Personal

Feminism begins, but cannot end, with the discovery by an individual of her self-consciousness as a woman.¹¹⁵

This chapter focuses on the personal lives of the eleven self-identified lesbian informants I interviewed. It begins by offering a general profile of the participants. Drawing on the oral interviews, the chapter then explores the participants' thoughts on "who and what is a lesbian" and such themes as the coming out process as it related to family, religion, and other life events, as well as the cultural milieu and political environment that influenced these women. What their oral histories make clear is that heterosexuality was not in the cards for these eleven women ... they knew they were different.

The Participants

The eleven participants are all self-identified lesbians currently living in Canada and born between 1949 and 1960. Two women were born in 1951, one in 1952, three in 1954, one in 1955, two in 1959, and two in 1960. Their places of birth included Ontario (2), Quebec (2); Manitoba (2); Alberta (1); British Columbia (2); Ohio (1); and Minnesota (1). All are white and are from Anglo/northern European backgrounds. Two of the informants are Jewish and eight were raised or baptized in Protestant faiths; one was baptized in the Roman Catholic church. Three were devout Christians; two endured a backlash from their religious groups because of their lesbianism, while a third felt censured by lesbians for being Christian. In terms of class background, three came from working-class backgrounds, while one was raised in the child welfare system for part of

¹¹⁵ Adrienne Rich, "Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women," *Heresies* 1 (Fall 1997): 53, accessed April 13, 2013, <http://heresiesfilmproject.org/archive/#1160>.

her life. Another informant started her life in the middle class, but by the age of sixteen, she had joined the working class as the relationship between her and her parents broke down over her sexual orientation and practices. All were raised by heterosexual parents, except for one who was placed in foster care as a young child. All are university educated, have achieved middle-class status, and are professionals working as self-employed entrepreneurs, lawyers, doctors, professors, researchers, and executives. Eight identify as feminists, two are hard to pin down in terms of a fixed politics, while one is unreservedly a lesbian separatist-materialist; none were asked about their political party affiliation. Four informants have married since 2005 when same-sex marriage became legal in Canada, but the other seven are generally ill-disposed to or ambivalent about same-sex or, for that matter, heterosexual marriage. Two of the informants are partnered with each other and have two children. One informant declared recent sexual liaisons with men, but identifies as lesbian, not bisexual (see Appendix D: Participant Reference Chart).

Who or What is a Lesbian?

When asked who or what is a lesbian, seven of the women agreed that attraction/desire for women and having sex with women defined their lesbianism, and two of these mentioned love for women. All the participants seemed to subscribe to Terry Castle's general definition: "a lesbian is someone whose primary emotional and erotic allegiance is to other women."¹¹⁶ Four, however, expanded on this definition. One narrator, Nancy Poole quoted *from memory* the Radicalesbians' definition of lesbian: "The rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion"¹¹⁷ and then settled on Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon's definition from *Lesbian/Woman*, which she pulled out to

¹¹⁶ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 15.

¹¹⁷ Radicalesbians, *The Woman-Identified Woman* (Pittsburgh: Know Inc., 1970), 1. Nancy Poole still has early pamphlets of *The Furies* as well as copies of Adrienne Rich's early work.

consult: “A lesbian is a woman whose primary erotic, psychological, emotional and social interest is in a member of her own sex, even though that interest may not be overtly expressed.”¹¹⁸ Mayne Ellis, another participant, also broadened the definition of a lesbian as “a woman who recognizes and rejoices in the fact that her most intimate, her most passionate, her most self-giving relationships will be with other women.”¹¹⁹ Here we see joy in loving women and a sense of sharing of the self. Yet another participant, Chantal Brodeur, broadened the definition and saw a lesbian as “a woman who has a sexual interest in other women ... is a woman that feels utterly comfortable around other women, and it - it’s a person of strength.”¹²⁰ Finally, one other participant, Miriam Kaufman, provided a two-part definition: “Anyone who defines themselves as lesbian ... and one whose main emotional and sexual commitments and attractions were to other women.”¹²¹ Overall, there was consensus that lesbians are attracted to women and prefer women sexually and emotionally. The subtleties of the ‘lesbian defined’ remained with the individuals.¹²²

In contrast, scholars have tended to see lesbianism as a category that is open to interpretation. In 1981, Gayle Rubin argued that we were but a social construct:

What angers me most is the assumption that lesbianism is not a social construct. The fact [is] that lesbianism is as much a social construct of the current system as anyone else’s sexuality. It has a different, specific relationship to the system as a whole. Everything does. But lesbianism relies on aspects of the system as it is. For instance, the sense of lesbianism being a rebellious sexuality is predicated on male supremacy.

¹¹⁸ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman* (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1972), 7. Nancy Poole, interview by Janet Trainor, Victoria, BC, October 9, 2011. All citations to the oral interviews include the interviewee’s *last name* as well as the transcript *page number* and *line numbers*.

¹¹⁹ Mayne Ellis, interview by Janet Trainor, Victoria, BC, November 4, 2011, 28: 1251-1253.

¹²⁰ Chantal Brodeur, interview by Janet Trainor, Victoria, BC, November 30, 2011, 14: 594-596.

¹²¹ Miriam Kaufman, interview by Janet Trainor via Skype, January 15, 2012, 13-14: 589-599.

¹²² For example, Judy Lightwater defined a “lesbian as somebody who likes having sex with women.” Judy Lightwater, interview by Janet Trainor, Victoria, BC, October 21, 2011, 9: 364.

If men did not oppress women, that valence would presumably be gone from lesbianism.¹²³

We are ‘in opposition to’, according to Rubin; we are of the binary and cannot exist outside that binary. Curiously, we are because we aren’t. In another take on lesbians ten years later, Ann Ferguson noted that, “Lesbian as a category challenges the essentialism of the idea of the eternal masculine versus the eternal feminine, defined as natural complements, but does not have a fixed content or essence.”¹²⁴ She also declared lesbians a sub-culture, “a culture of resistance ... which challenges the social roles and valuation given to it by the dominant culture.”¹²⁵ For Ferguson, identity becomes a subjective sense of culture or “a consciously held identification of others as members, along with self, as part of a particular group.”¹²⁶ By 1993, Shane Phelan suggested “that the process of declaring one’s lesbianism is a revelation, an acknowledgement of a previously hidden truth. By implication, coming out is a process of discovery or admission rather than one of construction or choice.”¹²⁷ Phelan’s phrasing here is puzzling: does ‘discovery’ mean the same as ‘admission’? Does construction precede the ability to make a choice? One of my participants agreed with Rubin, but many agree partially with Ferguson as they chose to see themselves as hetero-societal outlaws rather than as victims.

Coming Out Stories: Context, Responses, and Influences

In the interviews, the participants told their ‘coming out’ stories for the umpteenth time. They shared their varied journeys from the private sphere of curiosity,

¹²³ Deidre English, Amber Hollibaugh, and Gayle Rubin, “Talking Sex: A Conversation on Sexuality and Feminism,” *Socialist Review* 11 (July-August 1981): n.p. Reprinted in *Feminist Review* 11 (July 1982): 43, accessed January 9, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1394826>.

¹²⁴ Ann Ferguson, “Is There a Lesbian Culture?,” in *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures*, ed. Jeffner Allen (Albany NT: SUNY Press, 1990), 73.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹²⁷ Shane Phelan, “(Be)Coming Out: Lesbian Identity and Politics,” *Signs* 18 (1993): 773, accessed January 9, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174906>.

contemplation, and consummation of same-sex attraction to the public sphere of proclamation and performance, not necessarily of same-sex attraction, but rather of action deriving from it and the influences that brought them there. To be sure, the participants' admissions of same-sex desire occurred in a hostile heterosexual environment. They came out at different times in their lives - often it was a two-stage process. First, they came out to themselves and then to family and friends and, others. Coming out is an imperfect process at best. In 1985, Mariana Valverde described a four-step process: first, the decision to come out to a friend or family member; second, the actual disclosure to a friend or family member; third, the post-announcement period where the lesbian waits while they digest the news; and fourth, the friend or family member acts as though the subject "has been disposed of" and no longer needs to be mentioned.¹²⁸ Regardless of the *actual* stages, the participants shared what can best be described as the freeness of outness and depicted the emergence of a complete person comfortable with and at times defiant about their sexuality in a world still hostile to non-heterosexuals and uppity women. Unlike their forbears who held space in the marginal world of taverns and bars or in the closets of the suburbs, this group of eleven unique and accomplished lesbians were seen *and* heard.

Nancy Poole was born in a small town of 3,000 in eastern Ontario in 1951 and was the middle of three sisters. Her father was a leader in business and in the community, while her mother first stayed at home and then started her own successful business when the children were at school. Poole's father's prominent position with the town's major employer meant that the children felt under constant scrutiny, which was enforced by their parents. Maintaining respectability at all times in the eyes of the community was a

¹²⁸ Mariana Valverde, *Sex, Power, and Pleasure* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1985), 93.

requirement. Poole who came out while pursuing graduate work at the University of Toronto in the 1970s also indicated that her hometown was not a conducive environment in which to come to an understanding of her sexual orientation. There was, in her works, “no diversity other than, if you considered Catholics and Protestants diversity, and the one Chinese family that ran the laundry ... or ran the restaurant ... And - but there was no sense of difference, other than, as I said, religious differences, and there was an Indigenous people’s reserve right near there, the Tyendinaga Reserve. The stuff around lesbians and gays was so hidden that it took me a while.”¹²⁹ Even when she entered Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario as an undergraduate student, she had no concept of homosexuality: “I remember going through the Club Night and whatever at Queen’s and noticing that there was a Queen’s Homophile Association. But, you know, I completely blanked on what that meant. I had no kind of hook to hang it on, right? I thought it was, you know, some kind of stamp collecting club or something like that, you know. I was *so* naïve.”¹³⁰

In retrospect, however, Poole suggested that perhaps the signs were there as a child: “I brought along a picture here for you to see, of me at age three, and you know, on some level, one would wonder why I didn’t realize I was a lesbian, because I’m standing there in all my lesbian authority, jeans and all, in the ‘50s.”¹³¹ She also shared an incident that happened when she was about eight years old, which suggested that she would carve a different path:

[My mother] had reprimanded my sister about something and I had challenged her on it and saying that it was unjust - what she was - what she was doing to my sister, and standing up ... to her. And, at that time,

¹²⁹ Poole, 2: 70-76.

¹³⁰ Poole, 1: 37-42.

¹³¹ Poole, 1: 28-31.

she said two things. One, she called me *Miss Righteous Indignation*, which was sort of an indication I was likely to become a feminist. But she also told me at that time that I had an overdeveloped sense of justice. And so I remember going off and thinking about that for a while. I have no idea why she said that to an eight-year-old, or a seven-year-old, or whatever it was, but we'll just leave that aside and go on with the part that was interesting to me ... And I went back to her and I - to my mum - I guess, about a week after she'd told me I had an overdeveloped sense of justice and told her that I didn't think that I had an overdeveloped sense of justice, that actually you couldn't have an overdeveloped sense of justice, because justice was like a circle. It was, and you couldn't have more of or less of it. It was a concept that was inviolable, basically. I obviously didn't use that word. So anyway, to me - so when you - then arrive in Toronto a few - many years later, and hear someone speak about women's inequality and the need for social change on - and improvement in the status of women - it was the - like that moment of justice, you know, the - of justice, where I realized that this is - this is always who I've been, and that this is always what I'd felt and here was someone sort of affirming or naming or validating my reality. And - and that I had - and that's why I was earlier talking so much about not coming out any earlier, if you didn't have the context.¹³²

After graduating from Queen's University, Poole headed to Toronto to undertake graduate work at the University of Toronto in 1972. There she met other women and attended lectures and consciousness-raising meetings that explored a new politics - feminism:

... really the thing for me that was the big shift was that, in 1972, I went to U of T. And I learned about feminism there. I went to a lecture by an Australian woman feminist ... and I was blown away. I realized that, you know, this was so much of what I cared about. And so I started to hang out with - with feminists and so I - I kind of - you know, in that period between '72 and '76, I was very active and learning and growing as a feminist before I actually came out. And it was interesting, because, you know, those were heady times in terms of feminism and - and I feel like it was very much a process of 'coming out' as a feminist. You know, nowadays, I don't think people would have seen that as - in the same way,

¹³² Poole, 3-4: 126-151.

but it was both a coming out as a feminist and, later, a coming out as a lesbian that - that happened for me in those years.¹³³

For Poole, then, her lesbianism had an escort—feminism. She came out to friends by attending a lesbian conference: “And I - officially, when - when I came out was in, I believe, 1976. It was at the time of the second national lesbian conference that was held in Ottawa. That’s how I remember the date. And I remember that I was living in a co-op with a bunch of other women, including some lesbians, and, at the time of everyone deciding to go to Montreal - or go to Ottawa, for the conference, I said, ‘I’d like to come along’.”¹³⁴ In other words, her lesbianism was discovered in concert with and informed by a theoretical engagement with feminism and personal engagement with a feminist-lesbian cohort. For her, the two continued to inform each other:

So from that sense, you know, when you think about which affected which for me, did lesbianism affect my feminism or did my feminism affect my lesbianism? I think, you know, it’s - it’s hard to pull them apart but, if I had to say one over the other, I would say my feminism affected my lesbianism, and continues to inform it. At the same time, you know, you know, they’re - they’re kind of inextricable and it’s, you know, they both pop up in - in different - in different contexts.¹³⁵

Apart from a prodigious work ethic that both her parents possessed and promulgated, Poole veered radically away from her middle-class upbringing and, for many years, she lived in poverty working as a concert producer, volunteering at women’s shelters, and taking on contract work that paid very little. She did not get her first ‘straight’ job until she was thirty-one years old. After admitting and embracing her lesbianism and her feminism, she was also actively involved in women’s and lesbian arts and cultural life in Toronto in the 1970s and early 1980s. As feminists and lesbians

¹³³ Poole, 2-3: 82-95.

¹³⁴ Poole, 1: 20-25.

¹³⁵ Poole, 16: 722-727.

produced books and tracts, Poole was reading them, analyzing and discussing them, and using them in formal and informal settings. Poole asserted that, at the time, there was a common culture which now no longer exists: “...at the time we were first lesbians in the 1970s in Toronto, everybody read the same books, heard the same music.”¹³⁶ In part, that distinct culture revolved around the Toronto Women’s Bookstore (closed in 2012) and other women’s bookstores across Canada.¹³⁷ To supplement her memories of her early years and her involvement in the lesbian community in Toronto in the 1970s, Poole brought artefacts (photos, posters, etc.) to the interview. If we go back to the photo she showed me, Poole *has* worn her lesbian authority *well*, well past the age of three.

Judy Lightwater started her interview by providing a concise biography:

I was born in 1951 in St. Paul’s, Minnesota, U.S.A. I had two siblings, a brother and sister. I have parent - or, I did have parents. Middle class, ethnicity: Ashkenazi Jewish, Russian, Polish, Caucasian. Marital status: I have been married to a man; I am now married to a woman. I have two stepchildren from a previous relationship with a woman. I have - and I was raised in the Jewish religion although now I don’t practice Judaism. I would classify myself as a - I would classify myself as a Buddhist at this point.¹³⁸

When she was a teenager, Lightwater had crushes on school mates, but “there was no real language for that ... I think the first time I actually named it lesbianism was probably the year before I came out. So that would be 1977.”¹³⁹ She was 26. She went on to recount that, “the first thing that made me think that I might be a lesbian was when I had been carrying on sexual relationships with straight women for about a year and

¹³⁶ Poole, 17: 777-779.

¹³⁷ These bookstores sold such books as Robin Morgan’s *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*, and Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*, all of which were published in 1970. Thereafter, more books were published, including Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1971), Phyllis Chesler’s *Women and Madness* (1972), Ti-Grace Atkinson’s *Amazon Odyssey* (1974) and more.

¹³⁸ Lightwater, 1: 9-15.

¹³⁹ Lightwater, 1: 38, 41-43.

starting to think I wasn't interested in being married to my husband anymore."¹⁴⁰

Lightwater also highlighted how, for her, lesbian sexuality and Toronto lesbian culture came to inform each other. From experimentation with women lovers to lesbian conferences and a cultural body of work that explained and celebrated women-loving women, she had access to information that allowed her to form and express a lesbian life:

As soon as I came out, I started writing for *Broadside*. So that was one of the first things that I - as a lesbian and as a feminist in Toronto, which was an amazing place to come out because there was so much lesbian activity There was no end of lesbians, feminists, and activities that you could be a part of in terms of that, finding out about all that. So I - the first thing I read, actually, was Adrienne Rich's poetry. That was the first thing that I read that really spoke to the fact that I - it was the thing that reflected back to me that I could be a lesbian and there was somebody writing about it.¹⁴¹

The penny dropped for Lightwater: "I mean, all of a sudden something hit my brain and I - and so Cris Williamson and Adrienne Rich were probably the two things that kind of made me realize that there was language for this, there was music for it, there was poetry for it."¹⁴² In 1980, she attended the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, an annual celebration of lesbian arts and music.¹⁴³ Like Poole, Lightwater provided artefacts and documents to add context to her story. She indicated that, to some extent, she missed the old days of robust lesbian-feminist politics and lesbian-only cultural events like the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, but then added that, "It's nice - it's nice in some

¹⁴⁰ Lightwater, 2: 47-50.

¹⁴¹ Lightwater, 3: 97-106. Some of her writings were penned under previous names. Her birth name was Judy Liefschultz; she became Judy Kovnats while married in the 1970s; she then reverted back to Liefschultz in the 1980s; and then took the surname Lightwater. Her work can be found in *Broadside: A Feminist Review* at <http://broadsidefeminist.com/index.php/table-of-contents/>. Some of it was written under the name Liefschultz; see, for example, *Broadside* 1, no. 9 (August 1980); 2, no. 5 (February 1981); and 2, no. 7 (May 1981).

¹⁴² Lightwater, 3: 134-136

¹⁴³ Launched in 1975, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival focuses on lesbian and women's music, arts, and culture. Festival goers were introduced to lesbian artists and musicians, which they subsequently invited to perform in their own communities.

ways to have been mainstreamed into - you know, every TV show having to have one [a lesbian]. So I don't miss - I - what I mean is, as a jurisdiction, I - I appreciate the fact that, as lesbians and gays, we don't have to worry about our rights any more. But I - yeah, I miss it as a lesbian, too."¹⁴⁴

Lightwater suffered physical and psychological abuse as a child; her mother was mentally ill and family life was difficult. Although she severed contact with her parents, she remained in contact with her older brother and younger sister although they are not close. Her straight friends and some of her family members were supportive after she came out: "...my other community, which was composed of all my straight friends, and all of my family, who didn't have a problem with me deciding to be a lesbian, so I didn't go through a loss of friends and family because of that - they still constituted a big part of my community, too."¹⁴⁵ The effects of Lightwater's early trauma linger and as a result, she embraces a large cohort of friends and ex-lovers (and their lovers) as her extended family. She has two stepchildren from a previous relationship and was and is a conscientious grandmother. She values friendships and the family she has consciously formed around her. And as discussed in the next chapter, her past activities made a critical contribution to furthering the rights of BC and Canadian lesbians and gays.

Roberta Benson was born and raised in a Montreal suburb. Her mother was a British war bride. She is the middle child and has an older brother and a younger sister. Her family moved to Etobicoke (a middle-class Toronto suburb) in the 1960s where Roberta finished high school. She attended Queen's University and graduated with a law degree. She is tall and willowy with a gentle voice and a disarming sense of irony.

¹⁴⁴ Lightwater, 20: 888-81.

¹⁴⁵ Lightwater, 5: 190-193.

Benson had a sense that she was different from a young age. Her mother gave her a copy of *The Well of Loneliness* when she was about 13 or 14:

... she asked me how - what I thought of it and I said that I was really appalled that, you know, Stephen's mother had kind of disowned her and had nothing more to do more with her - about her, and my mother said to me, 'Oh, I would - I would do the same thing if it was my daughter,' or 'I would have done the same thing if it was my daughter.' So I was just like - shocked. So anyway, we didn't discuss further after that.¹⁴⁶

This conversation would have deterred Benson from telling her mother about another experience she had had about a year earlier:

Well, I'll tell you about my first sighting of - I'm pretty sure - a woman who was a lesbian. Although I really don't think I knew what she was. It was intuitive. We lived in Dorval [PQ] and I was at my - at a - I think it was a bowling - combined bowling-alley, pool hall down in - in the main street of Dorval. And there was this woman who was sooo butch. I had never seen anything like that in my life before and I just knew, right away, that she was different, and that somehow on some level I knew why she was different. So it was a source of quite a bit of interest and - you know - but confusion, too.¹⁴⁷

The feelings, however, did not go away. As Benson recounted, "a couple of years later after that, and I'm realizing, 'Hey, I'm not attracted to guys in the way all these other girls, they're, like, on and on about guys and this and that,' and it was just, like, 'What the hell?' So, yeah, so then you do the secret library searches, you know."¹⁴⁸ Benson, like some of the other participants, used the library to research homosexuality.

In high school and into university, she had a relationship with a woman she met in high school. After a gap year in Europe between university and law school, she came to the realization that, "This is it, I really am a lesbian and that's the only way I can live my

¹⁴⁶ Roberta Benson, interview by Janet Trainor via telephone, December 15, 2011, 4: 181-190.

¹⁴⁷ Benson, 4: 143-151.

¹⁴⁸ Benson, 6: 247-251.

life ... it was gradual - I mean, I had known it, it was that I was allowing myself to know it, I guess. Accept it.”¹⁴⁹ A lesbian, “for me, it was just a woman who loves other women and wants to have a sexual relationship with them.”¹⁵⁰ Benson acknowledged her previously hidden truth at the age of twenty-six. Like Poole, she too linked feminism and lesbianism: “There was this period of time there where I thought that, you know, it was absolutely the only way to go, lesbian feminist.”¹⁵¹

Benson met Miriam Kaufman at Queen’s University where they were studying law and pediatric medicine respectively. They dated, fell in love, and became life partners in 1982. Kaufman’s middle-class family lived in Kingston, Ontario. When Kaufman later interned in Hamilton, Ontario, their relationship logged many miles, but the depth of their commitment to each other has persisted to this day. Their relationship took an unusual turn when it became clear that Kaufman wanted children. As Benson stated, “I never saw myself as having a life, like, with children and, you know - partner and - and stuff like that. I mean, I’m not sure how much ahead I looked but I - I just didn’t anticipate that at all.”¹⁵² Kaufman got pregnant by artificial insemination and in 1986, Jacob was born. His sister, Aviva, arrived four years later. Children changed everything for Benson and Kaufman.

Initially, Benson’s parents did not accept the pregnancy: “My mother was not pleased at the news, and she also thought of it very much as something Miriam was doing. She didn’t see me initially at all as a - as a parent. And she saw herself as having no role, and my father no role, because what was it to them? Wasn’t related to them, this

¹⁴⁹ Benson, 8: 331-332, 338-339.

¹⁵⁰ Benson, 23: 1036-1937.

