Labour and Love:

Working-Class Lesbians in Vancouver, 1970-1983

by

Morgan Watson
B.A., University of Victoria, 2018

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

MASTER OF HISTORY

in the Department of History

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of working-class lesbians in Canada after 1969 have not been adequately addressed in historical scholarship. This thesis addresses that gap, using oral history interviews conducted with six working-class lesbians who lived in Vancouver during the 1970s and early 1980s. Situating the interviewees in relation to other working-class lesbians, within the leftist political movements, and within lesbian feminist community, reveals complex trends around class, politics, education, and culture. The cohort of interviewees were found to be removed from some elements of working-class culture; however, they also did not neatly fit into the mixed and middle-class feminist spaces they frequented. Upward mobility resulting from political engagement and education is posited as a reason why interviewees may have experienced a level of removal from working-class culture. Examining interviewees' relationships to working-class lesbian culture and upward mobility begins the work of connecting the disparate bodies of scholarship that examine pre- and post-1970 lesbian history. Examining interviewees' relationships to lesbian feminist community indicates the ongoing significance of their class backgrounds as well as the central role feminism played in their lives. By detailing the interviewees' experiences of love and classism within the lesbian feminist community, this thesis begins the work of including working-class lesbian experiences into historical scholarship after 1969.

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The learning and research I have done for this thesis and my Master's degree occurred on Indigenous territories. Victoria is on the traditional, unceded territories of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ nations. These nations have an historical and ongoing relationship with these territories, which have been shaped by continued illegal colonial occupation. By living in these territories, I am complicit in the ongoing settler colonial project.

Although gender norms are subject to change across time and place, hegemonic constructions of sexuality are rooted in Christian European gender constructions. These gender constructions were forcibly imposed and maintained through settler colonialism, which is ongoing. The very existence of the Canadian colonial state is a form of gender and sexual violence, which has disproportionately impacted the Indigenous peoples whose traditional territories Canada occupies.

Any discussions about sexuality and gender in Canada are inherently about colonialism. Moreover, any history in Canada is inherently about colonialism because the land on which the history occurs is all Indigenous land. The history in this thesis took place in Vancouver, which is located on the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations.

The constellation of nations that belong to the Coast Salish language group (including all the nations above) had their cultural knowledge and ways of living disrupted by colonialism. Work by scholars such as Saylesh Wesley and Corrina Sparrow share personal accounts of navigating their identities as queer and Coast Salish people, in a context where colonialism has severed language and cultural traditions. Sparrow, who is Musqueam writes, "until I am able to describe my own identity using Coast Salish ancestral language, I am compelled to use the modern term, Two Spirit to illustrate these parts of my experience, gender, sexuality, as well as my cultural and spiritual positionality."[1] Wesley, who is Sto:lo, writes about the role of grandmothers in governing their matrilineal society and how their own grandmother coined a term for them in Halq'eméylem. The term, Sts'iyóye smestíyexw slhá:li, can be translated as "Twin-Spirited Women" and is now a title that Wesley holds.[2] While the loss of culture and language pertaining to gender and sexuality is acutely felt by LGBTQ2S Indigenous people, their ongoing resilience and resistance continue to challenge not only homophobia and sexism, but colonialism.

I have included these details not only to stress that acknowledgment of Indigenous territories and colonialism are important now, but also that they are relevant to the history that is being written. This remains true even when there is a paucity of sources that can demonstrate this, or when there are few voices in the records that can speak to it explicitly.

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[1]Corina Sparrow, "Reclaiming Spaces Between: Coast Salish Two Spirit identities and Experiences" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2018), 6.
[2]Saylesh Wesley, "Twin-Spirited Woman," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (2014): 339; 443.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to the interviewees who trusted me with their stories. Marsha Arbour, Chris Fox, Moira Ryan, Cy-Thea Sand, Mary-Woo Sims, Diana Smith, and “Jane” were all generous with their time, thoughts, feelings, and recollections. I was honoured to receive your stories.