¹⁵¹ Benson, 9: 379-381.

¹⁵² Benson, 12: 539-541.

child.”¹⁵³ Three years later, Benson’s parents bonded with baby Aviva. “It was definitely a process. I think there were a couple of things. One is she [Mom] bonded quite strongly with Aviva. Aviva was a baby. She really felt a strong connection to her. And so she became more interested. I - I do think that that legal decision made a difference to them because somehow it made it that they really were their grandchildren.”¹⁵⁴

At this time, Benson was working for a small firm of Christian evangelical lawyers and she told her boss Bill that she would be taking time off after Jacob was born. Ironically, Bill and her co-workers did not query her relationship or her later decision to work part-time to spend more time with Jacob and later, with Aviva:

‘Oh, by the way, you know, Miriam’s going to have a baby and I’m going to take some time off.’ You know. ‘Oh, isn’t that nice!’ He thought I was helping out this poor single mom. (laughs) This kind of fallen woman. So, anyway, it - you know, and then, once Jacob was born, I found I could not continue on in the - you know, working full-time and seeing him a little bit here and there. I absolutely wanted to spend more time with him. So I said to Bill, ‘I’m only going to work part-time,’ so I worked three days a week after the - the first two weeks, I guess. And at that - I just told Bill I was doing that and he just accepted it.¹⁵⁵

There were, however, stresses associated with being a lesbian parent of an unexpected *boy* child and dealing with attitudes within the gay community. As Benson further recounted:

It was so exciting. But it was very strange, also. You know, just bringing him into - well, first of all, the fact that he was *male* was quite a shock to both of us. (laughter) I mean, I remember having these really vivid dreams shortly after his birth. And I - one of them, there was this, like, totally naked man standing in our apartment all of a sudden and I’m, like, ‘What?’

¹⁵³ Benson, 14: 638-641.

¹⁵⁴ Benson, 19: 838-842. Benson is referring to an Ontario Provincial Court 1995 decision that allowed same-sex spouses to adopt their partner’s children. For more on this case and other similar ones, see Miriam Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999): 157-161.

¹⁵⁵ Benson, 15: 655-663.

What are you doing here?’ You know. And Miriam had the same - we just never expected that, of course, in - in lovely feminist Lesbian-land and, everybody has female children.¹⁵⁶

Two gay men wanted to adopt Jacob thinking two lesbians would not want a boy child. Other people and lesbian friends had to adjust with the new family unit which included two mothers: “The other shocks were people had no idea how to relate to us; had no idea how to understand two mothers.”¹⁵⁷ Benson herself had to adjust to her new role and make a cultural shift in her own mind as she replicated, in a way, her own parents’ response:

I remember being at a party with him with some law school friends and so on, and I had a - I was wearing a Snuggly with Jacob in it when he was about six weeks old or something. And somebody said to - you know, kind of yelled across the room, ‘Oh, is he yours?’ and I went, ‘No.’ And I thought to myself, ‘cause I am understanding it as ‘Did you give birth to this baby?’ And so, of course, I’ve told him ‘No, I didn’t, so he’s not mine,’ and then I - I - I just felt terrible! Here is this child that I’ve already come to love and here I’m saying, ‘No, not mine.’¹⁵⁸

While Benson’s life trajectory changed when she became a parent, she was surprised at her own maternal inclinations. Ten years later, as discussed in the next chapter, she and Kaufman would be immersed in a Section 15 Charter challenge to have Roberta Benson declared the legal step-parent of Jacob and Aviva. Benson summed up her thoughts on leading a lesbian life as follows:

I think it was really different growing up as - and feeling, as I did, like an outsider to the sort of general mainstream population. Your family, what you see around you. And it - you know, it certainly had its painful moments, but on the other hand, I think you also have an awareness of things that other people sort of just being able to follow along a nice little

¹⁵⁶ Benson, 16: 687-697.

¹⁵⁷ Benson, 16: 705-729.

¹⁵⁸ Benson, 17: 735-742.

straight path, shall we say, just completely may not appreciate or understand so ... Yeah, I think it's definitely enriched and broadened my world, you know.¹⁵⁹

Miriam Kaufman, Benson's partner, was born in Cleveland Ohio in 1954. She recalled that her first interaction with lesbianism was in a high school debate when she said that lesbianism was horrible:

And then I dropped out of high school and I went down to North Carolina and ended up working full-time in the anti-war movement. This was during the Vietnam War. And there was a women's collective that came to Fort Bragg to do work with women in the army, so I joined them and - I mean, I had already been quite involved in feminist stuff before, but that was really - you know, we were kind of a - we had some big conference there. I can't remember what it was, a bunch of women, anyway, and I think it was just kind of like what everybody did, like, everybody said they were a lesbian and they came out.¹⁶⁰

She became a lesbian by association and for political reasons. Her early influences were Marxist and radical lesbian in content. When she entered the nursing program in university in 1972, she told everyone she was a lesbian, although she dated women and men. Her father was a constant in her life and her "main mentor," and he encouraged her to enter medical school rather than staying in nursing. She entered the Queen's University medical program when she was about twenty-five years old. She met Roberta at a dance at Queen's in 1978 and they met again a week later at another dance. She recalled:

I was just thinking, you know, 'I just feel so weird when I'm with Roberta, like, what -- what's that? Like, it's just this really weird feeling I get all the time when I'm with her. Every time I'm with her, I feel this way. When I'm not with her, I'm thinking about her and, like, what could that feeling be?' Which is unusual for me, I don't usually bother thinking about stuff like that. And then I thought, 'Oh, my gosh! I'm in love with

¹⁵⁹ Benson, 24: 1068- 1074.

¹⁶⁰ Kaufman, 2: 85-92

her! That's what that weird feeling is?' So I thought, 'Well, I can't say anything in the *middle* of the movie.' I waited til after.¹⁶¹

She came out to her parents only after meeting Roberta, because "that's when there was a point to it."¹⁶²

Kaufman, a diminutive one metre fifty, had a lightness of being in her responses during the interview. Her optimism is intertwined with the idea that there are no barriers in life that cannot be surmounted. For example, on getting pregnant, she stated:

I don't really like to think things through. Really - you know, I find conversations, making decisions, I find that really difficult. Like, to me, it's just much easier to just do stuff. So I was - I was thinking - you know, I just always assumed I would have kids and I wanted to have kids, so I - I think Roberta and I talked about it some. We certainly hadn't made any decisions. And then I said I was going to go and meet with a gynecologist just to find out about insemination and everything. And she said, 'But you're not making any decisions, right?' And I said, 'No, I'm just going to go and find out what - you know, can we do it? Et cetera, et cetera.' So I went, and then I came back, and she said, 'How did it go?' And I said, 'Well, my first insemination will be the next time I ovulate.'¹⁶³

She was by no means blasé about having a child as her fears came to the surface right after becoming pregnant: "Oh my gosh, how can we bring children up in such a horrible world? You know, what's it going to be like with lesbian parents who don't have a dad? How are we actually going to parent? Will either of us be any good as a parent?"¹⁶⁴

Like Benson, Kaufman also reflected on a lesbian life: "I just feel my life has been ... enlarged and opened up by being lesbian and ... part of that, is being able to, without doing anything except living my daily life, be different ... that I'm not part of the

¹⁶¹ Kaufman, 5:225-232.

¹⁶² Kaufman, 7: 288.

¹⁶³ Kaufman, 12:518-528.

¹⁶⁴ Kaufman, 12: 537-539.

mainstream in this ...”¹⁶⁵ Yet, she notes that when she was younger, “I felt more lesbian then because I was much more involved in the political discourse around it. But less lesbian because it wasn’t as much of an actual practical fact of life, which it is now.”¹⁶⁶

While I conducted individual interviews with Benson and Kaufman, which were scheduled about one month apart, I also interviewed them together because I specifically wanted to talk about their decision to have children, their lives as parents in the 1980s, and their decision to pursue formal step-parental rights for Benson through a Section 15 Charter challenge. The couple’s decision to have children exposed them to a wide range of experiences as lesbians, parents, daughters, professionals, and citizens.

The decision to get pregnant appears to have been mostly Kaufman’s with ‘some’ input from Benson. The telling of the story brings up a humorous bantering between the two. While Benson stated in her individual interview, as noted above, that, “I never saw myself as having a life, like, children and...a partner...I just didn’t anticipate that at all,”¹⁶⁷ Kaufman took a very different stance: “I didn’t see why I shouldn’t be [a parent].”¹⁶⁸ The couple both had misgivings about the road ahead with a new baby, but they coped like all new parents: “We had all the struggles of straight parents, but we didn’t have the support,” so they set up a support system with other lesbian parents.¹⁶⁹ The couple also worried about how other parents and children would react to their lesbian relationship when their children started to go to school. Benson noted, “I felt insecure ... when the kids were young. I was afraid what people would think if we had their kids over

¹⁶⁵ Kaufman, 19: 856-860.

¹⁶⁶ Kaufman, 14: 615-618.

¹⁶⁷ Benson, 12: 502-510.

¹⁶⁸ Miriam Kaufman (Roberta Benson and Miriam Kaufman, interview by Jan Trainor, via Skype, January 15, 2012), 21: 934.

¹⁶⁹ Kaufman (Benson and Kaufman), 22: 987-1000.

to our house and that they would find out we were lesbians and they wouldn't trust us anymore ... I found that very difficult to navigate.”¹⁷⁰

Benson and Kaufman also had to contend with each of their parents' responses to both their relationship and to their decision to become parents. Early in their relationship, Benson's mother had expressed concern about Kaufman being Jewish, while Kaufman's mother worried about Benson not being male nor Jewish: “My mom's one of those people - like it took her a few months to get used to Roberta and I ... But then she came around, I think pretty quickly, and really if she could have changed anything about Roberta, she would have made her Jewish.”¹⁷¹ Both mothers had reservations about their daughters becoming parents. As discussed above, Benson's parents were reluctant grandparents when Jacob was born, and as Benson stated, they were not open with their friends about her sexuality or parenthood: “My mother had never acknowledged to any of her friends that I was a lesbian so then all of a sudden I have a baby with another woman?”¹⁷² After Aviva was born four years later, however, her parents began to educate themselves on lesbian and gay issues and actively supported the United Church's policy of full membership for gays and lesbians in the liturgy and practices of the church. Kaufman indicated that her mother mainly worried that a child of a lesbian and a Jewish lesbian at that would be treated as ‘being different’. When Jacob was born, however, her parents were and remain enthusiastic grandparents. They also told their friends about their daughter's same-sex partner and the new members of the Kaufman family.

Benson and Kaufman's lesbian friends responded in a variety of ways to their decision to have children. Some drifted off because all of a sudden, the new mothers were

¹⁷⁰ Benson (Benson and Kaufman), 24: 1075-1078.

¹⁷¹ Kaufman (Benson and Kaufman), 32: 1453-1458.

¹⁷² Benson (Benson and Kaufman), 33:1473-1478.

no fun. Others who also had children helped form a support group for lesbians with children as they all learned to be parents and experienced the joys and fears of parenthood within a heteronormative context. Benson and Kaufman's management of their respective medical and legal careers was planned in concert as both worked full-time and part-time at different times to accommodate their parental responsibilities. As middle-class professionals, there was no necessity to engage in gendered decision-making as to which one would claim breadwinner status.

Susan Strega's early life was very different from that of the other participants. Born in 1954 in the poorest neighbourhood in Winnipeg, she became a ward of the child welfare system at the age of nine or ten; over the next eight years, she was placed foster homes, lived with relatives, and, as a teenager, spent some time in the juvenile and women's correction system for committing petty crimes as a street kid. With regard to her lesbianism, she stated that, "I don't know if I was ever *not* a lesbian ... I can remember having a huge crush on my second-grade teacher."¹⁷³ Given her social isolation and as an avid reader, she explored homosexuality by reading books such as Franklin Caprio's *Female Homosexuality* and Christine Jorgensen's *My Personal Autobiography*, both written in 1967. She described the influence that Caprio's *Female Homosexuality* had on her, as it represented lesbians as unhappily butches who preyed on innocent dupes or feminine women/femmes:

...and so for a while I thought maybe this - I - am actually meant to be a man. And for some reason, I'm not. And one of the things that I think is incredibly fortunate in my upbringing is that there wasn't this proliferation of transgender as an identity. Because I think, if that had been available to me, I might have thought, building on my thinking - because I didn't fit into Caprio's idea of what a lesbian was. I had

¹⁷³ Susan Strega, interview by Janet Trainor, Victoria B.C., November 18, 2011, 2: 66-67.

attractions to girls and to women. And, if I was not this thing that Caprio called a female homosexual or lesbian, then I had to somehow be a man.¹⁷⁴

Christine Jorgensen's story of her surgical transition from male to female further confused the young lesbian. Strega was also influenced by Harold Robbins' popular novel, *The Carpet-baggers* and the San Francisco lesbian publication, *The Ladder*:

...it was the absence of any positive images of - of lesbians at the time. But then, two other things happened. One was I read Harold Robbins' *The Carpetbaggers*, and there is a lesbian character there who, while presented in an unflattering light, was not demonized the way that those lesbians were in Caprio's work. And then, an absolutely, completely weird and fluky thing, which is that, one day when I was in the drugstore with my evangelical Christian cousins, I came across a copy of *The Ladder*. I have no idea how that happened and - and I - very sneakily bought it because I didn't want them to see it and, you know, I couldn't believe it. Like, I - I took it off the shelf and I looked at it and I put it back and, you know, like, it just seemed unbelievable to me, that it would be there. And - but I - I did - did buy it and I hid it and I read it and it said this very, very simple thing, and I don't know if this is a direct quote or in fact if *The Ladder* ever actually said this, but it's certainly what I remember, which is that 'if you're a woman who's attracted to another woman, then you're a lesbian. Move to a big city.' So, yeah, I know - I thought, 'Okay, this message is intended for me.' But it was - it was nice - it was so affirming. So, you know, I didn't have to become a man. I wasn't a monster. I could in fact have this affectional preference and many other women did and they were just all in big cities. And so - and so I thought, 'This is, you know, what I eventually have to do.'¹⁷⁵

While these early explorations into various kinds of literature became a means for Strega to make sense of who she was - a butch woman with an affectional preference for femme women, lesbianism also provided her with affective relationships she lacked while growing up:

¹⁷⁴ Strega, 3: 114-121

¹⁷⁵ Strega, 3-4: 126-151. *The Ladder* was published between 1956 and 1972 and can be accessed online via the University of Victoria Library at <http://voyager.library.uvic.ca/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=2525035>. A search of *The Ladder* yielded no specific advice on moving to a big city.

My siblings were older and they were gone. And one of the things that, of course, happens when you move from foster home to foster home or juvie jail and all the rest of this is that you - I never really developed - and I think one - one can't really develop any kind of friendship group. Like, I hear people - people who talk about going to their high school reunions or, you know, knowing - still being in touch with people they were in grade school with or junior high or something like that, I mean, these things are so completely foreign to me. And I - I think it's the nature of that kind of life, that you are really disconnected. So I don't remember - I - it wasn't until I came out as a lesbian that I started having any kind of what I would think of as a reference group or a friendship group or anything like that.¹⁷⁶

Just out of jail at seventeen, Strega recounted that she was working washing dishes and one of her co-workers was a waitress on whom she had a terrific crush. This older woman took her aside for drinks one evening:

I couldn't really believe this was happening. So - and so we went to a bar and I, of course, had, you know, fake ID and that, and so we went to this bar and we - we drank and, along about the fourth drink, by which time I'm completely blasted, she said to me, 'I'm gay and I think you might be, too,' and I said, 'I have to go to the bathroom,' because - which is - you know, I mean, thinking about it now, it's like the antithesis of the romantic response that you want to give, but what I - I had actually never heard the word 'gay' before. I - I knew the word ... So I had no idea. No idea what - what that meant. I mean, I must have had some suspicion about what it meant because what I did was, in this incredibly woozy state, sit on the toilet and think, 'Does this mean she's a lesbian? What does gay mean?' And - and so - and I think only because I had had so much to drink did I manage to come out and sit down at the table and say to her, 'Does that mean you're a lesbian?' And she did not like that word at all. Okay. But she said, 'Yes, I am.' And - and I thought, 'Well, then, life is simple,' so I just immediately declared my undying love for her. And I thought - kind of thought we'd live happily ever after, right? So she was - this is a woman who's probably at that time maybe thirty-five years old, and I'm seventeen, right? And of course she's in a relationship and, you know - but she was incredibly kind to me and she said, you know, 'I will introduce you to other lesbians. There's a few bars. There are some bars

¹⁷⁶ Strega, 10: 417-427.

that we go to a few times a year, we get together with the guys and we put on a big dance.¹⁷⁷

Through this woman, Strega was introduced to the bars and other gay community social events and she learned about being discreet about her sexual identity. She also became more aware of class differences within the gay and lesbian community:

And I also kind of found my level in that scene because I - I discovered early on that there was these two kind of nice bars where I would say middle-class or upper-middle-class gay men and lesbians went. And then there was, in the middle of the poorest, roughest, toughest part of town, a bar where working-class lesbians went. And it was - it was also where Indigenous lesbians went and - and - and that ended up being a place that I felt more comfortable with from a class perspective and so I spent - excuse me - more time hanging out - out there.¹⁷⁸

As historian Valerie Korinek has pointed out, working-class lesbians and butch lesbians preferred the Royal on Main Street in Winnipeg, while First Nations lesbians preferred the Patricia or the Bell.¹⁷⁹

Strega also learned about 'tourists' in gay bars. This involved situations in which owners allowed straight people into the bars so they could look at the gays and lesbians, which always meant there was the danger of being 'outed' by a tourist who knew you. Korinek notes that the Mardi Gras in downtown Winnipeg that catered to middle-class gays and lesbians was such a bar.¹⁸⁰ As Strega emphasized, "No one was out ... everybody was always worried about being seen by somebody that they knew in another context, because everyone was in the closet. There was no - the idea that you would not

¹⁷⁷ Strega, 5-6: 240-265. Strega was mentored and introduced into the lesbian community by an older lesbian in manner described in Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 76-81.

¹⁷⁸ Strega, 8: 346-353.

¹⁷⁹ Valerie J. Korinek, "'We're the girls in the pansy parade': Historicizing Winnipeg's Queer Subcultures, 1930s - 1970," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 45 (May 2012): 150, accessed April 22, 2013, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/histoire_sociale_social_history/v045/45.89.korinek.html.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

be in the closet was just unrealizable, impossible. You know. No one was open in any way as gay or lesbian at the time.”¹⁸¹

Strega also indicated that her ‘whiteness’ helped her weather a childhood where the social determinants of poverty, isolation, sexual difference, and juvenile criminal activity counted against her. Because she was smart and enjoyed school, she kept attending school and maintaining her grades despite frequent moves and time spent in detention centres. She was also ambitious and she figured out that *education* would determine her future and *her class*:

And I was also very - I was always very, very ambitious, like, despite all this being poor and involvement with the law, like, I think, from a very young age, I saw that the only way out of my class position - although, you know, of course, I understand you can’t really get out of your class unless you’ve got inherited wealth, but I saw education as the way out and so, despite the fact that I was so often in juvie jail, despite the fact that I went to so many different foster homes and lived with relatives, I always worked hard at school. Like, I never - you know, I would - I would blow school off sometimes and - and be truant but I would always show up to write the exams and I would always do the assignments, because I really believed that that would be the only way I could ever get out.¹⁸²

As we will see, this ambition and commitment to education became two keys to her future success.

Born in 1959, Jane Marple (a pseudonym), grew up in a blue collar working-class family with her two half-sisters and one full sister in a northern Prairie mining town where there was no room for sexual diversity. She knew at the age of sixteen that she was attracted to women when she had an affair with an older woman while working at a resort: “it was part [of] what I considered to be breaking out of a rural Prairie mold and really

¹⁸¹ Strega, 7: 304-307.

¹⁸² Strega, 9: 400-409.

understanding the world around me and exploring it personally as opposed to at a distance; so, actually being engaged with something that was different than what I was used to.”¹⁸³ However, her sexual orientation was not immediately established by the summer fling with an older woman nor her exposure to her half-sister’s lesbianism. She deliberated until she was twenty-nine years old before declaring her sexual orientation, when she fell in love with a woman. “I took a long time to work it out. I came out when I was twenty-nine. After, I would say, probably four years of - I - I’m not a person who - I’m not impulsive. You might - might know that. So I spent about four years thinking about whether or not I was lesbian.”¹⁸⁴

Marple was also receiving an education in feminism. After completing her Bachelor of Commerce degree, she went to work for a provincial Status of Women committee. It was there that she learned about women’s equality issues, feminism, lesbians, and activism. By the time she came out, her engagement grew from organizing Take Back the Night marches to leading a woman-centric life.¹⁸⁵ As Marple indicated, her feminism,

allowed me to create my own identity and to be happy with that own-identity. And it didn’t happen overnight ... it was through - to a large extent, through my involvement with the Committee on the Status of Women, that I actually was able to develop a strong sense of who I was and sustain that identity. And, up until then, I think my identity was quite confused. In fact, I know it was quite confused.¹⁸⁶

She attributes her life success in part to this formative work experience in a feminist milieu:

¹⁸³ Jane Marple, interview by Janet Trainor, Victoria, BC, October 29, 2011, 2: 80-85.

¹⁸⁴ Marple, 3: 98-102.

¹⁸⁵ Marple 4: 166-174.

¹⁸⁶ Marple, 8: 343-352.

I probably look at to some extent with rose-coloured glasses on, but when I think about how it felt the first day I walked into that office, it was like coming home. And ... I think I grew as a person, a lot, in the years that I was involved there. And that growth contributed so much to who I am today. Like, I would - the roots of my professional success, my personal success, all comes from there.¹⁸⁷

When Marple did come out in 1988, her parents reacted very differently. Her mother was angry, stated that “I wish you were never born!,” and did not speak to her for six months. She then abruptly called off ‘not-speaking’ and invited her and her then-partner home for Christmas. Her father did not react negatively or positively; he always treated her friends and lovers with respect and courtesy. Marple has now been partnered for twenty years. In 2013, Marple formally adopted her now-partner’s daughter even though that daughter is now in her twenties. Marple’s mother has since announced herself as the proud ‘grandmother’ of her ‘new’ granddaughter after being in the girl’s life for twenty years.

Marple defined her lesbian identity as follows: “My definition of lesbian is that I am woman-identified and that I ... I love women, I am sexually attracted to women, I find women to be more, as a rule, visually appealing than men, I’m happier in the company of women than I am of men.”¹⁸⁸ She is also aware of the passage of time and the changes in attitudes over the decades from the highly lesbian-feminist politicized environment of the 1970s to the identity and sexual politics of the 1980s:

So, if you grew up in the seventies and you were at the front end of the lesbian revolution, I’m sure you had a community and a political

¹⁸⁷ Marple, 8: 258-364.

¹⁸⁸ Marple, 12: 509-512. In *Never Going Back*, Tom Warner discusses the shift from community-based actions in the 1970s to an equality-rights approach in the 1980s that emerged from the HIV crisis and the need for gays and lesbians to gain access to health care, survivor benefits, pensions, and parental rights. In addition, as discussed in Chapter Three, there was also a greater focus in gay and lesbian publications, like *The Body Politic* and *Broadside*, on sexual and identity politics, including the HIV crisis and sex wars among feminists, in the 1980s.

perspective that was shaped by that time. You know, I would say that, for me, notwithstanding what happened in the eighties, my perspective on being a lesbian was shaped by my life in the late eighties and early nineties. That's when I came out, that's when I had my first long-term relationship, that's when I really started to think of myself as a lesbian, and think about what that meant about - for my life and my future. And it's quite different than what was going on in the two decades before.¹⁸⁹

After a long journey of discovery, she chose a lesbian life. Yet, she stated that, "I cannot imagine that my life - that I would be as happy and as content as I am now if I was not a lesbian. And I do identify as a lesbian. I don't, you know, I don't identify as queer, I don't identify as gay, I identify as lesbian. I feel quite proud to be a lesbian. And I feel that it brings a happiness, a contentedness to my life that I wouldn't otherwise have."¹⁹⁰

Chantal Brodeur is the only francophone participant. She is an energetic woman with a wry wit (*en deux langues*). She was born in 1960 in the small resort town of Dorion, Quebec and grew up in an extended family setting:

And so I was born in 1960 and I'm the middle child of three. I have an older sister and a younger brother ... actually my grandmother owned a hotel and we lived with my grandmother, so my grandmother was the matriarch of the family and she ruled the rooster [sic], believe me. (laughs) Everybody was under her thumb. That's right. My dad - but you know what's interesting, because my dad - sorry, it's a little slight - my dad never left his mother, because he was a child of his mother. Then his father died and he stayed with his mother to care for her. So he says. So he never left. And then eventually, you know, she aged and died and that was the only time that they were apart. When my grandma turned eighty. So - so that had a big matriarchal influence in how I saw society. I thought society was run by grandmothers.¹⁹¹

Brodeur also recognized how her early years in and around the family business affected her. For example, since Brodeur and her family lived in the hotel, they had to pass

¹⁸⁹ Marple, 13: 562-570.

¹⁹⁰ Marple, 11: 501-505.

¹⁹¹ Brodeur, 2: 60-75.

through public areas to reach their living quarters and early on, she learned that proper behaviour was expected:

And another particular aspect of my growing up is - well, two of them. One is the private home was above the hotel, bar, restaurant, okay. So we couldn't go anywhere without going through the public space, without going through the hotel so there was always this public image that was part of who we were. So I learned not to use my tricycle around the tables where people drank beer.¹⁹²

During her childhood, as Brodeur recalled, she was influenced by the presence of her strong grandmother and her severely disabled mother who was made fun of by local townspeople:

And - and with her giving birth and everything, that's really hard on her body. So there was - there was my grandmother, who was the matriarch, and backbone of our community, and then there was my mother, who was disabled, and made fun of because she was disabled. And there I was, the middle child, protecting my mother and being in awe of my grandmother. So those were my role models when I grew up.¹⁹³

These, together with her budding lesbian identity, gave her a specific perspective or social consciousness. She described one incident involving her opinionated, class-conscious, temperance-supporting father:

Because the men were the ones who were at the bar drinking, getting drunk, some of the times, and spending their money when they should be at home with their kids, so my father would say. And there was that - there was also a very broad dichotomy between the lifestyle that was shown, because of all the drinking and everything, and the message that my father would give us - because we were not allowed to drink, period. At Christmas or New Year we were allowed one glass and he condemned all the people that were drinking. And I - I - I remarked one time, I said, 'You know, Dad, it's because of these people that are drinking that we go to private school.' 'Cause he's [indiscernible] that's a private school. And

¹⁹² Brodeur, 2: 87-94.

¹⁹³ Brodeur, 3: 105-110.

he never really replied to that. And, again, I think maybe being the second child, maybe being - being who I am, but also being lesbian made me see things from a different perspective than my sister, who's older, for instance. Because my sister being in love with men, she didn't see men the same way as - I was able to have a - an outlook that was more of a - distance, yes, somewhat of a distance between what was happening, what was being said, where was I in all this dynamic, and it made it - for a very interesting childhood. (laughs) ¹⁹⁴

Early on, Brodeur knew to remain in the closet, as her father had threatened that, "if he ever had a child that were one of those [gays], he would send them to a psychiatrist." ¹⁹⁵

Brodeur had an inkling of being different and explained her journey toward lesbian identification in stages starting with: "I think I am a lesbian," which occurred while watching a monster movie when she saw two women kiss. ¹⁹⁶ Stage two occurred when "there was a couple of girls that dressed up as [pauses to seek the English word] drags ... and I just couldn't take my eyes off them ... it was ... like, I want to be with this man-woman. But it took a while for me to actually act on it." ¹⁹⁷ In her mid-twenties, she met a woman at a party, kissed her, and went home with her; she was out to herself.

Brodeur came out to her father in her late twenties when visiting at home with a lover. He made a disparaging remark about her friend being 'butch'. She told him that "when you talk like that, you're talking about me too." "Yes, I know," he said and he rarely brought it up again. ¹⁹⁸

Brodeur was very specific around the idea of choice when it came to her being a lesbian: "I don't—ever had a choice about *not* being a lesbian. I had a choice of acting on it. But I've never had a choice of being a lesbian or not being a lesbian. This is who I

¹⁹⁴ Brodeur, 4: 139-159.

¹⁹⁵ Brodeur, 5: 220-239.

¹⁹⁶ Brodeur, 4: 165-166.

¹⁹⁷ Brodeur, 5: 203-207.

¹⁹⁸ Brodeur, personal communication with the author, October 8, 2012.

am.”¹⁹⁹ She further maintained that lesbianism constitutes her *just as* much as being raised in a patriarchy, having a disabled mother, and growing up over a bar run by a father with old-style temperance views on drinking did. She noted specifically that her upbringing “also had an influence on what type of lesbian I became ... what kind of people I felt more comfortable with and what kind of relationship I’ve been looking for and ... it’s all part of this.”²⁰⁰ She articulated this beautifully: “You know, at times, I felt ashamed because of my parents’ attitude and I hid in the closet because of society and everything but it never ... like ... when I am with a woman, it never feels wrong.”²⁰¹ For her, lesbianism is emotional and about belonging: “To me, it was always a question of feeling, it was a question of belonging, and you don’t have to ask any questions if you belong.”²⁰² Brodeur was also clear that being a lesbian provided her with specific insights and skills:

Well, I think it made me more appreciative of other people’s struggles, whether it be a race struggle or a poverty struggle. Made me more appreciative of differences, in accepting of differences. It also made me question more what society take - takes for granted, in all the relationship, the power struggles, you know, the inequality. And it also allowed me to be more - a better listener because, especially at the very beginning, I would never talk, because we don’t talk and have to say anything. And people like to talk, as you’ve probably discovered through this. People love to talk so I’ve acquire [sic] a great ability to ask questions and then curiosity came with that, and interest. And then respect, most of the time. But - so - those skills I would have never acquired had I not been a lesbian, especially a lesbian in the closet at the time that I was in the closet because I wouldn’t have needed them. You only grow where you need to grow. And it’s - it was an - it was a survival skill.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Brodeur, 14: 613-615.

²⁰⁰ Brodeur, 3: 105-122.

²⁰¹ Brodeur, 7: 299-304.

²⁰² Brodeur, 8: 367-369.

²⁰³ Brodeur, 14: 621-633.

While shaped by strong matriarchal influences, Brodeur did not explicitly identify as a feminist:

I think because I've never felt I had to. I mean, it's a strange way of wording it. But I've never felt like I had to work that hard at being a lesbian and ... I know feminine - feminist is more than just a lesbian *cause*. But ... I just felt like my grandmother did, you just did take your space and, if you don't like it, you just move people out of the way and keep on going. So I didn't ever felt [sic] the need to belong to a group that would fight for a cause such as - many causes being fought by the feminists.²⁰⁴

She tends to walk in the world differently: "Because I've developed a sense of pride that I might not have had, had I not been a lesbian. Because - yeah, because you have to work at feeling good about yourself and, then, if you're able to do that, if you're able to reach that, then you - you carry it with you and you show it and, you know, you just - you walk the talk, and people sense it, I think."²⁰⁵ In this sense, for Brodeur, life is an action, not a label. She lives as she was raised. Today, she is a consummate professional in her work and is very active in the Special Olympics movement. She is not a self-identified feminist - she just acts like one.

Betty Blue (a pseudonym) was born in 1960 in Penticton, BC and two years later, her family moved to Victoria. She came of age in a Victoria that had a large, but largely invisible, lesbian community.²⁰⁶ Her parents were working class. Her father suffered a head injury during the Korean War and was permanently disabled; her mother worked outside the home. Her mother's ideal for her was that she would work at the cosmetics

²⁰⁴ Brodeur, 11-12: 501-507.

²⁰⁵ Brodeur, 25: 1117-1121.

²⁰⁶ See Barbara M. Freeman, "'A Public Sense of Ourselves': Communication and Community-building in Canada's Lesbianews/LNEWS, 1989-1998," *Westminster Papers* 8 (December 2011): 143-167, accessed January 10, 2013, <http://www.westminster.ac.uk/research/a-z/camri/wpcc>.

counter in a drug store or, even better, be a teller in a bank.²⁰⁷ As for her getting a Ph.D., her parents “had no idea what this Ph.D. thing is about.”²⁰⁸ “My father’s idea of a well-dressed woman was a woman in a polyester pantsuit.”²⁰⁹ Blue’s partner who was once a single mother on family benefits mirrored Blue’s transition from working-class to middle-class status as she has gone on to get a Master’s degree. “For both of us - to be living here and doing this, this is some major transformation. Now I’m not saying - this is not entirely due becoming a lesbian ... But at the same time, I would be living a different life.”²¹⁰

By the time Blue turned nineteen years old, she had a woman lover. When she formally came out in 1979 (although not to her parents), she stated that, “I was totally involved in lesbian feminism, politically and socially.” In fact, she jested that she was unfamiliar with popular music in the 1980s and 1990s, because she lived a lesbian separatist life and was totally immersed in lesbian and women’s politics, arts, and culture. At the same time, she suggested that her biography was perhaps an unusual one which was marked by decision and indecision, feeling settled and unsettled: “I also never really felt like I was, you know, a lesbian *vis-à-vis* the terms under which I understood lesbians to be ... Androgynous, I was not androgynous ... Finding femme gave me a place.”²¹¹ While her lesbianism was informed and at times sustained by her reading of Joan Nestle, Biddy Martin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Dorothy Allison, the notion that you could be femme and desire women (with an affectional preference for butch women) introduced a new path to lesbianism. It allowed her to reconcile her feelings for masculine women,

²⁰⁷ Betty Blue, interview by Janet Trainor, Victoria B.C., November 29, 2011, 15-16: 732-752.

²⁰⁸ Blue, 17: 736-739.

²⁰⁹ Blue, 17: 750-751.

²¹⁰ Blue, 17: 770-777.

²¹¹ Blue, 4: 180-181; 5: 185,190-191.

while retaining her own femme and woman-identified identity. She also admits that her winding path to admitting her lesbianism was a decade long process and made more complicated by the fact that she was in a relationship with a woman who eventually chose to transition to a man.²¹² “So I’ve been through a lot of thinking,” she stated, “and a lot of periods of time of trying to really sort of think about ‘what does this mean?’ You know, why am I attracted to these really butch women? What does it mean that my exes are men now? You know, where - what are - where am I around trans issues and very sort of supportive.”²¹³ She added: “I think that I came out and then became it ... I will say to people, you know, strategically, as much as anything else, is that I chose it or I was chosen, one way or the other, I’m not really sure. I don’t have the biography where I always felt I was. It took ten years for me to own my identity, to really think, ‘No, this is who I am’.”²¹⁴

Blue was also the most candid when reflecting on what being a lesbian means to her now:

‘Were you more lesbian than you - then, than you are now?’ When, how, where, why? Well, my lesbian issues have shifted with the femme thing and with aging. Aging, you know, is reorganizing my priorities. I mean, I remember Debbie [Yaffe] saying to me - you know, a bunch of us, about fourteen years ago, ‘My sexuality is not a project like it used to be’ and now I would have to say, I get what she’s talking about it. And it’s not that sexuality doesn’t matter to me, it’s that not dying from cancer matters more now. You know what I mean?’²¹⁵

²¹² Blue noted in the interview that, “most of my exes are men.” Blue, 8: 324.

²¹³ Blue, 8: 331-335. For more on butch lesbians who transition, see H. Devor, “More Than Manly Women: How Female-to-Male Transsexuals Reject Lesbian Identities,” in *Gender Blending*, ed. Bonnie and Vern Bullough and James Elias (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1997), 87-102.

²¹⁴ Blue, 3: 93-96, 99-100.

²¹⁵ Blue, 20: 902-908.

At the time of the interview, she was engaged to be married to a woman and they subsequently married in August 2013.

Nearer, my God, to thee?

For some of my participants, growing up in a devoutly Christian context variously shaped the process of ‘coming out’ and responses to it. Born in 1955, Daphne Drew (a pseudonym) and her two brothers were raised in a lower middle-class home by two parents in southwestern Ontario. The family moved around the area as her father was a pastor in a Protestant church with a “whole Christian theology and doctrine that was really quite rigid.”²¹⁶ This situation meant that her family was subject to a great deal of public scrutiny: “you know, appropriateness of behaviour was kind of a high priority within our family, and very Christian.”²¹⁷ Her parents encouraged her academic success, athleticism, and musical abilities at which she excelled, and into her twenties, she was an admitted ‘Jesus freak’, which included composing and performing Christian folk music. Drew knew from a young age that she was different. She recalled that she was, “probably ten, eleven years old and, you know, crushes on - crushes on girls, crushes on my friends, crushes on the organist at the church. That made going to church worthwhile, you know, just to - just to sit in her aura.”²¹⁸ Yet, her faith was challenged by familial and church rejection.

When she was twenty years old, Drew was ‘outed’ to her father by an anonymous letter. He was not supportive of her or her younger brother who is gay; he refused to attend his son’s wedding. As she recalled, “there came a time when my father would - was extremely sad and disappointed because he hardly ever saw me. So it impacted our

²¹⁶ Daphne Drew, interview by Janet Trainor, Victoria B.C., November 19, 2011, 2: 57-62.

²¹⁷ Drew, 2: 51-53.

²¹⁸ Drew, 4: 171-173.

family life, big time.”²¹⁹ Slowly, she drifted away from the church as she experienced Christian values that were in conflict with her sexuality: ““Oh gee, I am a sexual being’ and my sexual inclinations were against everything that the church thought was right.”²²⁰ More recently, she maintains a spiritual practice separate from organized religion.

Drew remains most conflicted about her sexual identity. At one point, she identified as “primarily a lesbian,” but noted that she had only slept with men recently. She asserted that sexual identity is not important to her now.²²¹ Later on in the conversation, she stated that she is a lesbian and described it as a core identity.²²² When asked if her life is different because she is a lesbian, she talked about her past and the lesbian bar scene she was a part of:

I’ve seen a whole segment of society, you know, the underbelly of some of the bars - I mean, look at some of the bars that we’ve been in over the course of the years, you know, the *Rose* in Toronto and *Labyris* in Montreal and ... *Miss Purdy’s* in Winnipeg. There was - in Ottawa, what it - Plurielle or something - Oral Grief, we used to call it. Oh, the *Coral Reef*! The Coral Reef, that’s what it was called. The Oral Grief, that’s what we called it. You know, and it was - how many of those places - they were underground, they were dark, you entered off a back alley somewhere and ... So not - not exactly glorified places. It was kind of like the whole culture was kind of underground, secretive, cast in this kind of shady, smoky -²²³

While working in a gay bar in Ottawa in the 1970s, she was exposed to the violence between women in the back alley, which shaped her opinion of lesbian bars. There is an air of disapproval, which reflects both a class and generational disdain for older butches and femmes whose lives differed so much from the younger, politicized lesbians. As we

²¹⁹ Drew, 22: 1005-1007.

²²⁰ Drew, 21: 960-964.

²²¹ Drew, 28-29: 1246-1298.

²²² Drew, 38: 1713-1727.

²²³ Drew, 33-34: 1499-1525.

will see in the next chapter, despite various challenges she experienced, Drew both thrived and succeeded.

Mayne Ellis was born in Vancouver in 1954, was adopted as an infant by tolerant and loving heterosexual Christian parents, and raised in Mission City, BC with her two adopted younger brothers. At the age of eleven, writing in her diary, she wondered if she was a lesbian because she was being bullied and teased in elementary school.²²⁴ She came out to herself in her late-teens and attempted to share this realization with her mother: “I tried to warn my mother when I was nineteen that I thought I was - that I could come home with a woman partner and she absolutely freaked. That scared the heck out of me because I didn’t want to make my mother unhappy.”²²⁵ She then tried heterosexuality for a few years, but “I was cut from the team finally.”²²⁶ When Ellis did come out in her late twenties, it had *panache*. Her parents were watching the evening news and her mother saw her walking in the Vancouver Gay Pride parade: “Mum was, like, ‘Okay ... I am putting together all these little things I’ve been noticing and actually I do think it’s our daughter’. So she was kind of waiting. And I wrote her a letter ... and sent them *Now That You Know* ... They phoned and drove into Vancouver that night and they took me out to dinner to celebrate that I had told them the truth about who I was.”²²⁷ As Ellis was adopted, she sought out her birth mother in 1992 at age thirty-eight; their reunion was a success. Both her birth mother and her adoptive parents were supportive of her as a lesbian.

²²⁴ Ellis, 4: 145-155.

²²⁵ Ellis, 8: 330-333.

²²⁶ Ellis, 5: 206-208.

²²⁷ Ellis, 17: 745-755.

Ellis, like Drew, was a devout young Christian who was an active member of the United Church of Canada and who wrote and performed folk songs in the church. She, however, left the United Church at about sixteen. She also recalled that she demonstrated feminist inclinations as a young child: “I had a Barbie doll. And never wanted a Ken doll ... I acted stories with Barbie. She owned a horse, she was a career woman, she had her own place, she went off and did wonderful things ... Without even knowing there was such a thing as feminism in the world, I was enacting feminism as a child.”²²⁸ At the age of seventeen, she read Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch*, a dog-eared copy of which she brought to the interview, and also encountered Jane Rule’s work. She identified both authors as early influences that allowed her to integrate her identity as a feminist and a lesbian:

This battered copy [of *The Female Eunuch*] ... I bought in nineteen seventy ... three. And it has gone with me wherever I go, partly ‘cause the prose is so good and partly because there was - there was a lot of food for this - for me - in her - her feminism and she’s sort of one of my mothers. So I’ve read *The Female Eunuch* through the years ... I was looking, you know - to speak to my condition as a lesbian and ... I also read Jane Rule. I found Jane just clear and sane. (laughs) You know, even though from a spiritual perspective, she was entirely different than me. I ... I liked her sense of respect for people that came through her writing very strongly. I read her fiction and I read her non-fiction. So I would say that Jane Rule was a very good influence on me in terms of demanding that I be clear about what I was thinking. She encouraged, by her example, clarity.²²⁹

She went on to add that these works, “helped me develop a feminist lens so that I have never felt that there was a separation between being a lesbian and being a feminist

²²⁸ Ellis, 7: 291-318.

²²⁹ Ellis, 18-19: 826-843. These two women have written extensively on women, gay, lesbian, and trans rights within the context of a Christianity centred in love and inclusion, not exclusion. Carter Heyward is an Episcopal lesbian, feminist priest first ordained in 1974. See more about Heyward at <http://www.lgbtran.org/Profile.aspx?ID=100>. Virginia Ramey Mollencott is a lesbian-feminist writer and LGBT activist. For more about her, see <http://www.virginiamollencott.com/index.html>.

although I know, for a lot of women who are lesbian who do not identify as feminist and, of course, there are a lot of straight women who are feminists.”²³⁰ Ellis was further influenced by the works of Carter Heyward and Virginia Ramey Mollencott, two Christian, lesbian-feminist writers: “[They] talked about the value of lesbian and gay experience of the Divine and, of the expression of Christianity. How could we be lesbian, gay and Christian?”²³¹ Later, as discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, she was drawn to the Anglican Church of Canada and became involved with Integrity, a group that advocated for access to ‘all the sacraments for all the baptized’ in the Anglican Church.

Ellis has a generosity and enthusiasm of spirit. Her definition of a lesbian is infused with the following: “a lesbian is a woman who recognizes and rejoices in the fact that her most intimate, her most passionate, her most self-giving relationships will be with other women.”²³² She has a sense of living a life: “That is best for my nature. Like everybody else, there’s been ups and downs. And I said to one person who was debating on coming out, ‘It will make some things easier and some things harder’.”²³³

Carol McDonald’s journey is a compelling tale. McDonald has a warm broad smile and a serenity of manner; our interview was conducted in her office.²³⁴ What you cannot know here is the warmth in her voice, her ironic humour, and her thoughtful pauses as she sought to answer my questions. McDonald described her own progress and growth during the interview - her path from the middle-class to high school dropout and working-class jobs to registered nurse to graduate school to university professor.

²³⁰ Ellis, 22: 978-988.

²³¹ Ellis, 26: 1166-1169.

²³² Ellis, 28: 1251-1253.

²³³ Ellis, 42: 1895-1901.

²³⁴ Carol McDonald, interview by Janet Trainor, Victoria, BC, November 24, 2011.

Born to upper middle-class heterosexual parents in 1959, McDonald recalled that religion played a major role in her early experiences:

I have had quite a bit of involvement with the church, with the formal church, with the Christian church over sort of particular - well, different times during my life, I guess. And I would say that that's probably - in some sense has played a fairly big factor in my coming to terms with or how I have felt about myself at different times. That's - as a lesbian."²³⁵

She recalled her time at summer camp run by the United Church where she first became involved with older and young lesbians as a teenager:

And I loved it. Like, it was really an important place to me. The relationships that I formed there were really important. In retrospect ... quite a number of the women who were involved there as both counselors who were older than myself and campers who were my age turned out to be lesbians as well. But, at the time, none of that was spoken of; in fact, it was, you know, really strongly discouraged. Yeah. What a surprise. So they - I kept going there in the summer while I was - during the year, this was before I had moved out, of course, but was sort of involved with these young lesbians. And so, in fact, one year, I guess the last year I went there, my mother sent a note with me to say that, on Visitor's Day, when Visitor's Day came every week, I could go out with these people. And so, some of them were quite a bit older than me. And so they'd arrive, you know, with a car, convertible or something, and off we'd go. It was ridiculous, really. I was going out with these, you know, older women who were actually - you know, some of them I was having, you know, sexual relationships with and - at the same time, was at summer camp. So there's a bit of tension there.²³⁶

These older women were influential in her life, as "they introduced this group of younger women to the clubs and ... but there was also a sense of separation between the older people - the older women and us. I mean, they were - they were barely older, like, they

²³⁵ Mc Donald, 2: 70-75.