I am very thankful that I had Dr. Lynne Marks and Dr. Annalee Lepp as my supervisory team. Their expertise in the field provided both the necessary guidance and intellectual enthusiasm required to support and shape my work. In addition to their intellectual and academic support, I am also very grateful for their patience and understanding. I considered dropping-out on more than one occasion as I struggled to navigate life, health, and financial challenges outside of school. Dr. Marks and Dr. Lepp routinely accommodated my circumstances with adjusted deadlines and flexible expectations while continuously receiving me and my work with respect and kindness. Most importantly, thank you for fixing my commas.

I would also like to thank Dr. Georgia Sitara who for nearly a decade has made me feel as though I was capable of doing this work. It was Dr. Sitara’s classes that brought me to History and her encouragement and support that guided me to pursue graduate studies. I do not believe I would have made it to this degree program without you. Thank you.

My friendship with Christine Hughes was an integral part of my graduate school journey. The abundance of laughs, zoom calls, meals, caffeine, chores, dictations, and our own private Friday seminars were a welcomed and much needed reprieve during school. Christine brought a lot of joy both to my studies and to my life. I look forward to reading your PhD dissertation on the topic of my choosing, and, to your drag debut as Elle Sass Lorraine.

Simone, I do not feel I have adequate words to thank you. Your love and presence in my life is a gift and you have sustained me in graduate school and beyond. I am eternally grateful for your patience, humour, intelligence, and femme excellence.

I am blessed with a network of chosen family who love and care for me and are too numerous to list. You know who you are – you have my love and appreciation. I could not have done this without you.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated, with gratitude, to Marsha Arbour, Chris Fox, Cy-Thea Sand, Mary-Woo Sims, Diana Smith and "Jane"

This history could not have been written without you.

Introduction:
Where did the working-class lesbians go?

Introduction:

At 14, I watched the opening ceremony for the 2010 Canadian Winter Olympics, and I saw k.d. lang for the first time. This is my earliest recollection of seeing another butch lesbian and I remember feeling overwhelmed by the possibilities her existence represented. I encountered a similar feeling in the first year of my undergraduate degree, when I wrote an essay on the history of lesbian bars in Canada in the 1950s and 1960s. I was drawn to the depictions of working-class bar life and butch/fem relationship models. In the essay, I argued that "class was integral to the organization of lesbian communities."

My undergraduate self was disappointed to encounter suggestions that the butch/fem culture of the early gay bars had stopped existing. I was also confused because the first explicitly gay venue I went to was a dive bar, and I had been in several relationships I considered to be butch/fem. While I understood that the conditions that produced working-class lesbian bar culture changed and that the categories of butch/fem had shifted, I was suspicious of the near complete absence of butches and fems in histories after 1969. By the time I was preparing my graduate school applications, I attributed this absence to the systematic lack of interest in the lives of working-class lesbians from the 1970s onward. In this thesis, I argue that class remained integral to the organization of lesbian communities.

This work is devoted to capturing the experiences of working-class lesbians in Vancouver from 1970 to 1983. While lesbian history during this period has been examined before, this work approaches it squarely from the perspective of working-class lesbians, which offers unique insight into lesbian history during this time. Working-class lesbian history is better documented before the 1970s, and history focusing on lesbians after 1969 does not give ongoing attention to

the question of class. This is a huge gap in a field of historical scholarship that is relatively small and new. It is difficult to mount a large intervention into an emerging field of scholarship using only the testimonies of the six lesbians I interviewed for this project. However, clear themes and trends emerge in their recollections of this time period, which paired with secondary sources, begin the work of carving out a new history.