²³⁶ McDonald 5: 194-210

were, you know, some of them were maybe working, some of them - you know, one woman I - was in university, you know. So there was some - some sense of that.²³⁷

At age fifteen, came out as a lesbian to her parents. She had fallen in love with a girl in her Girl Guide Ranger troop:

I found my first young love. And so we - so that was my - you know, my first relationship. There was a lot of - quite a bit of angst and um quite a bit of excitement. And it was very - you know, kind of very high emotion - of course, all the hormones of adolescence were active as well ... So there's a lot of sex and it was very - I would say it was - you know, it was both very great but also very - very difficult times. And so - but I did come out to myself, came out to my parents - or, to my mother, and - and then it ended up sort of with some tragedy around that in a way where I - I dropped out of high school and this first girlfriend and I ended up leaving home, leaving our parents' homes and renting just the most dismal basement suite.²³⁸

One component of the difficult times she referred to was experiencing the disapproval of the United Church and her parents being shunned by some church members. In addition to her United Church membership, she became involved as a youth member in an evangelical group; their attempts to rescue her included a 'laying on of hands' to exorcise her lesbian demons:

I mean, I went through some very difficult, challenging experiences with the church. I was, you know, excommunicated from the church. At - at one point I was involved in a laying-on of hands, a 'healing' experience where people were trying to, you know, call the devil out of me. You know, so it was really - which I - you know, I understand now as, you know, homophobic heterosexist kind of - of behaviour and, probably abuse, to some extent.²³⁹

After leaving home, McDonald experienced downward social mobility overnight:

"I think I was - yeah, sixteen when I left. So I did drop out of high school at that time and

²³⁷ McDonald 6: 233-237. She, like Strega, was mentored by older lesbians.

²³⁸ McDonald, 3: 114-130.

²³⁹ McDonald, 10: 421-431.

worked at some fairly - well, I would say now, I would say we lived, you know, a pretty working-class kind of life. You know, I worked as a security guard on construction sites.”²⁴⁰ Her social milieu and interests remained tilted toward the working class until she moved into the academy. “So it was - there was really - like, the thing in Calgary is that the lesbian community was very underground. (pause) And, even though, I think - even though I was living - like, working as a nurse which, in some ways, you wouldn’t really consider as working class, I suppose, but ... there wasn’t a big - I didn’t have a lot of intellectual interests, I would say.”²⁴¹ Despite her conflicts with the church, she did not forsake spirituality and wanted her views on religion to be balanced:

My spirituality and my spiritual practice are really important to me. And it adds, you know, a lot to my - to my life. It adds a huge amount to my life *and* to my relationships. So I think - I don’t want to sort of demonize that or suggest that - that they’re not compatible because I think even - like, more of my spiritual practice now is - it’s less aligned with Christianity but I think it’s still - I still hold on to some of the kind of belief system from that. And - and, as much as it - as I suffered as a lesbian in the Christian community, I also experienced discrimination as a Christian in the lesbian community.²⁴²

Summary

This chapter examined the texture of the participants’ early lives and how and where their experiences as emergent and out lesbians intersected with societal norms, class, religion, second-wave feminism, and lesbian feminist politics. Their lives and experiences do not resemble their foremothers in the pink-collar closet or the sleazy tavern. For the most part, once out, they chose to live out loud as feminists/activists and lesbians.

²⁴⁰ McDonald, 4: 145-148.

²⁴¹ McDonald, 12: 505-508

²⁴² McDonald, 21: 933-940

As each of the participants recounted, there were risks associated with coming out. For those rejected by family and friends, it is a mark of resilience that these women formed new families (with and without children) and friendships that have spanned decades. For those rejected by church institutional dogma and devout heterosexual congregations, it is remarkable how they held on to a personal spiritual practice; their faith was strong enough to withstand censure and rejection by their Christian brothers and sisters. Despite the risks, one cannot but note their confidence, wisdom, humour, generosity of spirit, and strength of character. Where others might have faltered at the loss of familial, community, and spiritual support, this cohort of lesbians derived knowledge and strength from adversity.

What was the environment that drew lesbians and gays out of the closet and into the public eye of disapprobation? Was there a specific cultural milieu that created lesbian and gay rage, pride, and visibility? What made lesbians and gays enter Foucault's world where "it also made possible the formation of 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified."²⁴³ Coming out freed every one of the participants from the responsibility of keeping a secret that was self-limiting. They created and attended lesbian conferences and concerts and women's cultural events. All were blessed with a university education and worked to attain life, work, and community goals. They had a framework for survival and how to live which was mainly derived from the presence of a lesbian community. The

²⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage 1980), 101.

existence of this community also sustained them in their political work, as will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Three

The Political

The question for feminists has always been: where do we start? The answer cannot be other than: where we are and with the conditions and problems which history presents to us.²⁴⁴

This chapter focuses on the participants' involvement in political activism. With the exception of Chantal Brodeur who disavowed the influence of feminism and Susan Strega who found it to be somewhat limited, most participants I interviewed came to integrate lesbian and feminist politics. Their political engagement involved addressing women's issues on the front lines or in the area of policy, building community through lesbian and feminist culture and art, and/or producing cutting edge scholarship. Others challenged the exclusionary policies and practices of religious institutions as they pertained to gays and lesbians, the unequal funding of women's amateur and professional sports, the absence of same-sex health and pension benefits in collective agreements, and the denial of same-sex adoption and civil marriage rights by the state. There is an old feminist chant born during the pro-choice movement of the 1960s: Not the church and not the state; women must decide their fate. Based on the participants' own recollections and the artefacts they brought to the interviews, as well as information extracted from newspapers, court records, documentaries, eye witness accounts, and secondary sources, this chapter explores the trajectory of participants' political work be it at the level of community, the academy, or the state and how they assessed the long term impacts of their contributions.

Foundations for the Revolution

²⁴⁴ Mary O'Brien, "Hegemony and Superstructure: A Feminist Critique of Neo-Marxism," in *The Politics of Diversity*, ed., Roberta Hamilton and Michele Barrett (London: Verso, 1986), 255.

The various forms of political activism that the participants engaged in and especially those fuelled by lesbian and feminist politics that resisted heteronormativity and women's inequalities, did not occur in a vacuum. In the Introduction, I discussed the socio-economic, political, and cultural imposition of heteronormativity on post-war Canadians as examined by historians Veronica Strong-Boag (women in the suburbs), Robert Rutherford (the role of father in the post-war family), and Mary Louise Adams (the teaching and disciplining of youth deviating from heterosexuality). Douglas Owram's rebellious generation included lesbians and feminists. It was a period when lesbians and feminists were in conflict heterosexual norms, the state and church's enforcement of that norm, and the legislated and institutionalized inequality of women in Canada.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Toronto, in contrast to other smaller cities (Calgary, Winnipeg, and Ottawa) as described by some of my participants, was at the centre of highly politicized and engaged gay, lesbian, and lesbian-feminist communities and as such, constituted the incubator of community formation and cultural exploration.²⁴⁵ It spawned two publications that were widely read by gays, lesbians, and lesbian-feminists in Canada and, while in circulation, reflected and guided their ideas. In November 1971, *The Body Politic* or BP (as it was affectionately known as), a gay Toronto newspaper, was launched and debuted with the *We Demand Manifesto*. At first, BP published an issue every three months, a rate that steadily increased to ten to eleven issues per year. It presented issues of importance to gays and lesbians in a well-produced and attractive format, which found their way into the mainstream press and provoked a wider dialogue

²⁴⁵ Four of my participants knew each other and/or engaged in political activism together in Toronto: Nancy Poole, Judy Lightwater, Roberta Benson, and Miriam Kaufman.

between the gay and straight communities. At the same time, the discussion of gay issues tended to predominate in the newspaper and only 28 per cent of the articles discussed lesbian topics.

From its inception to its demise in 1987,²⁴⁶ BP covered gay and lesbian political and social life primarily in Toronto, but also across Canada.²⁴⁷ Each issue usually included a report from the gay and lesbian community in another Canadian city or region, including London, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Kitchener, Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary, Red Deer, the Kootenays, Vancouver, Edmonton, the Yukon, and Halifax. At times, the situation of gays and lesbians in other countries, such as Nicaragua, Mexico, Chile, France, Germany and the USA, was featured. In addition, gay and lesbian equality rights were also regularly discussed in BP as both the federal and provincial governments came under pressure to include sexual orientation in human rights codes and extend access to provincial and federal services to gays and lesbians. In 1986, BP announced that in Ontario, discrimination based on sexual orientation was finally covered in the provincial human rights code. There was, however, no mention of equal marriage during its years of publication.

Issues related to sexual practices were also featured. In 1977, Gerald Hannon wrote an article called “Men Loving Boys Loving Men,” which almost destroyed the newspaper; its headquarters was raided by the Toronto Police and the publication was charged with obscenity.²⁴⁸ Mariana Valverde published a 1980 article on fistfucking, and

²⁴⁶ It was succeeded by *Xtra!*.

²⁴⁷ I wish to acknowledge and thank the Pride Library at the University of Western Ontario for indexing *The Body Politic*. See <http://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/> for more information on the BP. Accessed September 23, 2012.

²⁴⁸ The article asked: “Can a child actually choose to have sex with you when you have all the power and privilege that comes from simply being an adult?” *Yes* according to Hannon and *no* according to an enraged Toronto citizenry. The article followed on the heels of the torture and murder of shoeshine boy Emanuel

Gayle Rubin contributed a 1982 article on S/M and lesbian politics. In addition to discussions of bath house raids in Toronto, Edmonton, Vancouver, and Montreal in the 1980s, by 1983, HIV/AIDS began to command BP's pages as victims of the disease fought for humane and non-discriminatory treatment by members of society and health care providers. Throughout its 135 issues, BP also featured reviews of gay and lesbian writers, performers, artists, and musicians and its pages were graced by such writers as Jane Rule, Kate Millett, Gayle Rubin, Tom Warner and others.

In May 1979, a second and in this case, monthly publication, *Broadside*, was launched in Toronto. Given that there was a certain uneasiness about lesbian visibility in many second-wave feminist contexts and publications, *Broadside* became a space that really highlighted feminist and lesbian politics. As the collective members noted in 2012, "We did not, however, call ourselves a lesbian newspaper because that's not what we were. There was never a time when the collective did not include heterosexual woman, but we always incorporated a pro-lesbian, anti-heterosexist perspective."²⁴⁹

The topics covered in *Broadside* included such women-centred issues as childcare access, equal pay, pornography, abortion, violence against women, immigration, and nuclear proliferation. It also published reviews of books, music, theatre, dance and movies produced by and for women, as well as interviews with and articles by prominent feminists, such as Mary O'Brien, Kay MacPherson, Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich, Charlotte Bunch, Nicole Brossard, Catherine MacKinnon, Margrit Eichler, and others. While it

Jaques by three pedophiles in Toronto. The child's death was a shock to the community and it created a vitriolic backlash against gay men specifically by right-wing columnists, the police, feminists and lesbians, the citizens and politicians. Gerald Hannon, "Men Loving Boys Loving Men." *The Body Politic* 39 (December 1977/January 1978): n.p, accessed September 23, 2012, <http://www.clga.ca/Material/Records/docs/hannon/ox/mbm.htm>.

²⁴⁹ "Reinventing Journalism: What Makes A Feminist Magazine Different?," <http://broadsidefeminist.com/>, accessed September 25, 2012. This statement accompanied the online reissue of *Broadside* (1978-1988) in 2012.

featured scholarly articles, *Broadside* also provided a venue for the voices of marginalized women, including poor women, immigrant women, young women, incarcerated women, and women of colour. There were also a plethora of lesbian groups, such as Lesbians Against the Right (who met twice a month!), the Toronto Lesbian Network, the Lesbian and Gay Academic Society, the Lesbian and Gay History Group, and the Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario. *Broadside*'s events section promoted a rich lesbian-feminist cultural milieu which featured such lesbian and feminist performers as Cris Williamson, Meg Christian, Sheila Gostick, Ronnie Gilbert, Holly Near, The Wallflower Dance Order, Heather Bishop, and Mama Quilla II as well as a variety of one-woman stage shows, art and photography exhibits, community meetings, readings, etc. It also had a classified section; here I found an ad announcing the end of a relationship, my former partner's decision to leave town, and her desire to find someone with whom to travel west.

Broadside also featured articles that addressed feminist and lesbian politics and community issues. Val Edwards, the first editor of the LOOT newsletter, published an article in 1980, entitled "The Invisible Community," which explored whether there was a lesbian community just as LOOT closed down and the Fly By Night bar opened. Edwards asserted that "Toronto's lesbian community has no political or cultural character to express, and our emotional needs are being served adequately by a web of interlocking social circles."²⁵⁰ Her article directed addressed the rifts in the lesbian and feminist communities as lesbians/bar dykes, straight feminists, and lesbian feminists could not seem to agree on collective and common actions. "Likewise, we are feminists; but we're

²⁵⁰ Val Edwards, "The Invisible Community," *Broadside* 1, no. 10 (September 1980): 5, accessed June 3, 2013, <http://broadsidefeminist.com/>.

not like straight feminists - we get crapped on for being women *and* lesbians.”²⁵¹ She also tackled the question of invisibility:

Our refusal to be openly lesbian, even within the narrow confines of the women’s movement, poses the single biggest threat to our continuing existence as a community, for it strikes at the root of negativity that gives the community a half-life. Our closetry - whether it manifests itself as in a rejection of gay liberation or in a liberal reduction of lesbianism to a lifestyle issue – damns the community to a slow death by attrition.²⁵²

A year later, LOOT was gone for good as was the Fly By Night bar. I recall the closing of the bar and the sense of loss to the community.

At the same time, the basis for community was there in Toronto in the 1970s and 1980s, as lesbians and/or feminists produced a newspaper and newsletters, formed political action groups that focused on women’s and lesbian’s issues, including women’s safety in the city, pornography and its proliferation, and women’s inequality in the workplace. Despite Edwards’ lament about invisibility in 1980, Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal had gay and lesbian communities and cultural producers who spread outside those areas. These activities indicated the presence of lively, proud communities in big and small cities. The breadth and reach and importance of *The Body Politic* and *Broadside* cannot be underestimated. Copies were available across the country in select outlets and by mail. Whereas the classified ads for bars, clubs, bathhouses, and social groups found in both papers were a road map into the social life of the community, these publications were also venues in which key political discussions and initiatives were featured and publicized. There was an identity to be claimed and a reference group to be found.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 14.

²⁵² Ibid., 14.

Feminist Activism, Lesbian Culture, and Knowledge Production

Nancy Poole's life work may well have begun when she was eight years old and her mother liked to call her Miss Righteous Indignation and noted that she had over-developed sense of justice.²⁵³ When she moved to Toronto to start graduate school, she encountered feminism and, as she indicated, to "hear someone speak about women's inequality and the need for social change ... it was like that moment of justice ... where I realized that this is always who I've been, and that this is always what I'd felt and here was someone sort of affirming or naming or validating my reality."²⁵⁴ Poole took part in a feminist consciousness raising group in Toronto in the mid-1970s and her feminist and lesbian politics shaped her subsequent activism: She described this feminism as follows:

And I went on from there to - had the great privilege, in my entire life, to always work on women's issues, in various locations and various topics, but always in my work I was able to bring my feminism into that, as well as to bring it into my community activities so have always been involved in a whole range of social change, you know, community groups, boards of directors of sexual assault centres, that kind of thing. And also, I've been able to bring it into that sense of the social and the cultural, both through, you know, organizing women's music events, working as a women's sound engineer, and - or - you know, organizing festivals, organizing women's bars, that kind of thing. So I feel like, in all those domains, whether it was work or whether it was political and community work, or whether it was social and cultural work, I've just - have been really imbued with that sense of working to improve the lives of women and lesbians. But sometimes the focus has been on lesbians and sometimes - and more often the focus has been on women - on women overall. And with always being clear in that I was lesbian.²⁵⁵

Until the age of thirty, Poole's feminist and lesbian activism was concentrated mainly in Toronto and covered a wide range of issues. She was very active, for example,

²⁵³ Poole, 3: 126-132.

²⁵⁴ Poole, 4: 144-150.

²⁵⁵ Poole, 4-5: 182-197.

in building community, including the establishment of lesbian and women's services such as Nellie's (Canada's first women's shelter), and Women Against Violence Against Women. WAVAW provided counselling services to female victims of violence in Toronto and practiced a unique form of harm reduction in combatting violence against women. This included busting up a porn movie house:

Well, that was so exciting, in Toronto, that - that work we did around WAVAW early on. And I would have to check my files to remember exactly what year we were working on the ... on WAVAW in Toronto. But it was, you know, a massive coalition culminating, in my mind, with one night when we, you know, organized a protest that occupied Yonge Street and went down to where snuff movies were played [Cinema 2000] and we actually entered the snuff - the theatre, and pulled down the projectors. I was at the front of that march with several others and we ended up, you know, being the ones who created the - the, you know, chaos within the 'snuff movie' theatre.²⁵⁶

This action was tied to the feminist arguments around pornography. Catherine Mackinnon in the US and Susan G. Cole in Canada were vehemently against pornography.²⁵⁷ Ironically, this was a rare point of convergence between the Toronto Police Service and radical lesbians and feminist movements - both were against porn purveyors and outlets. The police did not charge the Cinema 2000 vandals.

Poole's feminist and lesbian politics shaped her arts and cultural work which also began in Toronto in the late 1970s. She was a founding member of Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT) and co-owned the Fly by Night women's bar. She also worked as a sound engineer for Mama Quilla II, a highly political Toronto lesbian rock band popular

²⁵⁶ Poole 6: 247-255. A snuff movie is a pornographic movie where one of the actors is allegedly murdered. More information on snuff films can be found in the NFB documentary, *Not a Love Story* (1981), directed by Bonnie Sherr Klein.

²⁵⁷ For more on the anti-pornography arguments in this period, see Susan G. Cole, "Gagged, Bound and Silenced," *Broadside* 3, no. 2 (November 1981): 10-11, accessed November 18, 2012, <http://broadsidefeminist.com/images/issues/Broadside%200302%201981.pdf>.

among rowdy and very *out* young lesbians in the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to Poole, the band not only “articulated lesbian culture, but it was something that really became a - a community builder.”²⁵⁸ Some of the band’s songs, like “Angry Young Woman,” were explicitly lesbian, while others dealt with political issues such as racism and alienation. The band rehearsed in the LOOT building and played in the Fly By Night and other Toronto bars as well as at national and US lesbian conferences. It tried to bridge the gap between the young and older lesbians who kept to themselves in their own bars, especially given that older lesbians of the butch-femme variety were not welcome in LOOT, while the young androgynous lesbians were not welcome at the Blue Jay which catered to a more formal butch-femme crowd. Poole is well-aware of the exclusionary politics of LOOT as described by Becki Ross in *The House That Jill Built*, while as a co-owner of the Fly By Night, “we had a vision for the bar that was less oriented around alcohol and was more oriented toward women’s culture ... It was much more that idea of creating a legitimate public social space where you could socialize.”²⁵⁹

When, at the age of thirty, Poole relocated to Western Canada following a lover, she continued to be actively engaged in the promotion of lesbian and women’s culture, which included women’s music, art, spoken word, and film. She is widely known in women’s and lesbian entertainment communities in Regina (1982-1984), Saskatoon (1984-1988), Edmonton (1988-1993) and Victoria (since 1993). She was in demand as a sound engineer in Regina, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary, and Moose Jaw. Both in Canada and the United States, she also acted as a concert producer for women’s rock

²⁵⁸ Poole, 8: 347-371.

²⁵⁹ Poole, 11: 465-500.

bands and performers,²⁶⁰ who played the Regina, Winnipeg, and Edmonton folk festivals, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, and the US East and West Coast Women's Music Festivals. She formed production groups in each city she lived, trained women in production and promotion skills, and brought in performers, many of whom she grew to know personally, from across Canada and the United States. In addition to creating communities of learning and practice, she wrote extensively on the need to have a national women's cultural network to allow women artists to find producers, to train producers in the business of promotion and producing, and to develop a distribution network across Canada for women's work.²⁶¹ In reflecting on her activist contribution, Poole stated:

And as for making history, I would say, 'Yes.' You know. There's little dribs and drabs of it here, like in the lesbian history book²⁶² - I mean, the feminist history book, but I do think that - that time of creating those institutions like WAVAW and Nellie's and um LOOT and the Fly By Night and Mama Quilla and all those - those visible lesbian, you know, agencies, groups, organizations, whatever - they were - they were history and I don't think they are going to be gone, like, the EP of - of Mama Quilla will continue, I'm sure, to amuse and delight people over - over the years. It was a form of being out in ways that were only possible in that moment in time and - and - and I think where - it was important that we did it and continues to be important that we - that we do it.²⁶³

While an early activist and advocate against the gendered over-prescription of benzodiazepine or tranquilizers among women by Canadian doctors in the late 1970s and 1980s, Poole also went on to produce policy and academic work in the area of women's

²⁶⁰ Poole also produced Angel Staccato and the Rebels, Hamburger Patty, and the Helpers; she also worked with the Parachute Club which was composed of some former Mama Quilla II band members such as Lorraine Segato.

²⁶¹ See Nancy Poole, "Creating a women's culture network," *Kinesis* (October 1985): 25.

²⁶² Poole is referring to the Feminist History Society and its goal of publishing books about the women's movement in Canada between 1960 and 2010. See <http://feministhistories.ca>, accessed August 8, 2013.

²⁶³ Poole, 20: 906-915.

health and wellness beginning in the mid-1980s. Late to the career path at age thirty, she first found a straight job as a program officer in the Secretary of State's Women's Program and then in Alberta Alcohol and Drug Addiction in Edmonton where she worked to develop and promote treatment programming for women until 1993. Upon moving to British Columbia, she first worked for the provincial government, developing treatment programmes specifically for women. Finally, she relocated to the BC Centre of Excellence for Women's Health as a researcher where she was able to examine such issues as gender in health policy, practices, and information. Poole is a prolific scholar, having written and edited four books as well as contributed to academic journals. In 2014, she became Executive Director of the Centre.

Poole situates her national and international research work and practice in the field of women's and girl's health within an integrated feminist framework as developed by Angela Miles, a member of her original consciousness-raising group in Toronto: "The term, 'integrative' feminisms and feminists refer to feminisms seeking deep transformation with integrative/holistic practice that addresses the whole world and understands the integration of race, class, colonial and patriarchal structures of power."²⁶⁴ The influence of integrative feminisms has been blended with Poole's spiritual path as she has read and studied with feminist spiritual thinkers such as Starhawk, Vicki Noble, Jennifer Berezan, and Joanna Macy.

Through her research work, Poole critically examines the health system and its gendered treatment of women especially in the areas of alcohol and drug diagnoses and treatment, and in the areas of trauma-informed treatment for women. Using virtual

²⁶⁴ Angela Miles, "Women's Giving: Feminist Transformation and Human Welfare," http://www.gift-economy.com/womenand/womenand_womens_giving.html, accessed November 12, 2012.

knowledge dissemination on issues related to women's substance use and building on feminist participatory action research, transformative learning, and virtual pedagogical principles, she creates communities of learning that connect the academy to work being done in the community by front-line workers.²⁶⁵ Her methodologies, scholarship, and policy development are grounded in a feminist, women-centred, collaborative, and inclusive approach. The key words that describe her work include communities of practice, feminist action research, feminist consciousness-raising, knowledge translation, evidence-based action and learning, virtual communities of learning, and virtual communities of practice.

Through her research and policy work, Poole has sought to change hearts and minds in the treatment of women who bear children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder. As she noted, "it was critical to challenge the prevailing view that pregnant women with addictions problems are incompetent and incapable of choosing recovery, and to emphasize that the health interests of mother and child are inextricably linked."²⁶⁶ She is also an advocate for harm reduction in the women's addictions field, which means that if you cannot eliminate a harmful behaviour, you try to reduce the frequency or degree of that harmful behaviour. This approach is unpopular with governments who lean toward prohibition, punishment, and/or abstinence. Her use of consciousness-raising as a means to translate knowledge is innovative as she has both used and analysed the practice. As she noted in one article, "Participants share their expertise and perspectives on women's substance use issues; examine evidence from research, grey literature, and other

²⁶⁵ This explanation was provided by Poole in an email dated September 13, 2014.

²⁶⁶ Nancy Poole, "Building a Coalition on the 'G' Case in British Columbia," *Canadian Women's Health Network* 1 (1997): 14, accessed September 24, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/214067366?pq-origsite=summon>.

sources; synthesize the information they have gathered; examine barriers to and supports for change; and discuss how to translate what they have learned into action in the practice and policy spheres.”²⁶⁷ The presence of trauma in the lives of victims of violence and those who are substance users is another area that Poole has researched. She lectures to medical practitioners and clinicians on the importance of exploring past trauma with patients and clients so that they can “recognize how central trauma can be to those with whom [they] work.”²⁶⁸ Her commitment to linking community members, scholars and policymakers in virtual collaborative communities has been a hallmark of her work; much of her facilitation is done on live-stream WEB platforms. Her early awareness of injustice carried forward into a body of work that is intellectually sophisticated, practical in its application, and inclusive. Over her lifetime, Poole’s overall influence has been multi-faceted, national, and international.

Susan Strega, as discussed in the previous chapter, spent her years from age ten to eighteen as a ward of the child welfare system in Winnipeg as well as some time in the juvenile correction system. However, as she indicated, she determined that education would provide her with the means to move out of poverty. As she recalled: “I had a social worker while I was in jail. And - and she suggested to me that I - that I could go to university, and I thought ... ‘I’m going to become a social worker’. So she really facilitated that for me and, again, I think that goes back to being white. And I think the

²⁶⁷ Nancy Poole, “Using Consciousness-raising Principles to Inform Modern Knowledge Translation Practices in Women’s Health,” *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research* 40 (June 2008): 83, accessed September 25, 2014,

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/mcgill/cjnr/2008/00000040/00000002/art00007>.

²⁶⁸ Nancy Poole and Lorraine Greaves, eds., *Becoming Trauma Informed* (Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2012), xi.

other thing that was very helpful was that I was really smart.”²⁶⁹ She then attended university and pursued a social work degree.

The university introduced Strega to feminism, socialism, and to a new kind of lesbian - the radical lesbian. In 1974, by the time Strega was twenty, liberation movements abounded in North America; they included the women’s movements supported in part by the high group and individual participation levels in the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada,²⁷⁰ Indigenous movements, such as the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood (which Strega remembered vividly), and the Canadian gay liberation movement that publicly announced its existence in Ottawa and Vancouver in 1971 by reading the *We Demand* Manifesto from the steps of Parliament and the then Vancouver Public Library.²⁷¹ The riots at Montreal’s Sir George Williams University in 1969 paved the way for more student participation in university decision-making and to the creation of the Office of the Ombudsman.²⁷²

While attending university, Strega’s first engagements with feminism did not impress her. As she stated, “I experienced feminism at the time as not just a heterosexual

²⁶⁹ Strega, 11: 408-417.

²⁷⁰ See Barbara M. Freeman, “The Media and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1966-1972: Research in Progress,” *Resources for Feminist Research* 23 (Fall 1994): 3-9. This work charts the work of the Commission and the Commissioners and the degree of local and national media resistance to the Commission, the argument being that Canadian women had it great and, by implication, men needed to reassert their masculinity. It also examines how Canadian women found ways to follow the Commission despite irregular coverage in the mainstream media. In “Invoking Experience as Evidence,” Joan Sangster examines how the personal letters sent to the Commission by over 1,000 Canadian women were handled and were unacknowledged. See Joan Sangster, “Invoking Experience as Evidence,” *Canadian Historical Review* 92 (March 2011): 135-161. A recent film that focuses on the Royal Commission, entitled *Status Quo? The Unfinished Business of Feminism in Canada* written and directed by Margaret Cho (NFB: Montreal, 2013), examines women’s equality issues that remain outstanding since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women reported in 1970: universal child care, abortion on demand in all provinces as per the Canada Health Act, and the fight against continued male violence against women.

²⁷¹ *Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives*, “We Demand, 1971,”

<http://www.clga.ca/Material/Records/docs/wedemand.htm>, accessed August 1, 2013.

²⁷² *Concordia University*, “Computer Centre Incident,” <http://archives.concordia.ca/computer-riot>, accessed August 1, 2013.

woman's concern, but also middle-class white heterosexual women's concern, right? So it's - it's boundaried not only by sexual orientation, but by race and class and - so [I am] not necessarily really feeling a fit there."²⁷³ For Strega, "there was a lot of feeling that feminists - feminism wasn't radical enough."²⁷⁴ Despite the strained relations between lesbians and feminists, however, she worked with other women in Winnipeg in setting up a Rape Crisis Centre, a Transition House, and a Women's Centre. She was also exposed to the radical lesbian-socialist politics of Ellen Woodsworth (currently active in Vancouver) and Pat Murphy (now deceased) who were both vocal and out Canadian radical lesbians in the early 1970s. As Strega recalled, "It was the first time that I got to talk to a lesbian who called herself a lesbian rather than a gay woman. And that was the first time I realized there was a political component to lesbianism."²⁷⁵ What Strega experienced was a product of geographic isolation as described by Valerie Korinek: "Only during the mid-to-late 1960s did Winnipeg residents become familiar with gay and lesbian identities and politics as articulated in the United States. News of these developments emboldened a small coterie of university students to import gay and lesbian politics into the city in the early 1970s ... Winnipeg was also out of step with Vancouver and Toronto, where gay activists began to form in the mid-1960s."²⁷⁶ Woodsworth and Murphy were radical lesbian and socialist proselytizers from Toronto

²⁷³ Strega, 15: 662-664.

²⁷⁴ Strega, 18: 792-793; 13: 594-609.

²⁷⁵ Strega, 10-11: 444-483

²⁷⁶ Valerie J. Korinek, "'We're the girls in the pansy parade': Historicizing Winnipeg's Queer Subcultures, 1930s-1970," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 45, no. 89 (May 2012): 117-155.

with a population of 2,628,043²⁷⁷ in 1971, who came to Winnipeg, a hinterland city with a population of 560,874.²⁷⁸ Strega had found politics.

The lesbian who entered university to do a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) was not the same person who left the institution in 1976. Strega had a family in the lesbian community, an education and a marketable skill, and a political framework. Strega's cultural allegiance to lesbianism is exemplified by her annual attendance at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival; she arrives early to help set up the site for the 3,000 to 4,000 women who attend each year and remains after the festival to assist in tearing it down. Her early experiences with the child welfare system and her subsequent politics have shaped her professional life as a social work practitioner and university educator. Her work emphasizes the need to recognize the epistemologies of the marginalized, such as Indigenous peoples who are excluded by the dominant patriarchal, racist, and colonial epistemologies of Canada's social welfare policies.²⁷⁹ She acknowledges that the experiences of the marginalized are real and that the knowledge gained from them is valid. She also goes against the grain by advocating that family services social workers engage and involve fathers in parenting assessments and family conferences. This is because fathers are often excluded from discussions of child neglect, which more often than not falls to mothers; as such, the state does not hold them as responsible as mothers

²⁷⁷ Statistics Canada, "Toronto City & CMA Population, 1971-2006," <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-516-x/sectiona/A1-eng.csv> (CSV Version, 5kb), accessed June 28, 2015.

²⁷⁸ Statistics Canada, "Historical Statistics of Canada: Population and Migration, 1971," <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-516-x/sectiona/4147436-eng.htm#1>, accessed July 28, 2013.

²⁷⁹ To learn more about Strega's work, see Leslie Brown and Susan Strega, eds., *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005) and Susan Strega and Jeannine Carriere, eds., *Walking This Path Together: Anti-racist and Anti-Oppressive Child Welfare Practice* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishers, 2009).

for the 'failure to protect'.²⁸⁰ In her published work, Strega advocates for those who have no voice especially women and children involved in the child welfare system. Her politics remain radical today and her current research activities include working with on-street sex workers and their families as they transition out of the trade.²⁸¹ Although her academic work interrogates dominant discourses by advocating for new ways of hearing and responding to marginalized knowledge, Strega denies making history because, in her view, we continue to be prisoners of dominant discourses:

Whatever history I/we made (and I think I/we made some) has been largely rendered irrelevant, it seems to me, as the result of the functioning of dominant discourses ... we may have spoken ourselves into another way of being, but all the oppositional or resistant discourses we once circulated have been absorbed and re-authored by dominant discourses - for example, I think that both butch and femme identities challenged rather than reinforced the masculine/feminine gender binary (or attempted to) - now any woman who is close to butch is expected to or urged to 'transition' - become a man - leaving the gender binary unchallenged. Similarly, our search for alternative forms of relationship, to challenged heteropatriarchy's idea of the only proper and acceptable type of relationship as the nuclear family production/consumption unit, was subsumed by gay marriage and the gayby boom.²⁸²

Strega is modest and perhaps too quick in writing off history being made; maybe, she would give the nod to history in the making.

Not the Church

Mayne Ellis' politics are complex—feminism, lesbianism, and Christianity are intertwined with a quest for social justice. As discussed in the last chapter, she was an

²⁸⁰ Susan Strega et al., "Working with Me, Working with Me: Father's Narratives of Child Welfare," *Journal of Progressive Human Services* 20 (2009): 87, accessed August 1, 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10428230902871207>. See also Susan Strega et al., "Connecting father absence and mother blame in child welfare policies and practices," *Children and Youth Services Review* 30 (2008): 705-716, accessed August 1, 2013, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740907002216>.

²⁸¹ University of Victoria, "Faces of UVic Research: Susan Strega," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpmhuEClswE>, accessed July 26, 2013.

²⁸² Susan Strega, Personal email communication, August 29, 2012.

active member of the United Church of Canada until the age of about fifteen, but later gravitated to the Anglican Church. As an active member and one-time president of Integrity Vancouver (from 1989 to 1991), Ellis became and was the public face of Anglican gays and lesbians in British Columbia as they sought, as *baptized* Anglicans, access to *all* the sacraments including Holy Orders (ordination as a priest) and Holy Matrimony (church marriage). An oft-quoted Integrity motto is ‘all the sacraments for all the baptized’ and “Integrity Vancouver is a local expression of the international gay and lesbian Christian movement supporting an inclusive Anglican church, a place of welcome for all people, particularly those who have been excluded or even shunned by the church because of their sexual orientation or gender identification.”²⁸³ As a Christian, a feminist, and a lesbian, then, Ellis took on homophobia and the exclusion of gays and lesbians from the sacraments and rites of the Anglican Church. The Anglican Church, like other organized religions, has grappled with the place of gay and lesbian congregants in their institution and how to respond canonically, spiritually, and socially to gays and lesbians. As Ellis noted, “It was always very clear to me that the church was an institution and that it was - that I was part of movement to create healing and acceptance and equality within that structure. I received a lot of wonderful things from the Anglican church (sic) during my time being involved with it and I felt there were so many beautiful people who were dismissed and hated and it wasn’t right. I considered it a social justice issue.”²⁸⁴

In order to situate this struggle in its historical context, it is important to consider how the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC), established in 1857, responded to gay and lesbian demands for equal rights. Under the Anglican Church, the country is organized

²⁸³ Integrity Vancouver, <http://www.vancouver.integritycanada.org/>, accessed November 13, 2012.

²⁸⁴ Ellis, 26-27: 1197-2005.

into four *ecclesiastical* provinces of which British Columbia and the Yukon are one. Each province has an archbishop or metropolitan to whom the bishops, who oversee the dioceses, report. A diocese is a corporation under provincial civil law. A diocese and its council or synod, together with its parishioners, has a good deal of autonomy in conducting its own diocesan affairs.²⁸⁵ Difficulties have arisen, however, when diocesan decisions conflict with church policy, doctrine, or canon law.

A review of Anglican Church records dating back to 1978 indicates that Anglican prelates endorsed marriage unions between men and women only and rejected the blessing of homosexual unions. Ironically, this same group of Anglican prelates issued a press release, which affirmed that “homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection under the law with all other Canadian citizens.”²⁸⁶ Similarly, in 2005, the ACC Primate’s Commission on Sexuality issued its “Report of the Primate’s Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions,” in which the church decided not to allow same-sex blessings, and to welcome all regardless of sexual orientation while not accepting the sin of homosexuality.²⁸⁷ While Anglican Church and other religious institutions continued to identify heterosexuality as the foundation of canon and civil marriage law, beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, the bishops of Canadian urban dioceses did face pressure from Anglican gays and lesbians who sought equal access to all church sacraments including marriage and ordination to the priesthood.

²⁸⁵ The Anglican Church of Canada, “How we are organized,” <http://www.anglican.ca/about/organization/>, accessed March 19, 2013.

²⁸⁶ Anglican Church of Canada General Synod and House of Bishops, “History of Statements and Resolutions about Homosexuality,” <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/focus/hs/ssbh/hsrh/>, accessed March 15, 2013.

²⁸⁷ Anglican Church of Canada, “Report of the Primate’s Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions,” 2005, <http://www.anglican.ca/primate/ptc/smr/>, accessed March 19, 2013.

When Ellis joined the Anglican Church and became active in advocating for gay and lesbian rights in the late 1980s, the church was grappling with its ideal of welcoming all with sin, but not *that* sin. Gay and lesbian eligibility for the priesthood was also an issue, with gay men becoming priests, but being forced to deny their sexual orientation.²⁸⁸ As a consequence, Ellis' speeches and writings focused on analysing church politics and doctrine. In 1989, for example, she spoke at a diocesan conference; her speech entitled, "We are sitting beside you: Gays and lesbians in the Anglican Church" was re-titled "Homosexuals in the Church?" in the conference programme. Ellis discussed the politics behind the re-titling of her speech without her consent in an article, "How to do Oppression," which was published in the diocesan newsletter, *The Integrator*, in 1989. For her, this move demonstrated the level of church resistance to gays and lesbians, in that they were being hidden under the then scientific term, "homosexual." Ellis went on to argue that, "I'm glad it happened, though, this silencing of our statement. It is the best example I could give you about how oppression works at the grass-roots level, here, in our church. Not out of a malicious conspiracy to mess us up, but because it never occurs to the oppressor to question what it is doing."²⁸⁹ She also exposed how the church 'suffered' the presence of gays and lesbians:

In the church at this time, for gays and lesbians, this sufferance is expressed so: We'll let you in IF. IF you are celibate. IF you aren't ordained. IF you dress and act like a non-gay. IF you stay away from our children. IF you are sorry for being gay, IF you don't talk about it. Each condition is a denial of our understanding, of our calling, of our gifts.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ In 1976 in Ottawa, the first Canadian woman was ordained as an Anglican priest, which was also very controversial. This decision illustrated local decision-making within the diocese, which involved the parishioners, the diocesan council, and the Bishop who conducted the ordination.

²⁸⁹ Mayne Ellis, "How to do Oppression," *The Integrator* (Pentecost, 1989): 2-3.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

Ellis' 1989 speech and critical writing on its re-naming, however, did not result in any shift in Anglican Church policies. In 1992, the Bishop and the Bishop's Court of Toronto fired Jim Ferry, an ordained Anglican priest, on the grounds of 'disobedience' because he would not end his homosexual relationship and/or practice chastity. In another article published in *The Integrator*, Ellis mounted another critique, arguing that this decision exposed "the true nature of the 'liberal' front that church officials seems anxious to present, to keep lesbians quiet while draining us of our money, energy, gifts and time."²⁹¹ In 1997, the Anglican Church formalized its policy towards gays and lesbians, which included the requirement that single (unmarried) gay and lesbian clergy remain chaste:

Among our clergy there are some who are gay or lesbian. Their ministries are often highly dedicated and greatly blessed. God has endowed them with many intellectual and spiritual gifts and we give thanks for their ministries. We reaffirm that sexual orientation in and of itself is not a barrier to ordination or the practice of ministry within the church. Within the wider parameters of suitability, it is the manner in which sexuality is expressed that must be considered. Our intimate relationships are an expression of the most profound possibilities for human relationships, including our relationship with God (Eph.5:32). At ordination, candidates promise to live their lives and shape their relationships so as to provide a 'wholesome example' to the people of God (BCP, 642). Exemplary behaviour for persons who are not married includes a commitment to remain chaste.²⁹²

This policy meant that the Anglican Church would ordain gays and lesbians as priests, who in turn could administer the sacrament of marriage to heterosexuals, but could not themselves marry their same-sex partners within the church. Furthermore, a lesbian priest

²⁹¹ Mayne Ellis, "The Family of God? Reflections on the sentencing of Jim Ferry," *The Integrator* (Toronto 1992): n.p.

²⁹² Anglican Bishops of Canada, "Human Sexuality: A Statement by the Anglican Bishops of Canada, 1997," <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/identity/hob-statement/>, accessed March 15, 2013.

can marry heterosexual couples; however, she can only *bless*, but not marry same-sex couples. Given these discriminatory practices, Ellis noted that, “One of the things that Integrity always wanted to achieve was the recognition of same-sex marriage on an equal basis with heterosexual marriage, because it is a sacrament.”²⁹³ As the public face of Integrity in British Columbia and indeed in Canada, she remained an outspoken and visible lesbian both within and outside her church. During her interview, she stated:

...the beautiful thing about being involved with Integrity and every other organization that I've been involved with since was that I had the opportunity to speak for people who could not speak out. I was very conscious when I worked with Integrity that there - there were a whole bunch of people behind me and that I had a responsibility. It actually was - one of the things I loved about it was that it connected me to other people in a useful way. I had - I had an important role and I could do things for people who could not take the risk of doing those things for themselves. And I was able to speak in a way that could not necessarily be brushed aside. Because I had the - you know, I was an official of this organization. I was going to be taken seriously because I had President of Integrity Vancouver after my name. So sharpen up, boys! The dyke's in town!²⁹⁴

In the end, Ellis also made history:

Some of the history I've helped to make is that openly lesbian and gay priests can be ordained in the Anglican Church in Canada. They can live together with their partners. They can ... they can be loved and respected and valued and included by and with everyone in the church. There are many congregations across the country that have, for most intents and purposes, settled the question about lesbian and gay full participation, who would like to see - what would a gay or a lesbian marriage look like? We'd sure like to have one in our church. I have been part of making it possible for an openly gay man to be chosen as the rector of a Cathedral - archbishop is not far behind.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Ellis, 37: 1679-1681.

²⁹⁴ Ellis, 25: 1112-1122.

²⁹⁵ Ellis, 43: 1969-1980.

As of January 2013, in the Diocese of New Westminster (BC), same-sex couples wishing to be blessed by the Anglican Church must first get married in a civil ceremony; then, they may be blessed in a church where the congregation has voted in favour of same-sex blessings and where the priest has no objection to performing the blessing.²⁹⁶ However, the Anglican Church in Canada and worldwide remains split on the role of women, gays, and lesbians in its spiritual and institutional structure. That said, Ellis' work with Integrity was instrumental in the achievement of ordination rights for gays and lesbians in British Columbia and across Canada. With customary humility, she suggested of her work: "And ... whatever legacy I leave, there's - there's things that the world around me can no longer un-know because I have participated with my brothers and sisters in doing that work. And isn't that neat!"²⁹⁷ Eventually, Ellis left the Anglican Church and now engages in a spiritual practice that includes meditation and reflection.

Women and Sports

Daphne Drew's feminist work has focused on addressing the inequities experienced by women in Canadian sports. As a high school and University of Western Ontario athlete, she became aware that women's sports were under-funded and had unequal access to field, rink, and pool times; male teams (whether intramural or inter-collegiate) got the best practice and playing times and the bulk of allocated sport funding.²⁹⁸ In 1980, Drew wrote a thesis on how Sport Canada and Fitness and Amateur Sport Canada had barely worked with or funded women athletes, coaches, and

²⁹⁶ "Memorandum from Michael Ingham, Bishop of Diocese of New Westminster to All Diocesan Clergy & Members of the Diocesan Council," *Synod 2012 and the Blessing of Same –Sex Relationships* (July 17, 2012): 1, accessed February 18, 2013, http://www.vancouver.anglican.ca/portals/0/repository/Bishopletteron_samesexblessingsjuly2012.pdf.

²⁹⁷ Ellis, 59: 2674-2676.

²⁹⁸ Drew, 14: 632-637.

administrators in the period between 1976 and 1979. Her thesis and subsequent research exposed the gendered nature of amateur sports, by providing statistics on boys' and girls' sports participation rates, gendered inequalities in the funding of athletes and different sports, and women's lack of representation in national coaching and administrative structures. As she pointed out, "...that research reflected a gross under-representation and almost systemic elimination of women from senior coaching and administrative positions in sport in Canada, and that was happening at the both the provincial and federal level. It was happening less so in club sports like synchronized swimming, field hockey ... the girls' sports ... pretty hard to justify a *male* coach for synchronized swimming."²⁹⁹

As a result of Drew's research and with the passage of Title IX in the United States in 1975, Canada's sport funding policy began to be scrutinized as did the issue of equality in sports.³⁰⁰ Drew further noted that, in this period, she "loved the exposure to some really good thinkers and ... it was through that exposure that we actually developed kind of a - network. And this is where I think the feminism aspect and ... if you want to call it a core group of lesbian women from across Canada ... They spearheaded the formation of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport (CAAWS),"³⁰¹ an organization dedicated to the achievement of gender equality and non-discrimination in such areas as the allocation of "resources, programs, and decision making."³⁰² This group first met in Hamilton, Ontario in 1981 and, as indicated in a photo that graces the organization's website, Drew is named as one of the founding

²⁹⁹ Drew, 15: 642-653.

³⁰⁰ Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in any educational program or activity receiving any type of U.S. federal financial aid. This amendment to the Education Act has been under attack since its inception; for the most part, its provisions have held. See <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/home/advocate/title-ix-and-issues/history-of-title-ix/history-of-title-ix>, accessed August 8, 2013.