Historiography:

There are two identifiable trends in the scholarship that pertains to lesbian history in Canada which can be observed thematically and temporally. Scholarship on lesbian history that focuses on the decades prior to 1970 predominantly examines working-class lesbians and working-class lesbian spaces. Scholarship that examines lesbian history after the 1970s is not centred around working-class lesbians or their spaces. It is based on accounts provided by predominantly middle-class lesbians and is interwoven with the history of the women's movement and especially lesbian feminism. The result is that questions about, and depictions of, working-class lesbian lives, politics, and spaces in the later decades of the twentieth century are underdeveloped. Tracing historical scholarship on different lesbian cultures in Canada before and after 1970 (in conjuncture with the analysis of a seminal American texts) will reveal this pattern, how this thesis is situated within the historiography, and what this thesis offers, and does not offer, in remedying the identified gaps.

One of the foremost scholars in American lesbian history is Lillian Faderman whose books, *Surpassing the Love of Men* and *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers,* traced patterns in lesbian history from the Renaissance to the present. Faderman's work is impressive in its breadth, predates all the other works in this section, and is often cited. I would be remiss if I excluded her foundational work. However, her accomplishments in breadth sometimes result in a dearth of

detail and contextual specificity. The result is that many trends identified by Faderman do not align with the more detailed and specific accounts provided by the scholars who followed her.[1]

Working-class lesbian bar culture is at the centre of most Canadian and American scholarship on lesbian history that focuses on the middle decades of the twentieth century. One foundational book in the field, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, details the lives of lesbians who patronized a series of working-class bars in Buffalo from the 1930s to the 1960s. This research was conducted using oral history interviews which provide intimate insights into the cultural norms, experiences, and day-to-day lives of the lesbians in Buffalo, most of whom frequented the bars and were working class. In addition to the bars being working-class in clientele, they were also frequently located in working-class areas that were considered less desirable, usually downtown.[2] Davis and Kennedy also argued that the butch/fem relationship model was pivotal to lesbian culture and helped create a "distinctive lesbian eroticism" that provided a framework for social and sexual interactions.[3] These models were central in structuring lesbian life, but as scholarship on the decades after the 1960s tends to focus on middle-class lesbian (and especially feminist) communities, many of whom took issue with the butch/fem relationship model, the extent to which the categories of butch and fem continued to evolve and expand after the 1960s is understudied.[4]

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[1]Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981). My comments here refer to Faderman's work on post-war American history. Much of Faderman's work is on "romantic friendships" which are significant category of inquiry in the field of lesbian history prior to the emergence of organized lesbian communities. This is important work but has an entirely separate historiography and set of considerations which fall beyond the scope of this thesis. See also, Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[2]Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 39.

[3]Davis and Kennedy, *Boots of Leather,* 191.

[4]A note on spelling: literature on butch/fem uses both the spellings "fem" and "femme." I have used fem throughout unless in a direct quote.

In Canada, the work of El Chenier and Line Chamberland examines working-class lesbian bar culture in Toronto (1955-1965) and Montreal (1955-1975). Their work also draws on oral history interviews with lesbians, and they share findings similar to Davis and Kennedy, such as the locations of lesbian bars, the class demographics of the patrons, and the centrality of butch/fem relationship models. Chenier notes that, like the bars in Davis and Kennedy's work on Buffalo, lesbian bars in Toronto were often in or near "red light" and "tenderloin" districts.[5] In Toronto's bar scene, butch/fem relationship models were prevalent, with Chenier noting similar aesthetic and behavioural trends as Davis and Kennedy.[6]

In Montreal, Chamberland also found that lesbian bars in the pre-1970s were situated in or near "red light" districts in working-class enclaves and "under the control of local organized crime."[7] As Chamberland's work extends later than Chenier or Davis and Kennedy, she notes some mixed-class spaces, especially into the 1970s when more middle-class women went into public lesbian spaces. However, she still found that butch/fem roles were central to the lives of working-class lesbians and were maintained by some lesbians in mixed-class bars even if the culture of the whole bar was not working-class or butch/fem.[8]

All the works above centred on working-class lesbian bar culture as this was the culture of lesbianism that was most visible and established during the 1950s and 1960s. Because most of the interviewees were working-class and it was generally working-class lesbians who frequented the bars, they comprised most of the narrators in all three cities. However, middle-class and upwardly mobile lesbians do appear intermittently in the scholarship. While all scholars clearly