³⁰¹ Drew, 16: 728-735.

³⁰² CAAWS, "What is Gender Equity?," <http://www.caaws.ca/gender-equity-101/what-is-gender-equity/>, accessed August 7, 2013.

mothers.³⁰³ In describing this group of women, Drew indicated that it “really formed kind of a new - a movement - and I wouldn’t say it was a totally lesbian group, but I would say that the lesbian group within the group strengthened the overall initiative to move forward and it had nothing to do with sex, it just had - it was about creating equality.”³⁰⁴ As Sandra Kirby, another founding member of CAAWS, has suggested, what distinguished CAAWS from, for example, the Sport Canada’s Women’s Program was its feminist politics:

Throughout the 1980s, the relationship between CAAWS and Sport Canada’s Women’s Program had been an awkward one, partly because CAAWS called itself an organization that was openly and ‘blatantly feminist.’ At that time, CAAWS was positioned outside of the recognized sport community, and, although it worked diligently to bring gender equity to the government and various sport organizations, it was clearly not considered part of the sport community by the funders of the Sport Forum process.³⁰⁵

She further points out that, when Olympic athlete Marion Lay of CAAWS was hired by Sport Canada’s Women’s Program, the latter program was radicalized as Lay “took with her the CAAWS feminist agenda as a blueprint for change. As a result, a strong feminist voice from government began working collaboratively with national sport organizations and with CAAWS.”³⁰⁶ In addition, feminist processes were relied on to address sometimes complex internal dynamics. For example, Drew noted that sexual relationships between group members became an issue, in that “the unfortunate thing about the lesbian community is that people get together and then they break up and they’re still on the

³⁰³ For more information on CAAWS, see Guylaine Demers et al., eds., *Playing it Forward: 50 Years of Women and Sport in Canada* (Toronto: Feminist History Society, 2013).

³⁰⁴ Drew, 18: 784-788.

³⁰⁵ Sandra Kirby, “Gender Equity in the Canadian Sport Council: The New Voice for the Sport Community,” in *Feminist Success Stories/ Célébrons Nos Réussites Féministes*, ed. Karen A. Blackford, Marie-Luce Garceau, and Sandra Kirby (Ottawa : University of Ottawa Press, 1991), 59.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

Board of Directors together.”³⁰⁷ However, CAAWS aspired to be an organization with a strong common sense of purpose and the feminist culture of the organization was to address conflict and seek resolution. Its members had a job to do.

Among its many activities, CAAWS challenged the Olympic Charter, which in 1980 stated that women could only compete in certain sports. The organization translated this to mean that, since men were not mentioned at all in the Olympic Charter, the Olympics should be a women-only event in the identified sports.³⁰⁸ In Drew’s view, when CAAWS tackled the International Olympic Committee (IOC), it made history, in that the IOC “took out that clause that said ‘women may...’”³⁰⁹ In 2007, the IOC formally adopted the goal “to encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women.”³¹⁰ It also produces regular factsheet updates on women’s equity in the Olympic movement.³¹¹ While modest about her contribution that began with her 1980 thesis which formed a blueprint for action, Drew did suggest that, as a community of women, the CAAWS did make history: “We have brought women’s sport up to a level where ... female athletes ... are being recognized as world-class athletes ... it wasn’t like, ‘let’s make history’ ... it was like ... we have these goals and we need to achieve them. In retrospect, yeah, we made history but I don’t think we looked at it that way.”³¹² She further noted that, since its inception in 1981, the CAAWS has grown and expanded significantly and “now has a multi-million dollar budget and has some incredible

³⁰⁷ Drew, 18: 812-832.

³⁰⁸ Drew, 17: 738-743.

³⁰⁹ Drew, 26: 1601-1612.

³¹⁰ International Olympic Committee, “The Organisation,” <http://www.olympic.org/about-ioc-institution>, accessed August 7, 2013.

³¹¹ International Olympic Committee, “Factsheet: Women in the Olympic Movement, Update—March 2013,” <http://www.olympic.org/results?q=gender%20equity%202007>, accessed August 7, 2013.

³¹² Drew, 35-36: 1586-1611.

programming.”³¹³ And Drew continues to make a contribution to discussions of women in Canadian sports, as indicated by recent chapter she published in the collection, *Playing it Forward: 50 Years of Women and Sport in Canada* (2013).

And Not the State

On 14 February 1981, a thirty-one year-old lesbian from Toronto stood in front of 1,500 women from across Canada assembled in the East Block in Ottawa to propose that freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation *specifically* be noted in the provisions of the proposed new Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Although my motion was approved by the women in the room, it did not make it into any of the Charter’s provisions at the time of its patriation.³¹⁴ The feminists present at the same ad hoc assembly in Ottawa were also unhappy about the lack of *specific* mention of ‘women’ in the Charter and in particular in the Section 15 equality provisions, which read as follows: “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”³¹⁵ They argued that the use of the term ‘individual’ in the Charter was not specific enough because historically, the term ‘person’ generally only applied to men. As a result, the 1981 ad hoc committee proposed and adopted an

³¹³ Drew, 17: 763-767. The organization is thriving today as indicated by the programs and achievements featured on its website available at <http://www.caaws.ca>. Since 1981, for example, CAAWS has worked in close cooperation with government and non-government organizations on activities and initiatives that advocate for positive change for girls and women in sport and physical activity. See <http://www.caaws.ca/about-caaws/vision-mission/>, accessed September 24, 2014.

³¹⁴ The author was present at the *Ad Hoc Conference* and participated in the discussions over Section 28. After the conference, organizers fanned out across the Hill to promote Section 28, which was incorporated in the Charter. For more information, see the documentary film, *Constitute!*, available on the web-site: <http://constitute.ca/the-film/>.

³¹⁵ Government of Canada, *The Constitution Act, 1982*, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-15.html#h-38>, accessed January 30, 2013.

additional clause, which implicitly referred to the 1930 Persons Case and read:

“Notwithstanding anything in this Charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female *persons*.”³¹⁶ This latter clause was included in the Charter Section 28.

After the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was incorporated into the repatriated Canadian Constitution in 1982 and came into effect across Canada in 1985, the Canadian liberal state undertook to formally establish individual equality rights and freedoms, while giving individuals the promise of inviolability of those rights. As its equality provisions (Sections 15 and 28) were challenged and tested in provincial and federal courts, the interpretation of the new *Constitution* and its *Charter* was nested in the 1930 Persons Case and the concepts of the “living tree principle” and the “frozen concepts/originalism principle” articulated therein. In that landmark case, five Canadian women applied for the right to be considered ‘*persons*’ under Canadian law,³¹⁷ as only white men were designated as such and hence Henrietta Edwards could not be called to serve as a senator as the *Constitution Act, 1867* did not consider a woman to be a ‘qualified person’. The case, formally known as *Edwards v. A.G. of Canada*, instituted two important legal landmarks: that ‘*persons*’ included men and women; and the articulation of the ‘living tree principle’ by the British Privy Council. In the latter case, “The *British North America Act* [1867] planted in Canada a living tree capable of growth

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ They were known as the Famous Five: Henrietta Edwards, Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, Emily Murphy, and Louise McKinney. There are commemorative statues of them in Calgary and on Parliament Hill.

and expansion. The object of the Act was to grant a Constitution to Canada. Like all written constitutions it has been subject to development and usage.”³¹⁸

Seventy-five years later, in 2004, the Canadian Supreme Court in 2004 affirmed the idea of a ‘living’ constitution: “The ‘frozen concepts’ reasoning that is prevalent in the USA, runs contrary to one of the most fundamental principles of Canadian constitutional interpretation: that our Constitution is a living tree, which, by way of a liberal interpretation, accommodates and addresses the realities of modern life.”³¹⁹ In a 2007 debate between Canadian Supreme Court Justice Ian Binnie and US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, Justice Binnie referred to the 1930 Persons Case “where the courts in Canada embarrassed themselves by holding, in accordance with the ‘original meaning’ of Section 32 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, that women were not qualified for appointment to the Senate because they were not ‘qualified persons’.”³²⁰ In his counter argument, Justice Scalia explained the frozen concept or originalism approach to constitutional change in the US where “... limitations are put on the majority by the *Bill of Rights* which was voted on by the majority.”³²¹ His argument denied the frozen concept as he stated that the US *Constitution* was frozen only until the majority determined to change it by law/statute. The contrast between the Canadian and US constitutional approaches is clear: the British-Canadian ‘living tree principle’ has

³¹⁸ Edwards v. A.G. Canada [1930] AC123; [1930] 1DLR 98 (PC) “Privy Council Judgement on the Meaning of “Qualified Persons,” <http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/en/browseSubjects/edwardspc.asp>, accessed February 21, 2013.

³¹⁹ Supreme Court of Canada, “Reference re Same-Sex Marriage, 2004 SCC 79, [2004] 3 S.C.R. 698,” 3, accessed October 30, 2012, <http://scc.lexum.org/en/2004/2004scc79/2004scc79.html>.

³²⁰ Ian Binnie, “Interpreting the Constitution: The Living Tree vs. Original Meaning,” *Policy Options/Options Politiques* (October 2007): 104-110, accessed February 9, <http://www.irpp.org/po/archive/oct07/binnie.pdf>.

³²¹ Canadian Public Affairs Channel, “Judging in a Democracy: Binnie vs Scalia” (2007), <http://www.cpac.ca/eng/programs/public-record/episodes/judging-democracy-binnie-vs-scalia>, accessed February 9, 2013.

supported and promoted a broader reading on equality rights for gay and lesbian Canadians. “The ‘living tree’ doctrine looks not to historical practices or assumptions, but to evolving social conditions and the social realities surrounding each specific case that comes before the courts.”³²² The frozen argument in the US has served as a means to limit constitutional reform and the expansion of equality rights.

Despite the articulation of the living tree principle and the existence of the Charter, the road to equal rights for lesbians and gays was not without its roadblocks. For example, Becki Ross wrote a personal account of sitting in the Visitors’ Gallery in 1986 and watching Ontario legislators debate whether to pass Bill 7 (Equality Rights Statute Law Amendment Act), which would bring sexual orientation under the protection of the provincial human rights legislation as mandated by the 1982 *Constitution Act* and the Charter. Ross, who was twenty-five at the time, indicated her eyes were opened: “More gradually, I realized that each member present [in the Legislature] was infused with the power necessary to accomplish pieces of the organization of my everyday, ordinary life. In effect, my lesbian life was being managed, administered, and ruled, largely by ‘the sons of educated men’ right before my horrified eyes.”³²³ Those who opposed the Bill forwarded various arguments. Robert Runciman (MPP, Leeds-Grenville and now a Senator) argued that, “Most important, this bill lacks a clear definition of just what is meant by sexual orientation. Does that mean the province at some point will be recognizing homosexual marriages as legal unions? Will this legislation indirectly result in homosexual couples having the right to adopt children? Those are two serious

³²² Kathleen A. Lahey and Kevin Alderson, *Same-Sex Marriage: The Personal and the Political* (Toronto: Insomnia Press, 2004), 88.

³²³ Becki Ross, “Sexual Dis/Orientation or Playing House: To Be or Not to Be Coded Human,” in *Lesbians in Canada*, ed. Sharon Dale Stone (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990), 139.

questions that must be answered.”³²⁴ Leo Bernier (MPP, Kenora), who favoured a separate but equal approach, focused on issues related to definitions of family:

In this province, one may disagree with another’s sexual preferences without denying them their rights. To include sexual orientation in the Human Rights Code of Ontario would, in my opinion, change the definition of a family as is accepted at present by the vast majority of this province and this country. It would provide a functional definition, which does not require heterosexuality as its foundation and would provide homosexuality as a legitimate and alternate lifestyle on the same basis as the traditional family.³²⁵

The issues that preoccupied those who opposed the Bill included the fear that homosexuals would seek marriage and adoption rights just like heterosexuals, the heterosexual family unit, as the “foundation” of the nation, would be threatened, and heteronormativity, “the systematized set of social standards, customs, and expected practices which both regulate and restrict romantic and sexual relationships between persons of different sexes in late twentieth century western culture,” would be undermined.³²⁶ In the end, however, Bill 7 was passed by the Ontario Legislature in 1986.

The Canadian Library of Parliament provides a timeline which indicates the steady and incremental expansion of gay and lesbian rights at the federal and provincial levels, which were achieved through court challenges and/or political lobbying.³²⁷ In 1995, the Ontario court delivered a ground-breaking decision on adoption rights allowing

³²⁴ Ontario, *Legislative Debate* (November 25, 1986), <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/33-2/1070.htm>, 31 January 2013, accessed January 31, 2013.

³²⁵ Ontario, *Legislative Debates* (November 26, 1986), <http://hansardindex.ontla.on.ca/hansardeissue/33-2/1069.htm>, accessed January 31, 2013.

³²⁶ Christine Overall, “Heterosexuality and Feminist Theory,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (March 1990): 3, accessed November 5, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40231680>. Elise Chenier’s *Strangers in our Midst: Sexual Deviancy in Postwar Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) plots how the judiciary, police, medical establishment, and government-appointed bodies regulated anti-social behaviour and sexual misconduct in post-World War II Ontario.

³²⁷ Mary C. Hurley, “Sexual Orientation and Legal Rights,” *Library of Parliament* (Ottawa, May 31, 2007): 31-35, accessed January 31, 2013, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/prb0413-e.htm>.

adoption by same-sex step-parents.³²⁸ I interviewed two of the plaintiffs (Benson and Kaufman) whose legal case is discussed below.³²⁹ In 2000, same sex couples achieved the same status as common-law heterosexual couples under federal laws, when Bill C-23 was passed: “Federally, the *Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act* (Bill C-23) enacted by Parliament in 2000 amended 68 statutes to effect equal application of federal laws to unmarried heterosexual and same-sex couples and to extend to them some benefits and obligations previously limited to married couples.”³³⁰ In 2003, Ontario and British Columbia approved civil marriages for same sex couples. Quebec, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland-Labrador followed suit in 2004; New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island came on board when the Canadian Parliament passed Bill C-38, *The Civil Marriage Act*, which legalized state-performed, same-sex marriages across the country, in 2005.

Same-Sex Adoption Rights

Roberta Benson and Miriam Kaufman met in 1978 in Kingston, Ontario while attending Queen’s University. They fell in love and have been together ever since. Benson and Kaufman are both feminists and for them, feminism and lesbianism are intertwined. They were both actively involved in addressing social issues that affected women. Benson, for example, worked on women’s access to and treatment before the law, volunteered at women’s and rape crisis centres in Kingston and Toronto, and beginning in 1976, belonged to political groups such as Lesbians Against the Right (LAR) and

³²⁸ K. & B. (Re). LII 7396 (ON SC). Superior Court of Justice. 1995. *Superior Court of Justice*, <http://canlii.ca/t/1wc3d>, accessed January 31, 2013. The judgement is exceptionally well-written, cogent, and clear.

³²⁹ M. v. H. 2 S.C.R. 3. Supreme Court of Canada. 1999. *Supreme Court of Canada*. <http://scc.lexum.org/decisia-scc-csc/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1702/index.do>, accessed November 5, 2012.

³³⁰ Government of Canada, *Bill C 38: The Civil Marriage Act*. 2005, http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/LegislativeSummaries/bills_ls.asp?ls=c38&Parl=38&Ses=1, accessed June 20, 2015.

Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW).³³¹ At the age of sixteen, Kaufman dropped out of high school, went to North Carolina, and joined a women's collective that was active in the anti-Vietnam War movement. As she recalled, "Well, I think my original decision to be a lesbian was a decision, was definitely based on the fact that if you - if you really wanted to be a feminist, you should be a lesbian."³³² She further noted that, "Well, I think if I hadn't identified as a lesbian, I wouldn't have ... met Roberta so I would say my life is profoundly different because I identity as a lesbian. I don't know if there is a lesbian sensibility or not. I definitely view the world differently than many straight people I work with but - you know, there's feminism, there's all kinds of things in there."³³³

As discussed in the previous chapter, Benson and Kaufman's son Jacob was born in 1984 and their daughter Aviva followed in 1988. As lesbian parents, they experienced a steep learning curve, which was shared by their friends and professional contacts. Another obstacle they encountered was Ontario's child and family laws that specifically excluded same sex couples from legal child custody and the adoption of each other's children; the law specifically stated that adoptive parents had to be members of the opposite sex. Benson, Kaufman, and their ten year-old son Jacob disagreed and they launched a challenge to Ontario law in the mid-1980s. The following provides a summary of the case:

In the mid-1980s, a lesbian couple, Miriam Kaufman, a doctor, and Roberta Benson, a lawyer, decided that they would raise a family together.

³³¹ Benson, for example, attended the Lesbians Against the Right conference held on 9 May 1981 in Toronto. It examined the rise of right wing groups, such as the Western Guard (a white supremacy group), as well as REAL Women of Canada which has traditionally opposed women's Charter equality. Another participant, Judy Lightwater presented at the same conference.

³³² Kaufman, 9: 397-399.

³³³ Ibid., 16: 727-731.

Miriam gave birth to two children: a son, Jacob and a daughter, Aviva. Despite the fact that they were clearly a family, the law did not recognize Roberta as the legal parent of the two children. The obvious answer was for Roberta to adopt Jacob and Aviva. However, at that time, the adoption legislation only allowed opposite sex couples to adopt their partner's children. In 1994, Ontario's first female Attorney General, Marion Boyd, introduced legislation to amend all Ontario laws, so same-sex couples would have the same rights as opposite-sex couples. Ms. Boyd believed that, otherwise, Ontario's laws infringed the equality provisions of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. There was a great deal of controversy over this bill. Ultimately, a free vote was held in the legislature. Some of the members of government voted against the bill, and it was defeated on second reading. In the provincial election that followed, the issue of same sex benefits was a major campaign issue. Miriam, Roberta, Jacob and Aviva, were left legally vulnerable. After the bill's defeat, with three other lesbian families, Miriam and Roberta decided to take action. They retained the now Treasurer [of Law Society of Upper Canada], Laurie H. Pawlitzka, to bring a Charter challenge to the adoption legislation that prevented them from both being the legal parents of their children. When the challenge was launched, Attorney General Boyd intervened in the adoption case, and asked her lawyer, Crown Attorney and now Law Society Bencher, Janet Minor, to make arguments both for and against the validity of the adoption legislation. The Attorney General also conceded that the legislation was unconstitutional. The case came before the Honourable Justice James Nevins of the Ontario Court of Justice. Justice Nevins found that the law precluding the adoptions was unconstitutional. In May 1995, he granted adoption orders to four non-biological mothers who were co-parenting their partners' children. The children, son, Jacob and daughter, Aviva, were part of that group.³³⁴

This summary, however, does not express the human dimensions of the case. As Miriam explained, "Jacob kind of led us into this. Like, he was really worried after Bill 167 failed [Ontario, 1994], about what would happen to him if I died and if he would end up *stuck with* my older sister ... And he understood a lot and he - so it was really

³³⁴ The Law Society of Upper Canada, *Ontario Lawyers Gazette* (Summer 2011): 6.

important for him, but it would have been awful for him if we had lost.”³³⁵ In 1994, Bill 167 sought to amend all Ontario laws so same-sex couples would have the same human rights as opposite-sex couples. It was defeated when some members of the NDP government who had proposed the Bill voted against it. Ontario gays and lesbians were very disappointed with the defeat; for gay and lesbian parents, it served as a reminder of how unstable their family situations were and how vulnerable they were to state and institutional intervention. Benson and Kaufman took the Government of Ontario to court under Section 15, the equality provision of the Charter. Benson noted that in 1995, “I had no legal rights or responsibilities to the children [Jacob and Aviva]. Legally, I couldn’t make decisions about their health or anything and, if anything happened to Miriam, I would not have parental rights to raise them or anything like that.” Recall that Benson, just after Jacob’s birth, did not consider him ‘hers’.³³⁶ Now, fifteen years later, Benson stated that, “I didn’t want to admit that the law had any - made any difference in our lives. I mean this whole thing that biology was determinant of - or that law could determine who loved each other and so on, in a relationship - I totally rejected that ... Afterwards, I did feel more secure because I could say you know, ‘Yes, they’re my legal children’.”³³⁷

The question is what drove Benson and Kaufman to undertake this legal challenge? In this case, both parents were women; their emotional, domestic, and parental union was not recognized by the state, but was recognized by their children and their families. Every decision Benson and Kaufman took as parents involved some form of risk. While Miriam bore the children, the state could have removed the children from Miriam because she

³³⁵ Kaufman (Benson and Kaufman), 26-27: 1179-1209. This comment was expressed with some ironic humour. The Ontario Bill 167 did pass in 1986.

³³⁶ Benson, 17: 732-742.

³³⁷ Benson (Benson and Kaufman), 26: 1117-1130.

was a lesbian, of poor moral character for being a lesbian and raising the children with another woman, and/or for bearing the children out-of-wedlock.³³⁸ By undertaking a Section 15 Charter challenge, Benson and Kaufman were subjected to intense court and public scrutiny. All aspects of their lives were examined through a heteronormative lens, including education, employment, character, income, etc. As Benson recalled, “I had to file an affidavit - we did you know, saying that in fact, we weren’t perverted gutter-dwelling people, but we were actually, you know, regular people with regular jobs and you know, education and - and that kind of thing and it was - you know, I found that ... not that it’s humiliating, but it ... but it bothered me...”³³⁹ In addition, what added to the risk and stress of the Court challenge was the fact that Ontario had just elected Progressive Conservative Premier Mike Harris and his neo-conservative social, economic, and political government. Benson and Kaufman feared that the new government would appeal the Ontario court’s decision, which would have put them in a precarious situation as parents and appellants. The government did not appeal, the Ontario law changed, and other provinces, including British Columbia, changed their provincial regulations after this ruling. Both Benson and Kaufman became the legal parents of *their* two children. Justice Nevins’ reasoning read:

Therefore the definition of ‘spouse’ as it appears in s. 136(1) of the *Child and Family Services Act* should be read and applied as if enacted in the following form: ‘spouse’ means the person to whom a person of the opposite sex is married or with whom a person of the same or opposite sex is living in a conjugal relationship outside marriage. The applicants for adoption in all the cases before me qualify as spouses within that

³³⁸ Joanne Radbord, “Lesbian Mothers and the Law of Custody, Access, and Child Support,” *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* 1, no. 2 (1999): 87, accessed December 6, 2012, <http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/jarm>.

³³⁹ Benson, 20: 898-902.

definition, and the adoption applications will now be considered individually on their merits.³⁴⁰

Nevins 'read' equality of persons into the *Child and Family Services Act* and subsequently, this reading entered all other relevant Ontario statutes. As to the question of 'making history', Benson modestly noted that, "I hope that we made a contribution ... to make things better for, you know, other people that came along afterwards so, yeah."³⁴¹ Kaufman added that, "Yes. Yeah, I think we were quite aware that we were making history. We were quite aware that it was going to be momentous. It was very exciting when it happened."³⁴² And this became the case that allowed same-sex step-parental adoptions across Canada as other provincial jurisdictions adopted Judge Nevins' ruling.