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[5]El Chenier, "Tough Ladies and Troublemakers: Toronto's Public Lesbian Community, 1955-1965" (MA thesis, Queen's University, 1955), 124-125.
[6]Ibid., 100.
[7]Line Chamberland, "Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal 1955-1975," *Journal of Homosexuality* 25, no.3 (November 1993): 235; 253.
[8]Ibid., 252.

demonstrate there were strong trends along class lines, they also note the permeable borders of the different class categories. The group that all scholars found the most permeable and difficult to generalize about were lesbians who were upwardly mobile.

In Davis and Kennedy's book, they note the presence of women who were from more working-class backgrounds, sometimes frequented the bars, but wanted lives and careers that required them to be discrete about their lesbianism.[9] They referred to these women as "upwardly mobile" to "distinguish them from the many middle-class lesbians who did not go to the bars at all."[10] While upwardly mobile women did patronize working-class lesbian bars, they also frequented middle-class lesbian circles.[11]

Chenier's work examined comparable categories, which were denoted by the terms "downtowner" (working class) and "uptowner" (upwardly mobile).[12] The main difference between the two groups was their commitment to living a "gay life" full time, which the downtowners did. The uptowners lived "double lives" as they sometimes visited the bars, but also kept separate and more discrete lives outside the bars that were more aligned with middle-class notions of respectability.[13] Chamberland's work also touched on a similar trend as she notes that it was not just class background, but also the specific occupation that women had that shaped their capacity to engage in particular lesbian subcultures.[14] While the occupations women engaged in frequently correlated to their class backgrounds, an increase in opportunities for women around education and work meant that some women did experience a shift in their social

[9]Davis and Kennedy, *Boots of Leather,* 115.
[10]Ibid., 133-134.
[11]Ibid., 134-135; 166-167.
[12]Chenier, "Tough Ladies and Troublemakers," 201.
[13]Ibid., 200-202.
[14]Chamberland, "Remembering Lesbian Bars," 252.

and economic status, which in turn shaped their relationship to lesbian culture.[15] The division of lesbian communities along class lines was stark and trends of upward mobility were significant enough for every scholar to mention, but they also noted that the different groups were porous and there were always people who defied their attempts at generalization, and this appeared especially true for lesbians who were upwardly mobile.

In a more recent book, *Awfully Devoted Women,*[16] Cameron Duder uses oral history interviews to examine the lives of lower-middle-class lesbians whose experiences he connects to the aforementioned "upwardly mobile" lesbians.[17] Similar to the "uptowners" in Chenier's work, he found that his interviewees were "only occasionally involved in the bar scenes" as they were concerned about "respectability and the threat to their employment."[18] However, unlike the implication in other works that many of the upwardly mobile lesbians were of working-class origin, Duder included lesbians whose backgrounds ranged from "very poor working-class families to comfortable middle-class ones."[19] If there were differences between those who were raised working or middle class, they were not examined by Duder except to note that urban, working-class lesbians may have had more opportunities for intimate same-sex encounters at younger ages.[20] Duder pointed out that most interviewees had entered the middle class for the period of his study and that these women "whatever their class origins, had achieved middle-class status, respectability, and income" that they did not want to lose, which required them to

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[15]Ibid., 259-260. While Chamberland does not detail this much in her article, her book offers a more substantial breakdown. See: Line Chamberland, *Mémoires Lesbiennes: le Lesbianisme à Montréal entre 1950 et 1972,* (Montréal: Éditions du Remue-Ménage, 1996), 147-148.
[16]Only "Part 2" of Duder's book is being analyzed here. The first part focuses on same-sex eroticism between upper-class women in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, which is distinct from this history and fits into the separate historiography mentioned in footnote 1.
[17]Cameron Duder, *Awfully Devoted Women: Lesbian Lives in Canada, 1900-65* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 239.
[18]Ibid., 207.
[19]Ibid., 14.
[20]Ibid., 181-182.

lead a quieter lesbian life.[21] Duder's book largely aligns with prior scholarship, but offers more details into the lives of lower-middle-class lesbians, including their different relationships to butch/fem roles (and therefore sex), and the nature of their social lives such as preference for house parties over bars.[22]

The historiography on lesbian community and culture in the 1970s and 1980s is quite different. In many ways, this accurately reflects a historical shift as different kinds of lesbian communities emerged on the heels of the women's movement over the course of the 1970s, with a proliferation in organizing at the end of the decade and the beginning of the 1980s. While there was variety in the different community constellations that formed, the creation and expansion of a specific lesbian politic intersecting with feminism has been central in the literature. A matrix of changes enabled some lesbians to carve out new forms of social, physical, and intellectual space at unprecedented scales. For example, advancement in the areas of transportation and printing allowed for gathering and exchanging ideas in new ways; opportunities in professional work and education for women granted some women a greater degree of autonomy; and radical political and student movements from the previous decade provided blueprints for community organizing and activism. Much of the scholarship below traces lesbian-feminist politics to their roots in women's university education, student activism and the feminist movement.

Becki Ross' work *The House That Jill Built* uses oral histories, and feminist and lesbian textual sources, to offer an in-depth examination of a lesbian-feminist organization, the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (or LOOT). In doing so she provides a rich account of the social and political context of the 1970s during which the group formed. The aforementioned changes in

[21]Ibid., 240.
[22]Ibid., 206-208; 191-195; 244-246.

technology, travel, education, and organizing left a broader range of sources for historians.[23] Publishing, consciousness-raising groups, and conferences all grew to be of central importance in feminist and lesbian organizing.[24] Therefore, in addition to oral history, Ross utilizes "fiction, poetry, coming-out stories, and non-fiction manifestos published in the 1970s by largely white, middle-class lesbian feminists in the small-scale feminist, lesbian and gay press."[25] The resulting production of knowledge and theory also prescribed particular ways of living a lesbian-feminist life, such as encouraging non-traditional work, communal living, and particular dress and behaviour.[26]

The political ideology of lesbian-feminists had many militant components but, as Ross points out, also had its own complexity. Her work aimed to "capture the dominant ideological underpinnings" of the movement without precluding the "lived discontinuities, contradictions, and complexities of identity and community formation."[27] It is good to acknowledge that even proponents of lesbian feminism experienced an ambivalence between their feminist dogma and their everyday lives. If the predominantly white and middle-class lesbian-feminists Ross interviewed experienced some contradictions here, then those who were less privileged must have felt it twofold. Indeed, Ross notes that "on occasion, a straight or bisexual feminist, an older lesbian, a punk dyke, a gay bar-goer, a lesbian mother, a lesbian transexual, or a sex-trade worker passed through LOOT and wider lesbian-feminist circles, but almost never stayed."[28]

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[23]It is not that scholars studying lesbians before the 1970s did not use written primary sources; it is just that those sources were fewer and were not often written by the communities that they studied and instead were often from homophobic "experts" and media and/or police records.
[24]Becki Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 44-47.
[25]Ibid., 16.
[26]Ibid., 96-97.
[27]Ibid., 18.
[28]Ibid., 109.

While the core of Ross' work is centred around LOOT and the politics thereof, there are occasional references to bar dykes throughout the book. Compiling these scant references to bar culture or butch/fem lesbians leaves a disconcerting picture. On the one hand, there is a strong inference in a few of the passages that butch/fem and bar culture were of the past. Ross argues that "lesbians who came out in the 1970s" were "split off from the rich history of lesbian bar culture in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s" and therefore could not recognize its significance.[29] At the outset of her book, she makes a similar claim that younger lesbians were "unaware of the earlier feats of courage, love and determination by gay women (and men) whose proto-political, pre-Stonewall struggles prepared the ground for liberation movements," and instead just viewed butch/fem bar culture as "seedy, apolitical, and regressive."[30] Both quotes, while offering a thoughtful synopsis of bar culture, clearly place that culture within a particular timeframe, which had passed by the 1970s. However, Ross also documents animosity between lesbian-feminists and "bar women" several years into the 1970s. It is clear from the quotes Ross selects that the "bar women" were still in bars and committed to butch/fem roles.[31] Referring to later in the 1970s, Ross explains that LOOT members avoided the bars, which are described as "hidden at the end of alleyways or in hard-to-find basements, poorly lit, open only on weekends, periodically inspected by the police."[32] Because the subjects of Ross' work were not "bar women," there is little detail about what life was like for lesbians still in the bars, but the few pieces of information Ross does provide suggest similarities to lesbian bars before the 1970s.