Carol McDonald shared how she was also actively involved in fighting for same-sex benefits and in this case, through the United Nurses of Alberta. As discussed in the previous chapter, McDonald dropped out of her Calgary high school and left her upper middle-class home at the age of sixteen and worked at various working-class jobs in the 1970s. Although isolated from her family and church, she had friends who supported, aided, and guided her in life and career decisions. One friend encouraged her to think about nursing and helped her enrol in a nursing program. Between 1979 and 2003, McDonald obtained a Diploma in Nursing, a Bachelor of Science degree, an M.A., and a Ph.D.; she now teaches at the University of Victoria. At one point in our interview,

³⁴⁰ K. & B. (Re). LII 7396 (ON SC). Ontario Supreme Court. 24 May 1995. <http://canlii.ca/en/on/onsc/doc/1995/1995canlii7396/1995canlii7396.html>, accessed January 31, 2013. This case is worth reading in full as Justice Nevins clearly addressed the welfare and best interests of the child within the context of a loving and supportive familial environment. He clarified the rights (stated and implied) that come with being a spouse and spouse-like.

³⁴¹ Benson, 24: 1082-1084.

³⁴² Kaufman (Benson and Kaufman), 28: 1274-1276.

McDonald stated that, "...in my life, I felt like I was always awake to what was going on."³⁴³

While employed as a nurse in Alberta before moving to British Columbia, McDonald fought for same-sex health benefits for her then partner through her union, the United Nurses of Alberta (UNA). The union included this clause in their collective agreement negotiations with the province of Alberta in 1990 and it was incorporated in the final collective agreement. As McDonald noted, this victory constituted a political awakening: "So that was kind of the first - that was a - kind of my awakening to the - the possibility of - that things can change."³⁴⁴ At the same time, while she was out to the Director of Nursing and her co-workers, her request to the nurses' union *outed* her to those beyond her own workplace who did not know her sexual orientation. As she recalled, it shone a light on her and her partner: "I remember someone wanted to come and do an interview with pictures ... and I was kind of interested, but my partner was not."³⁴⁵ In addition, this was a gutsy move for both McDonald and the union, especially given that the 1988 labour negotiations between the United Nurses of Alberta and the government of Alberta was marked by a series of bitter interactions interspersed with illegal work stoppages, court injunctions, and hefty fines levied on the union. The strike was nasty as the Getty government tried to cut costs in the face of falling worldwide gas prices. The 1990 settlement, which included the same-sex benefits clause, was reached before the strike deadline and labour peace held.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ McDonald, 17: 750-765.

³⁴⁴ McDonald, 12: 542-543.

³⁴⁵ McDonald, 13: 560-563.

³⁴⁶ "Ratify Nurses' deal," *Calgary Herald*, March 26, 1990, A4,
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/244068017/13CC0E442E434979CC6/7?accountid=14846>.

McDonald's action in requesting same-sex health benefits was both personal and public and it involved engagement with the state *and* the nurses' union. She indicated that, for her, it was a professional, lesbian, feminist, and political issue. She suggested that she had made history on a number of levels, which went beyond same-sex health benefits: "I never would have imagined that I could have been married. And so to have participated in that process, you know, of same-sex marriage, I think is history-making, right? I think participating in ... the political action of having same-sex benefits is making history. I think being out ... as a professional in nursing and particularly in the academy, I think is making history."³⁴⁷ McDonald indicated that she came late to feminism; she always knew her allegiance was to women, but was not fully aware of feminism until graduate school. Feminism filled a gap in her analysis: "I think, in some way, the kind of central ideas of feminism, when I came to sort of be exposed to them theoretically, aligned with a lot of my thinking about women, the value of women, the - oppression of women. And so it gave me a language both to understand and to talk about things that were very relevant for my life."³⁴⁸ In reflecting on her life, she indicated that, "Well, I think I've had a wonderful life - like - I think I am - very, very happy with my life. And it's a *lesbian* life."³⁴⁹ Now, she blends a sustaining spirituality with personal, political, as well as academic pursuits. With regard to the latter, her work considers some of the following personal, professional, and political questions in relation to women and their sexual identity:

In a feminist understanding of women's health, experiences of health are inseparable from the everyday experiences of an embodied life and are constituted within each woman's social, material, and discursive

³⁴⁷ McDonald, 18: 793-799.

³⁴⁸ McDonald, 10: 417-422.

³⁴⁹ McDonald, 17: 750-751.

realities ... They challenge nurses to consider the binary categories of homosexual and heterosexual as inadequate signifiers for the reality of women's lives, to consider the particular arrangements of each woman's life, and to disrupt assumptions of heterosexism in order to reduce the negative impact of social exclusion, isolation, discrimination, and stigmatization as social determinants of health.³⁵⁰

She Loves Me, She Loves Me Not

A final struggle for equality that my participants discussed is same-sex civil marriage. As Tom Warner has argued, this issue was not on the radar of gay and lesbian activists in the 1970s and 1980s. During those decades, activists focused on the establishment of human rights codes that would protect lesbians and gays against discrimination in, for example, employment, housing, and parenting. In subsequent years, however, there was a shift toward fighting for equality rights, including same-sex marriage, which was achieved in British Columbia and Ontario in 2003 and in Canada in 2005. Of the eleven, four participants have married; the other seven informants expressed reticence about marrying for a variety of reasons, including on feminist grounds and because of its heteronormative assimilationist potential. Here are their stories and perspectives.

In July 2000, Judy Lightwater and Cynthia Callahan were the second couple in British Columbia to attempt to get a marriage license from the Government of British Columbia's Vital Statistics branch in Victoria, British Columbia. What was different about their request was that it was not denied ... nor approved; rather, the then BC Attorney General, Andrew Petter, asked the British Columbia Supreme Court to declare

³⁵⁰ Carol McDonald, "Lesbian Disclosure: Disrupting the Taken for Granted," *CJNR* 38 (2009): 260, accessed January 14, 2013, <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/mcgill/cjnr/2009/00000041/00000001/art00018>.

that same-sex couples could marry under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.³⁵¹ Petter stated that, “In a modern society there is no justification for denying same-sex couples the same option to form marital bonds as are afforded to opposite-sex couples.”³⁵²

Lightwater and Callahan’s very visible action of applying to marry was covered by the local media and the cloak of invisibility associated with lesbians was shed. As they indicated in a public statement, “The Deputy Attorney General has assured us that if a licence could have been legally issued by the Director of Vital Statistics, we would have one by now ... Naturally, we are disappointed our union can’t yet be a legal one. But it’s up to the federal government to right this wrong, and we’re extremely pleased that the BC Government has committed to arguing in support of equal marriage in court.”³⁵³ Three years after trying to obtain a British Columbia license to marry, it became a reality.

Kathleen A. Lahey and Kevin Alderson, both legal scholars, emphasize the importance of the British Columbia Court of Appeal’s wording in its decision; it dismissed the notion of *separate equality*, given that offering civil *unions* as opposed to civil *marriage* to Canadian gay and lesbian *persons* was “constitutionally impermissible.”³⁵⁴

In her interview, Lightwater defined herself as a civil libertarian and this politics shaped her approach to such questions as being ‘queer’ and equal marriage rights. She noted that, “to me, being queer means saying, ‘I can sleep with whoever I choose; I can define my sexuality and my gender in whatever way I choose’ and as a civil right, I

³⁵¹ CBC, “Legalizing same-sex marriages,” July 20, 2000, http://www.cbc.ca/news/story/2000/07/20/bc_samesex000720.html, accessed November 1, 2012.

³⁵² Egale, “Attorney-General’s Statement on Same Sex marriage,” <http://archive.egale.ca/index.asp?item=199&version=EN#statement>, accessed March 4, 2013.

³⁵³ Egale, “B.C. supports same-sex couples’ right to marry,” <http://archive.egale.ca/index.asp?lang=E&menu=50&item=324>, accessed November 1, 2012. Callahan was an executive in Egale.

³⁵⁴ Kathleen A. Lahey and Kevin Alderson, *Same-Sex Marriage: The Personal and the Political* (Toronto: Insomnia Press, 2004), 89.

defend that.”³⁵⁵ With respect to marriage, she insisted that, “Marriage to me is just a civil liberties issue. It’s not even a gay issue. I prefer ‘equal marriage’ over ‘same-sex marriage’. Religion has nothing to do with it ... marriage shouldn’t have anything to do with religion anyway. You either - in a civil sense - you either have a right to get married or you don’t.”³⁵⁶

Prior to tackling the issue of equal marriage in British Columbia in 2000, Lightwater had long been a political activist in both Ontario and British Columbia. As indicated by Toronto news sources, such as *Broadside*, *This Magazine*, *Toronto Clarion*, and *Ward 8 News*, and BC publications, like *Kinesis* and *Lesbianews*, she was involved in a range of issues between 1979 and 1984. She organized, marched, and wrote on nuclear power and the work of Women for Survival, equal pay for women, equal rights federally and provincially, union rights and organizing, affordable housing and lesbian rights.³⁵⁷ She was a participant in the 14 February 1981 *Ad Hoc Committee* women’s assembly in Ottawa that sought to enshrine *specifically* the rights of women in the proposed new Canadian Constitution Act. As she recalled:

In Toronto, in those very early days, I was involved in - almost exclusively lesbian and - lesbian and gay politics. However, we were addressing a whole bunch of other issues. We were just addressing them as lesbians. So, anti-racism, anti-nuclear war, affordable housing work, environmental work. But there were so many of us who were lesbians who were doing those kinds of things that we could do that work

³⁵⁵ Lightwater, 12: 534-536.

³⁵⁶ Lightwater, 10: 440-454.

³⁵⁷ Lightwater was born Judy Liefshultz. She briefly used her married name, Judy Kovnats; she resumed using her birth name until after 1982, when she officially changed her surname to Lightwater. Articles written by her and consulted for this thesis include: Judy Kovnats, “Refugees for Sale,” *This Magazine* 13, no. 4 (September-October, 1979): 41-45; Judy Kovnats, “Harbourfront brass scuttle union drive,” *Toronto Clarion* 14, no. 4 (November 28, 1979): 1,5; Judy Liefshultz, “Nuclear Power: Child of the Patriarchy,” *Broadside* 1, no. 9 (July-August 1980): 5; Judy Liefshultz, “How Women for Survival, an all-women’s anti-nuclear group is fighting the right,” *Lesbians Against the Right* (May 1981): 19-20; and Judy Lightwater, “How far have women come?” *Kinesis* (February 1984), 12-13.

exclusively with lesbians. So that's what we did. So we were Lesbians Against Racism, we were Lesbians Against Nuclear Energy and nuclear arms, we were lesbians for, you know, anti - we were anti-poverty lesbians. So every single one of those things was done as part of an all-lesbian group ...³⁵⁸

As such, her activism was clearly shaped by her lesbianism and feminism: "Since coming out as a lesbian, feminism has become much more important to me. I decided to withdraw from all mixed groups and try to work with all women [Women for Survival]. The group is not all lesbians, but most of the women are, and the rest are very comfortable with it because we never made any secret of it."³⁵⁹ When she moved to Victoria, a smaller community, Lightwater had to be flexible and pursue her social justice activities in mixed groups which she has done. To this day, she remains active in a number of communities and is involved in various issues including women's employment, a woman's right to choose, the environmental, and girl's and women's equality locally and internationally; she is also a successful businesswoman who works with non-profits.

Other participants decided to marry when equal marriage was legalized in Canada in 2005. In the process, some traditional lesbian and feminist complaints that the institution was a patriarchal plot designed to enslave women appeared to be subverted. In 2005, Carol McDonald entered into marriage believing

that same-sex marriage has moved us towards assimilation, you know, to becoming more like heterosexual couples. Which I'm not necessarily thinking is a good thing. I also think that it - to say that we have the ability to marry and - so, in some very small area, really, we have 'equality', is a - a poor measure of overall equality in terms of our citizenship. You know, so I think - and I think that it, in fact, kind of covers over a lot of areas in which we don't have equality. And so I think it's kind of a red herring in a way, because people say, 'Well, you can get married now, what more do

³⁵⁸ Lightwater, 5-6: 223-235.

³⁵⁹ Liefschultz, "How Women for Survival," 19-20.

you want?’ Right? When, in fact, to me it doesn’t represent equality. So I think - and so, because it covers over other things, more important issues, *and* because it - like, social - real sort of social equality - and because it also sort of ... moves us towards assimilation, for those reason, I don’t support gay marriage.³⁶⁰

That said, McDonald acknowledged the culture in which she was raised: “I don’t support same-sex marriage. On the other hand, (pause) I had never been married. I grew up, you know, very much a part of - I’m not separate from the culture in which, you know, little girls are instilled with the wish to - to be married and so I did have that desire for myself and I also, in some sense, did see it as progress. I mean, I thought, when - when I reflected on my life, I thought, ‘I would *never* have imagined that this would happen in my lifetime, so how can I not do it?’.”³⁶¹ Her motivation for marrying reached beyond its state-sanctioned institutional nature of marriage into personal commitment. She asked: “what would it mean to make a commitment in that way? Am I ready for that? And then to live that, you know, every day.”³⁶²

Chantal Brodeur approached marriage with a plan that she would garner a *yes/oui* from her partner and thereby fulfil her need to build family. As she noted:

It kind of felt right. (laughs) It’s just about feeling right. Why did I want to marry? I wanted to marry because I believe in the - in the family unit. And I guess part of me only really had a strong sense of what a family unit [sic] through marriage, and I’ve been in a relationship before, I was in a monogamous relationship and ... it’s - it’s a strange thing, because it’s almost like you’ve - you’ve - how can I say it? You’re there now.³⁶³

Brodeur’s marriage proposal, which involved seeking her partner’s hand from her parents, mirrored an age-old heterosexual custom mired in the tradition of women being

³⁶⁰ McDonald, 15: 673-685.

³⁶¹ McDonald, 16: 689-695.

³⁶² McDonald, 16: 707-711.

³⁶³ Brodeur, 15: 650-655.

considered chattels. It was a sensitive accommodation on Brodeur's part, but this gesture was meant to act as a bridge to reconciliation between her partner and her parents who continued to be unhappy about their daughter's sexual orientation:

But she's - she comes from a very big family and (laughs) this is going to sound so corny. I proposed and I proposed in front of her parents and to me that was important. It was essential, it was a requirement for this to bring in the family unit because she's not very well accepted by her parents all - she's accepted, but they never speak of it. So it caused a bit of friction. So, by doing it with them, to me it was - it brought the family - it was purposely to bring the family together.³⁶⁴

Brodeur's pragmatism allowed her to bridge the divide between the traditional view of marriage and the contemporary reality of marriage:

And Dad was a little stunned but Mom was quite welcoming and they're very, very religious and they brought - brought a religious song into the event, onto the moment, into the moment, and - but to them, that meant a great deal and for Christine, it also made - meant a great deal so therefore for me it meant a great deal, that it was, like, through the event, the act of asking, they were able to feel comfort and safety through their religious background or support, so everything was brought in together, like, a nice puzzle, and it fit.³⁶⁵

Brodeur's attitude toward marriage reflects her middle-class upbringing, which includes the aura of respectability ascribed to being married in the eyes of the community:

You've arrived, in a way. You've arrived. Although there's more struggle in (laughs) you think there is after marriage but it's - it was kind of a - an act of being proud. I'm proud of being lesbian and, now that I'm allowed to get married, I want to embrace that by telling people that I am married. So people - when people I work [sic] say, 'Are you married?' I say, 'Yeah,

³⁶⁴ Brodeur, 16: 685-690.

³⁶⁵ Brodeur, 16: 703-709.

I'm married.' And then we can carry on from that conversation. People don't say to you, 'So, are you a lesbian?'³⁶⁶

During her interview, Betty Blue also reflected on her decision to marry:

Well, this is interesting, about the question of marriage, eh? I mean, I - you know, we decided to get engaged and get married next summer and it's been a big deal, right, and, you know, it's been a big deal - it's - it's very - it's been a very interesting moment because I - it was not something I thought we would do. I think that - I've always worried about the gay marriage thing and that - and I've always worried that people would think it was the end of politics. And, for me, it's - because marriage was never up there on my political agenda. And I think that, you know, as the years go by, that things that have stayed on my political agenda and, in fact, have sort of taken over, are - are questions around poverty, homelessness, um ... you know, the treatment of people who use drugs, you know, a lot of the forms of social marginalization, and I've always worried that the marriage thing, in fact, worked *against* addressing those questions. Well, marriage as a - historically, has been - has been an institution that the state has used, in fact, to get a lot of free labour out of women. And, you know, the breakdown of marriage for many women has revealed how unrewarding that unpaid labour has been for them because then they have to continue to do it or to look for work that's akin to that unpaid labour and they suffer the financial costs of that. And I think the institution of marriage has propped that up.³⁶⁷

While Blue indicated that marriage was not part of her political agenda as a young activist and was critical of marriage as repressive to women, she did marry in August 2013, one year after her interview. The implied hope is that her marriage to her female partner will elude the drawbacks of the institution.

With the exception of Brodeur, the participants who did get married were fairly ambivalent about the institution. The arguments *against* marriage for those who did marry ranged from marriage being seen a capitalist ploy to access the free labour of

³⁶⁶ Brodeur, 659-665.

³⁶⁷ Blue, 11-12: 485-517.

women, a route to lesbian assimilation into heteronormativity to it being the end of radical gay and lesbian identity politics. Their arguments *for* marriage tended to focus on it representing a deeply personal and public commitment, an act of pride, a way to bind and strengthen families, and a means to fit in.

Seven of my participants have not married. Mayne Ellis, for example, indicated that she was not prepared to get married:

I would not be prepared to marry. And I also feel that, by legitimating marriage between women and between men, in a sense the society has co-opted us ... I realize that's some of what people were fighting for, but that's certainly not all of what I have been fighting for. I've been - my desire has been for freedom not to be married, freedom not to take part in the structures. (Prompt): *Freedom not to be heterosexual?* Freedom not to be heterosexual and not to be paired, that there is - that you have a valid life as a single person moving lightly upon the earth.³⁶⁸

Ellis was well aware of and critical of the social expectations and allure associated with marriage:

...my feeling is that I personally would not wish to marry. I have very strong reservations about the immense power of the tradition and of the structure. I think that people become subsumed in it, whether they like it or not, because there are such - it's one of the most powerful social groundings we have, as persons, whether or not we're gay or straight. So that there are these - there are these assumptions and pressures and beliefs and intentions and expectations with - that constitute that structure of marriage and, as I mentioned, I think that marriage is overrated a lot of the time. I don't think everybody should be getting married. I think it should be harder to get married.³⁶⁹

While Ellis indicated that marriage required self-knowledge and could fulfil people, she was insistent that, "You have to break the bonds of the expectations of marriage in order

³⁶⁸ Ellis, 29-30: 1330-1337.

³⁶⁹ Ellis, 34-35: 1549-1563.

to really fulfil yourself within it.”³⁷⁰ In the end, Ellis wanted gay and lesbian Anglicans to have access to choice: “Not necessarily that it should be enjoined on everybody. I viewed it as being able to exercise choice as a fully acknowledged and recognized human being.”³⁷¹ In Ellis’ opinion, people should look within themselves before embarking on the commitment of marriage and not succumb to the myths of marriage promoted by church and state.

Miriam Kaufman was not untouched by the myth of heterosexual courtship, engagement, and marriage. Like Ellis, she indicated that it was important to consider what marriage is. Kaufman would marry Benson, but “I would say we have chosen not to marry because Roberta has - well, I never had any real interest in it [indiscernible]. I would say that - but much more strongly. But I do like a good party. So I think, from my perspective, you know, if - if that was a decision that one person made, we’d be married, but Roberta has pretty strong feelings about ... why marriage was created in the first place, which was to kind of enshrine men’s ownership of women’s property and children.”³⁷² She added that,

I was certainly very opposed to marriage when I was younger because I felt really that the state does not have a place in the bedrooms of the nation. Like, I really - and I really do believe that there should be, you know, that religious marriage should not be a legal thing. That if people, you know, are Catholic or whatever and they feel it’s important to be married before they have sex with somebody, fine. They should get married. But that that should be a church related thing? So I guess I don’t really think there should be marriage, other than as an - you know, some kind of a ritual ceremony, party, whatever, between two people and their families. Kind of a - I think, you know, I’m in favour of a public recognition of relationships and stuff, but I don’t actually think that it

³⁷⁰ Ellis, 35: 1598-1599.

³⁷¹ Ellis, 38: 1702-1704.

³⁷² Kaufman, 13: 600-604.

should be - have anything to do with the state and I think, if people live together, then there shouldn't be any rights that accrue to people who are married versus people who aren't. But, having said all that, it does turn out that the one thing that is still sitting there is the ... RSP stuff. So when you die, your RSPs get taxed to the hilt if you're not married to your partner. If you are married, they just roll over.³⁷³

Roberta Benson is clearly ill-disposed to marriage for historical, legal, and feminist reasons. She stated that, "I have kind of a long-standing prejudice against marriage. When I was ... in Women and the Law in law school and I studied history and the origins of marriage and stuff and, you know, the whole property thing ... then I just went, 'Nah'. Not something I'd ever want to do."³⁷⁴ Benson does believe that the Marriage Act, and its legalization of gay and lesbian marriages, has changed social attitudes: "'Well legislation does not change attitudes'. I disagree with that. I think it can ... you know, change. In and of itself it doesn't, but it normalizes a situation and makes it real and then that changes people's attitudes, you know."³⁷⁵

Nancy Poole was diplomatic in her discussion of marriage:

I see marriage really as a - I mean, I guess I come from the era, like the Mama Quilla poster, of seeing marriage and - and that nuclear family as, you know, an institution of patriarchy and therefore something I would not even in any way want to engage in. No. That's - you know, having been so scathing there, I - I want to acknowledge that, you know, for those people who see that as important, good on ya. You know, I'm not *against* the fact that the Marriage Act changed. I'm just saying, for me, that's not the prime struggle. And it's - it's - you know, it's a piece of it but it's - it - it's the reformist of what needs to be much more revolutionary shift in the paradigm, about how we see that lesbians, gays, transgendered people, two-spirited people, et cetera, I mean, that we - you know, it's a much bigger story than - than - than having a marriage license. On the other hand, if a marriage license legitimates it in a way for some lesbians to be

³⁷³ Kaufman, 13: 626-638.

³⁷⁴ Benson, 3: 110-113.