An article written by Chamberland and Julia Podmore outlines a series of events in Montreal's lesbian history in the 1970s and 1980s. From the outset of the article, the scholars are

[29]Ibid., 132.
[30]Ibid., 15.
[31]Ibid., 132.
[32]Ibid., 90.

clear in establishing a relationship between lesbian rights and feminism, noting that "autonomous lesbian activism in Montreal became visible over the course of the 1970s when both gay and lesbian movements emerged alongside other new social movements, such as anti-imperialist, feminist, and socialist movements."[33] While Chamberland had previously written about lesbian bars and butch/fem bar culture in Montreal into the 1970s, as previously discussed, it is clear that this article focuses more on a different group of lesbians. Chamberland and Podmore state that by the end of the 1960s, "downtown bars were more accessible to a wider population than the more working-class bars of the red light," which drew in a wider variety of lesbians including those who were "increasingly identified with feminism."[34] This reference to the working-class bars is one of the two allusions to butch and fem lesbians in the article.[35] The primary focus of the article is on more overtly activist and feminist lesbian organizing.[36] While brief, the article provides some insight into Montreal's lesbian history, demonstrating connections between university groups, feminism, and lesbian culture and politics.

Liz Millward's book, *Making a Scene,* offers a broad account of Canadian lesbian history from 1964-1984. Millward's book draws predominantly on lesbian and feminist archival sources supplemented by interviews, and her work is structured a bit differently from the other scholars as her focus was to document the emergence of lesbian "scenes." While Millward's conceptualization of "scenes" is nuanced to include physical and symbolic spaces, her approach to historical material places more emphasis on documenting different types of lesbian scenes as they emerged across Canada. It does not provide as much in-depth analysis of the cultural trends

[33]Line Chamberland and Julie Podmore, "Entering the Urban Frame: Early Lesbian Activism and Public Space in Montréal," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 19, no. 2 (2015): 196.
[34]Ibid., 198.
[35]There is one other brief reference to butch/fem terminology scrawled on a protest banner. Ibid., 205.
[36]Ibid., 197.

associated with the scenes that were produced.[37] Millward's work is diligent in tracing the constellations of lesbian "scenes" across a large temporal scope and Canada's expansive geography, cataloguing various "gay and lesbian centres, lesbian drop-ins at women's centres, lesbians rap [consciousness raising] groups, bookstores, cafes, and private members clubs."[38]

Early in her book, she says feminism was a "crucial factor supporting women who wanted to make a scene."[39] She says that while not all lesbians were feminists, "it was true that many feminists were lesbians, and many lesbians were affected by feminism."[40] In regard to lesbian sexuality, she offers feminism high praise:

> [feminism] created possibilities for women to develop this inner strength and to see themselves as sexual beings in their own right. As a result, more women began to take control of their own sexuality, and groups of lesbians began to claim spaces for themselves, the types of 'lesbian' that a woman could 'mimic' diversified.[41]

Millward clearly links feminism, lesbianism, and education. She provides examples such as the emergence of Women's Studies, lesbian conferences, and the formation of student political groups.[42]

Millward addresses working-class butch/fem bars sparingly, mostly in one chapter devoted to drinking establishments.[43] Consistent with Millward's work more broadly, the chapter focuses on where the bars were and when they opened and closed, emphasizing a shift from

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[37]This is not to say there is no analysis, but compared to other larger works in Canadian lesbian history it is noticeable that the framework organizing the work is different, seemingly more of a history of human geography than a cultural history. It would be difficult for Millward to provide the level of analysis provided by other scholars when her work is much broader in scope.
[38]Liz Millward, *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-84* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 4.
[39]Ibid., 19.
[40]Ibid., 20.
[41]Ibid., 39.
[42]Ibid., 171-173.
[43]Liz Millward, "'The Lesbian, Drinking, Is Never at Her Best': Beer Parlours, Taverns, and Bars," in *Making a Scene: Lesbian and Community Across Canada, 1964-84* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 43-75.

working-class straight-owned bars to women and lesbian owned spaces, and not necessarily discussing the nuances of different cultural milieus.[44] When bar culture is addressed, it does not feature favourably, as themes of violence, alcohol, drug use, internalized homophobia and repression are the primary focus.[45] In Millward's own words:

> bars were, by design, spaces for drinking and erotic encounters, not for other forms of community building. This purpose, therefore, determined to a large extent the behaviour and intentions of those who spent time in them, and this reinforced the reductive definition of lesbians as women who were solely and deviantly sexual.[46]

I do not wish to romanticize bar life or deny unsavoury or challenging elements of its existence. Many of the issues cited by Millward are consistent with scholarship on lesbian bars and butch/fem culture. However, that same scholarship also presents complex arguments about the simultaneous importance of those bars, and the ways that they were central in establishing community and culture. Recognition of this is lacking in Millward's book, especially compared to her limited but enthusiastic analysis of the contributions of the women's movement.

The most recent significant intervention into the field of Canadian lesbian history is Valerie Korinek's book *Prairie Fairies*, which offers an important account of underrepresented queer communities in the western prairies.[47] Detailing queer existence, community formation and activism in cities such as Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg, Korinek's work uses archival and oral history sources to challenge the notion that all queer history occurred in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. Korinek faces greater methodological challenges in locating sources on lesbian history than that of gay men, which results in a gender disparity in

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[44]Ibid., 45.
[45]Ibid., 60-61.
[46]Liz Millward, *Making a Scene,* 38.
[47]Similar to Duder, Korinek's book is sectioned into discrete parts. The first part of this book deals with the early twentieth century and is not included in this literature review.

the work which she notes is particularly apparent prior to the 1970s.[48] Regarding the early 1970s, Korinek references that the "Mount Royal Hotel" in Winnipeg was known as the "working-class lesbian hangout."[49] She offers a brief mention of fights in said bar, but there is no mention of butches and fems or commentary on the culture which likely results from a paucity of source material.[50]

Korinek argues that in the post-1970s, there was a goal of "diversifying gay and lesbian socializing away from its traditional venues - bars in particular," and that "this was a particular goal for lesbian activists and community builders."[51] It was common, Korinek argues, to see a breakdown between "middle-class 'campus lesbians' and working-class queer women" in university towns.[52] For example, Korinek observed that "some Edmonton women were interested in working with gay men on practical matters [...] while others in the universities may have been focused explicitly on feminist issues."[53] In line with the themes already discussed by other scholars, Korinek also talks about regional conferences as touchstones of lesbian organizing in the later years of the 1970s.[54] The patterns of queer organizing in the prairie cities captured by Korinek share some themes with histories written in other cities, but the ebb and flow of particular movements, how different groups formed coalitions, and when these things occurred could differ between different prairie cities, let alone larger Canadian metropolitan centres. Because the queer history of the prairies is less developed and there are regional specificities, my thesis does not engage with Korinek's book. However, there are certain dynamics and trends

[48]Valerie Korinek, *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 13-16; 35-36.
[49]Ibid., 121.
[50]Ibid., 121.
[51]Ibid., 151.
[52]Ibid., 183.
[53]Ibid., 233.
[54]Ibid., 133.

visible (though less thoroughly supported) in Korinek's work that align with similar trends in the historiography: the connection between feminism, universities, and lesbian activism; tension between different lesbian groups; and even a glimmer of working-class lesbian bar life in the 1970s.