³⁷⁵ Benson, 22: 978-982.

able to have a relationship they're having - you know, to me that's a wonderful outcome. You know, that - that, you know, women will meet, fall in love, and get married. I mean, that - you know, that's - that's possible as one of the routes for me is an excellent - is an excellent thing. It's definitely not my - I'm cautious. My feminism - is trumping my lesbianism there, around marriage as an institution.³⁷⁶

Susan Strega's feminist politics is a thread that runs through her opinions on marriage:

...is marriage really what we want? I mean, you know, so many of us had campaigned as feminists against marriage. So what were we doing now, signing up for it? And did we not see what we would - would lose by doing that. And, you know, I - I certainly agree. I - I think that one of - one of the manoeuvres that has been most destructive to any kind of politicized lesbian identity is marriage, right? And so - and so what you have now is homonormativity. Right? I mean, we used to have heteronormativity but now - now, to be an acceptable lesbian you have to produce this particular kind of self or subjectivity. And one of the things that I find so fascinating all the time is virtually everybody I know whose heterosexual acts as if, aside from maybe a few very specific sex acts, I'm just like them, right? And - and - and that's the loss of lesbianism as a - as a politicized identity. And I think marriage has done a lot for that, to destroy that politicized identity. But I also think that lesbians had lots of other experiences in which they were very richly rewarded for producing a kind of heterosexualized lesbian. And I think that - that's what *The L-Word* is. And we certainly try and read ourselves into the characters that exist on *The L-Word*.³⁷⁷

Daphne Drew is conflicted about marriage. Her idea of marriage was nested in the heterosexual model: "And, you know, buying into the traditional nuclear family, you're going to get married and have kids and - and be a wife and mother and all those things. I

³⁷⁶ Poole, 15-16: 687-704.

³⁷⁷ Strega, 19: 856-872.

mean, that, to me, is repulsive. It was really repulsive.³⁷⁸ When challenged on this opinion later in the interview, she relented:

Oh, I think it's great. I - I - I think it's wonderful that - that it's possible. I think it's a major breakthrough. I think it's unfortunate that there is such a systemic outcry, you know, from the Christian right. It - it - yeah, I think it's wonderful. I mean, my brother - my brother's marriage - wedding was just a blast and, you know, we - we - it - the sad part of that was that my father wouldn't attend. So gay marriage, I think it's - I think it's great. I'm glad that we've - we've managed to achieve that. I hope that we can keep it. I don't know that it's etched in stone.³⁷⁹

She further added that, "And the nuclear family kind of situation. I wanted to have a career and you know, the gay marriage thing is ... is more of an achievement in terms of - of political and social equality, whereas the - the - what I was just talking about personally was more the traditional nuclear family. I think I said 'nuclear family' where I would get, you know, I had a couple of different - almost close calls to getting married."³⁸⁰

Jane Marple emphasized that times change. As she stated, "if you grew up in the 1970s and you were at the front of the lesbian revolution, I'm sure you had a community and a political perspective that was shaped by that time ... my perspective on being a lesbian was shaped by my life in the late 80s and 90s."³⁸¹ Marriage as an institution has nothing to offer her - the rituals and language do not apply to lesbians.

The arguments *against* marriage among those who chose not to marry included marriage being a capitalist ploy to access the free labour of women, a form of assimilation into heteronormativity, and representative of the loss of a radical lesbian-

³⁷⁸ Drew, 42: 1882-1885.

³⁷⁹ Drew, 32-33: 1451-1469.

³⁸⁰ Drew, 42: 1919-1921.

³⁸¹ Marple, 13: 566-570.

feminist identity and politics. Furthermore, marriage was seen as subsuming individuals under the weight of traditions perpetrated by the state, society, and church. The legalization of same sex marriage challenged this generation who, as feminists and lesbians, had not necessarily fought for the right to marry. However, despite the fears expressed by those who had not married, those who did had not lost their politics or their identity.

Summary

The group of lesbian participants interviewed for this thesis clearly moved goal-posts through their personal and public actions. No doubt, they were very familiar with the street chant: Not the Church and Not the State, Women Must Decide Their Fate. In some cases, their actions were generated by personal circumstances which became political. In order to preserve their family and driven by their lesbian and feminist politics, Roberta Benson and Miriam Kaufman took on the federal state via a Charter challenge as they sought and won same-sex step-parental rights in Ontario in 1996. Carol McDonald fought for and gained same-sex benefits through the United Nurses of Alberta union in a province known for its conservatism in matters related to sexuality. Judy Lightwater challenged the BC provincial government, which, constitutionally, has jurisdiction over marriage, when it would not issue a marriage license to her and her partner. Others were more motivated by an equal rights and social justice agenda. Mayne Ellis took on the Anglican Church of Canada because of its resistance to allowing all baptized Anglicans (including lesbians and gays) access to all the sacraments (including Holy Orders and Matrimony). Daphne Drew and CAAWS injected Sports Canada and its Women's Program with a dose of feminist politics.

McDonald has continued to be an advocate for lesbians and senior lesbians in the health care system and she has urged practitioners not to assume that all their female patients are heterosexual and to consider including a woman's sexual orientation as part of their medical history and assessment for care. Susan Strega pleads with social work practitioners and governments to listen, understand, and work with the different 'knowledges' people, such as First Nations, have and to work with the strengths contained therein. Nancy Poole's cultural work is largely done, but her work in the academy now focuses on gender and health especially in policy programming around women, trauma, and knowledge translation. She too is aware of different knowledges as she has worked extensively with Innu, First Nations, and Australian Aboriginal women's groups on addiction issues germane to them. Betty Blue's work in the academy has covered a range of issues from the place of femmes in the queer movement to public policy on search and seizure and drug use.

These are accomplished white, middle-class, and professional lesbians. At the beginning of this chapter, Mary O'Brien held that feminists, in their pursuit of social change, started "where we are and with the conditions and problems which history presents to us." This group of lesbian-feminists and 'feminist-like' lesbians did precisely that. The problems history presented to them were historically and systemically embedded in social custom and in law. Their political activism disrupted these institutions and moved lesbian and women's issues forward and towards a more equal footing.

Conclusion

There is a television ad for a men's cologne called *Bleu de Chanel*. The 2010 ad which generally runs around Christmas was filmed by Martin Scorsese and features the French actor Gaspard Ulliel, who looks directly into the camera and says, "I'm not going to be the person I'm expected to be anymore."³⁸² The eleven self-identified lesbians who participated in this study at one time likely made a similar statement to themselves and then to family and friends.

Born between 1949 and 1960 and coming of age beginning in 1970, Chapter Two of this thesis documented the participants' early journeys from private contemplation about their difference to a public affirmation of their sexuality. While Miriam Kaufman and Mayne Ellis) were blessed with supportive parents, others, such as Roberta Benson, Nancy Poole, Jane Marple, Betty Blue, McDonald, Daphne Drew, and Chantal Brodeur still bear the harsh memories of short- or long-term resistance by parents, siblings, and others. Judy Lightwater and Susan Strega did not have families to reject them; they found and formed new families after they came out. Mayne Ellis, Carol McDonald, and Daphne Drew looked to a god whose institutions ostracized them, but who survived with their spirituality intact. Some of the participants, such as Carol McDonald, Judy Lightwater, and Nancy Poole, endured temporary class disruption after coming out and joined the working poor by intent or by circumstances beyond their control.

Despite these early struggles, as discussed in Chapter Three, all of the participants asserted themselves as *out* lesbians in their adult lives. Many of them, as dedicated lesbian feminists, also became involved in various forms of political activism at the local,

³⁸² Martin Scorsese, Director, *Bleu de Chanel* (Paris, New York: Chanel, 2010), <http://chanel-news.chanel.com/en/home.media.video.html>, accessed September 29, 2014.

provincial, or national levels and entered diverse professional fields. When lesbians met feminism, a framework was established through which the roots of women's and lesbian oppression could be understood and confronted and through which community-building could be achieved. Lesbian feminist politics also challenged white, middle-class, heterosexual feminisms that consciously sought to segregated lesbian issues from the feminist agenda. Yet the participants' allegiance to all women is evident as they challenged unjust policies in sport and labour relations as well as discriminatory laws that harmed families and prevented their full and equal participation as Canadian citizens. They also challenged the churches to open their Christian arms to lesbians and gays as congregants and celebrants.

By documenting the stories of these eleven white, middle-class, self-identified lesbians who came of age in the 1970s, this thesis has sought to add their presence, their voices, and their experiences of struggle, survival, and accomplishment to the Canadian historical canon. However, the question that remains is whether these histories will be of future interest, especially if lesbians are indeed going extinct as posited by a retired Women's Studies professor in 2010. During the interviews, the participants were asked to consider the question of lesbian extinction and all but one responded to query. While most of the interviewees suggested that some women would always seek out other women as sexual and emotional partners, which defined the essence of being a lesbian,³⁸³ some acknowledged that the terms used to describe that identity would and did change. Judy Lightwater, for example, noted that, "I know lots of young women who are lesbians. They are – they may not call themselves that, they may call themselves queer, they may call themselves nothing. But they are lesbian ... The language is just perhaps a little

³⁸³ See, for example, Drew, 38: 1713-1725; Marple, 12: 538-546.

different. So I don't think that lesbianism is becoming extinct. And I think that the terms maybe aren't so important. And the language will just kind of shape itself over time."³⁸⁴

Mayne Ellis echoed this sentiment and also suggested that, because of the struggles of her generation and regardless of whether or not younger women used the term, "lesbian is no longer a dirty word"³⁸⁵ Chantal Brodeur also indicated that, given that there is now greater freedom "to be who we are at a younger age" and "'decide' which way you want to go," lesbians are "not going extinct," but rather the conditions have been created for uncloseted young lesbians to flourish as strong women.³⁸⁶

Nancy Poole insisted that lesbianism was not just about sexual orientation, but also about culture and the adoption of a feminist political stance. Using this understanding of "all the things that, you know, make up being a lesbian," she argued that, "it's endangered, but not by any means extinct and we need to, you know, bring forth all efforts we can to – to prevent extinction in – so that, you know, generations after us will be able to build on our early and – probably quite clumsy attempts to – to define what that is."³⁸⁷ Miriam Kaufman and Carol McDonald maintained that they thought that identifying oneself as a lesbian had gone "out of fashion"³⁸⁸ and the word itself was considered by some younger women as "archaic." McDonald concurred that "queer" is a more inclusive term as spoke to both sexual and gender identity.³⁸⁹ Betty Blue shared her vision of a more pluralistic future: "I – you know, sort of my dream for the future would be this very plural – is a very pluralistic dream, you know, where all of these identities

³⁸⁴ Lightwater, 16: 692-708.

³⁸⁵ Ellis, 38: 1717-1745.

³⁸⁶ Brodeur, 20: 898-899; 21: 939-943.

³⁸⁷ Poole, 21: 923-935.

³⁸⁸ Kaufman, 16: 821-825.

³⁸⁹ McDonald, 19: 834-868.

can co-exist. But do I think the lesbian as I understood it in lesbian feminism will survive? I'm not really sure. Am I upset about it? Not really. For me, the – beauty of that identity was its linking with politics and I don't think that's necessarily dead. I think it's just emerging in different forms.”³⁹⁰

Some participants also commented on what they saw as a shift in the lesbian community with regard to what is considered to be the loss of butch lesbians to sex reassignment. Kaufman argued that, “you know, there are all these young women now who are saying they're trans, that I don't think are. You know, but I think they see the kind of power that men have and - and it's a lot more fun to be a boy than a girl in our culture, so they just want to be boys, you know. And so they are, you know. They spell it differently but - but I think they really are lesbians, I don't think they are boys.”³⁹¹

McDonald saw the migration of butch lesbians from lesbian space as signalling a “closing down, in a sense, the space for how lesbians can be ... or how they can present in terms of gender diversity.”³⁹² Susan Strega wondered “whether, after our generation dies out, if there will really be such a thing as – as lesbian, lesbianism anymore, because the rewards for assuming those other identities ... are so great ... Who doesn't love a wedding? Right. And there are so – but there are so, so, so many rewards for doing that. And there are so many rewards for stepping into a different gender identity as opposed to trying to carve out a space for a gender identity that doesn't fit within the binaries ... So your options are either to be a lesbian who is just like a heterosexual or to become a man ... I

³⁹⁰ Blue, 19: 833-845.

³⁹¹ Kaufman (Benson and Kaufman), 15: 683-688.

³⁹² McDonald 834-868

do worry that lesbians are becoming extinct because we're not lesbians if [we transition]. I'm not sure if we're still lesbians if we get married."³⁹³

This thesis offered documentation that lesbians were and are still with us and that those who participated in this study did, in various ways, make history. The stories of others of the same generation whose life trajectories may have differed would add further complexity to the historical record. Furthermore, the participants' varied, yet honest and tentative, reflections on what the future may hold for "the lesbian," as an embodied gendered, sexual, and political identity, also raise important questions for further historical and contemporary research.

³⁹³ Strega, 25: 1111-1135; 27: 1201-1211.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Script: Flyer

Canadian Lesbians: Present at the making of their own history and at their extinction?

Call for Participants

I am seeking to conduct audio interviews with self-identified lesbian participants for a Master's thesis project, entitled "Canadian lesbians: Present at the making of their own history and at their extinction?" This MA research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Annalee Lepp in the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Victoria. She can be contacted at alepp@uvic.ca or at 250-721-6157.

The purpose of the research is to explore the lives, activism, and legacy of self-identified lesbians born between 1949 and 1960 and living in Canada. It will also examine the current debate on whether or not lesbians are becoming "extinct." Your decision to participate must be completely voluntary. Please note that you have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without consequences or explanation.

Besides providing crucial information for my MA thesis, you will also have the option of having your audio-recorded interview archived in the Archive of Lesbian Oral History located at Simon Fraser University. Here it can be accessed by future researchers and/or the public who will be able to listen to your words and learn from your experiences. You will have an opportunity to review an audio-recording of the interview for accuracy. Information you do not want included in my M.A. thesis will not be used, nor will the audio-recording be archived if you decline this option. If you are interested in participating in an audio-taped interview, I will forward the questions to you ahead of time as well as a consent form for you to sign. If you are willing to participate or need further information, please speak to me in person by calling me at 250-882-1197, or by emailing me at jtrainor@uvic.ca.

Thank you,

Jan Trainor

Appendix B

Interview Questions

The object of this research project is to explore the lives, activism, and legacy of self-identified lesbians born between 1949 and 1960 and living in Canada. It will also examine the debate on whether or not lesbians are becoming extinct, via the perspectives of this generation of lesbians.

1. In what year were you born? Where? When did you come out? Where?
2. How would you define what a lesbian is?
3. What is your “coming out” story? What were your major influences in this period in your life?
4. Do you remember what you were reading then? How were you getting your information before the internet?
5. Did being a lesbian affect your feminism? How so? Did being a feminist affect your lesbianism? How so? Are the two connected or separate in your mind? Why?
6. Were you or have you ever been involved directly in lesbian and gay issues? Where? Describe your activities?
7. Feminist/women’s issues? Specify. Where? Describe your activities.
8. Other social issues? Specify the issue. Where? Describe your activities.
9. Political issues? Where? Describe your activities.
10. Religious issues? Where? Describe your activities.
11. Describe your activities related to women’s equality? Lesbian and gay rights? Feminism? Anti-violence work? HIV/AIDS work? Other social issues?
12. With the Canadian government’s approval of same-sex marriages performed by the state in 2005, it could be argued that sexual identity as a contested area of equality for all Canadian citizens has been effectively neutralized in Canada. Do you agree/disagree with this statement? Why?
13. Do you have an opinion on the use of ‘queer’ as a term that is often used to describe lesbians and gays?
14. Did/do you have a sense that you were making history? Yes or No. Please explain your answer.
15. Are lesbians going extinct? Why? Why not?

Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

Canadian Lesbians: Present at the making of their own history and at their extinction?

You are invited to participate in a study entitled, **Lesbians: Present at the making of their own history and at their own extinction?** that is being conducted by Jan Trainor.

Jan Trainor is a graduate student in the Department of History at the University of Victoria. [REDACTED] If you have any questions about the research, you can also e-mail the Department of History by emailing histgrad@uvic.ca or by writing to History Department, PO Box 3045 STN CSC, Victoria, British Columbia, V8W 3P4.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in History. My project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Annalee Lepp. [REDACTED] alepp@uvic.ca

Purpose, Objectives, and Importance of Research

The purpose of this research project is to explore the lives, activism, and legacy of self-identified lesbians born between 1949 and 1960 and living in Canada. In a February 2010 opinion article in the online journal, *Trivia: Voices of Feminism*, Dr. Deborah Yaffe asked: "Are lesbians going extinct?" There are two possible reasons for her and others to ask this question. First, with the Canadian government's 2005 approval of same-sex marriages performed by the state, it could be argued that sexual identity as a signifier has been effectively neutralized as a site of contested citizenship in Canada. Secondly, "lesbian" has been replaced by "queer" in popular and scholarly usage; this serves to remove "lesbians" as a descriptor and sexual signifier and it could be argued, it serves to desexualize lesbians. Is this the exhaustion of a particular historical construction, the lesbian? Is it the demise of an imagined community as lesbians are subsumed in a larger "queer" imagined community?

This research will add to existing scholarship of the histories and legacies of lesbian community-building and activism in Canada. It also tackles more contemporary debates about the future of lesbian identities, cultures, and communities in the Canadian context. In addition to offering source material for my MA thesis, you will also have the opportunity to have the audio-recording of the interview archived for posterity in the Archives of Lesbian Oral History located at Simon Fraser University, where it could be accessed by future researchers and/or the public.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you a self-identified lesbian born between 1949 and 1960 and reside in Canada.

What is involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an audio-taped in-person or telephone interview of about 1.5 hours on a date and at a location if relevant that is most convenient for you. You will also have the option of reviewing the audio-recording for accuracy which will take another 1.5 hours of your time.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the 3 hour time commitment as well as any travel that may be involved.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. At the same time, I will be mindful should you appear fatigued during the course of the interview. If you do feel fatigued, you will have the option of taking a break or completing the interview at another time. Disclosing past experiences can cause discomfort. As noted below, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. If you should show or express discomfort during the interview, I will stop the interview immediately and discuss next steps; i.e. taking a break, terminating the interview, or seeking the assistance of a professional.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include the opportunity to share your experiences and perspectives as a lesbian and possibly as an activist as well as to comment on the future of lesbian identities, communities, and cultures in the twenty-first century. The benefits to society and knowledge include increased awareness of the history of lesbian lives, activism, and contributions to Canada and their visions of the future.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your interview data will not be used unless you provide written permission to do so. In addition, you will have the option of reviewing the audio-recording for accuracy. If there are portions of the interview that you do not want included in the written thesis, I will ask you to note those portions in writing and your wishes will be respected. Finally, if you are uncomfortable with any of the interview content, the audio-recording will not be archived in the Archive of Lesbian Oral History at Simon Fraser University.

On-going Consent

Should you and I decide that a follow up interview is important for the research, I will review this consent form with you and ask you to sign it at each subsequent interview.

Anonymity

I am asking each participant if she is comfortable with her name and identifying information being included in the written results as well as being attached to the archived audio-recording. The reason for this is that, to use your interview as source material for works of history, it is important that listeners/readers know who you are. Knowing who the speaker is enables the audience to put your experience in context, provides authenticity to your narrative and provides transparency to my own work. That said, if you are not comfortable with your name and identifying information being included in the written results or the archived audio-taped, your anonymity would be protected as much as possible through the use of a pseudonym in both cases. You also have the option of having the audio-recorded interview sealed, under your name, for a specified period of time. Please indicate your preferences below by initialing beside the appropriate description:

MA thesis:

I agree to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study: _____

I agree to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results: _____

I prefer the use of a pseudonym in the written results: _____

I prefer the use of a pseudonym and the removal of all identifying information in the written results: _____

Archives:

I agree to have the audio recording of my interview digitized, catalogued, and archived in the Archives of Lesbian Oral History at Simon Fraser University: _____

I agree to have my name attached to the archived audio recording: _____

I prefer the use of a pseudonym in identifying the archived audio recording:

I prefer that the audio recording of my interview be sealed: _____

(Please specify the month and year to be released _____)

If you are not satisfied with the above options, I would suggest that you decline participation in this project.

Confidentiality

Regardless of the level of anonymity and confidentiality you requested above, the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing audio recordings and any typed interview transcripts in password protected computer files, and any CD copies and memory stick backups of your interview in a locked cabinet in my home office (see address below). This procedure will be followed until the written project is completed and if you give permission, the audio recording is archived in the Archives of Lesbian Oral History at Simon Fraser University. If you do not wish to have your audio recorded interview archived at the aforementioned archives, the interview data will be destroyed once my MA thesis is completed; that is password protected computer files, CD copies, and memory stick back up will be deleted and any typed interview transcripts will be shredded.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways. I plan to use the interview results in the writing of my MA thesis, which is a public document and stored on-line at the University of Victoria. I may also use the results in presentations to my class, at scholarly meetings, in a newspaper article, on a web-site or in a radio or TV interview. In addition, as noted above, the audio recording of your interview could be disseminated further and be accessible to future researchers upon agreeing to have it archived in the Archives of Lesbian Oral History at Simon Fraser University.

Disposal of Data

As noted above, if you provide permission, your audio recorded interview will be digitized, catalogued, and preserved in the Archive of Lesbian Oral History at SFU, which will make it accessible to other researchers and/or the public. If you do not wish to have your audio recorded interview archived, all copies of the interview will be destroyed upon completion of the researcher's MA thesis in August 2015.

Contacts



. My supervisor, Dr. Annalee Lepp, can also be contacted at the phone number or e-mail address indicated above. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

A copy of this consent form will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher

Appendix D
Participant Reference Chart

	Informant Name *	Birth year	Place Birth	Self-ID Class**	Ethnicity	Religion	Education	Marital status***	Children	Notes
1	Benson	1954	Montreal, PQ	middle	Anglo	United Church	LL.B	Partnered	yes	Partner is Kaufman
2	Blue *	1960	Penticton, BC	working	Anglo	Anglican	Ph.D.	Married	no	
3	Brodeur	1960	Dorion, PQ	middle	Franco-phone	Roman Catholic	BComm	Married	no	
4	Drew*	1954	London, ON	middle	Anglo	Evangelical	MA	Single	no	
5	Ellis	1954	Vancouver, BC	middle	Anglo	Anglican	BA	Single	no	
6	Kaufman	1954	Cleveland, OH	Middle	Anglo	Judaism	MD	Partnered	yes	Partner is Benson
7	Lightwater	1951	St. Paul, MN	middle	Anglo-	Judaism	MA	Married	no	
8	Marple*	1954	FlinFlon, MB	working	Anglo	United Church	B.Com. MBA	Partnered	yes	
9	McDonald	1959	Calgary, AB	middle	Anglo	UC/Evangelical	BScN, Ph.D.	Married	no	
10	Poole	1951	Napanee, ON	middle	Anglo	United	Ph.D.	Partnered	no	Trainer is partner
11	Strega	1954	Winnipeg, MB	poverty	Anglo	Nil	Ph.D.	Partnered	no	
12	Trainer++	1949	Tignish, PE	working	Anglo	Roman Catholic	MA	Partnered	no	Poole is partner

*Denotes pseudonym suggested by interviewer or requested by informant.

** Informants were asked to describe the socio-economic class in which they were raised.

*** Marital status: Married = legally married; Partnered =not legally married

++ The interviewer added her data to this chart.