Canadian lesbian history is a relatively small field with many histories still missing. There are important and nuanced trends in the historiography, but also moments of dissonance and dropped threads which play out along class lines. Scholars who focus on the 1950s and 1960s centre lesbian butch/fem culture and the working-class bars that housed it. Scholars focusing on the following decades examine specific forms of lesbian activism, often with detailed attention given to the impact of feminism. Chamberland's work is a notable exception, as it extends past 1969, sustaining recognition of butch/fem bars in Montreal into the middle of the 1970s. However, in a later article, Chamberland and Podmore examine lesbian activism and public space in the 1970s and 1980s in the same city, and butch/fem lesbians barely garner a mention. This aligns with lesbian history written about the 1970s and 1980s more generally.

The impression left by Ross and Millward's scholarship on the 1970s is that the era of butch/fem bar culture was past. However, there are simultaneous anecdotes and references noting the ongoing existence of butch/fem bar lesbians well into the 1970s. This simultaneous acknowledgement and relegation to the past leaves a cognitive dissonance around butch/fem, the working-class culture surrounding it, and the social conditions that helped produce it. My interpretation of Ross and Millward's books may seem ungenerous as I am placing much weight onto select words; butch/fem bar culture accounts for only a tiny fraction of their books' overall content. They both interviewed a few working-class lesbians (Millward and I share two interviewees), and they work to situate those women's experiences with attention to the impact

of class. Furthermore, throughout my thesis, Ross and Millward provide some of the only anchors I have in Canadian lesbian history in the 1970s and 1980s. For the most part, I do not see my work as standing in opposition to their historical accounts. Instead, my work is asking different questions and prioritizing different voices to enrich, deepen, and add to the work that is already done.

In the 1970s and 1980s, working-class butch and fem bar culture became the subject of much discourse and debate within feminism. However, while there is ample writing about the political nature of this culture, the lives and experiences of working-class lesbians stopped being recorded in any substantive way. It is not my intention to argue that there were no changes to working-class lesbian culture after 1969, but I do think scholars examining lesbian history in the 1970s and 1980s have not offered sustained attention to the question of class. Much has been missed as a result. A genuine and sustained interest in the lives of working-class lesbian experiences after the 1960s will require examining changes and declines, but also continuities and expansions.

Methodology:

This thesis is first and foremost an oral history. As the above historiography reveals, oral history as a qualitative methodological practice has been integral to the recording and writing of lesbian history. The work of Davis and Kennedy is an early example of oral history and in discussing their methodology, they offer a pre-emptive response to concerns about the issues of memory when using interviews as a source for historical inquiry:

> Whether the more conventional sources for historical and sociological studies -letters, newspaper accounts, court records, or observation- provide a sounder base than rich oral narratives for the constructing of community history is in our minds a moot point. Although [conventional] sources do not introduce issues about the distortion of memory,

> they do raise other kinds of problems, such as the limited representation of community participants' own views, or the lack of multiple perspectives.[55]

This quote reminds their readers that the potential fallibility of sources is not specific to oral history. Echoing this idea, Alessandro Portelli argues that "oral sources are not *objective* [but] this, of course, applies to every source," and he accuses his fellow academics of seeking to "cut oral history down to size" before attempting to learn its uses.[56] Resistance to accepting oral history as a valid methodological practice is fraught with power, as oral history is absolutely pivotal in capturing the histories and stories of oppressed communities.[57] Korinek notes that "historians of sexuality have made extensive use of oral history interviews because initially there were very few archived cultural, legal, or social documents from which to reconstruct worlds that their inhabitants intentionally kept covert."[58]

This is not to dismiss the particular challenges and considerations involved in conducting oral history interviews and referencing them as source material. For example, expert oral historians Franca Iacovetta, Katrina Srigley, and Stacey Zembrzycki argue that there was an "initial optimistic, and naive, embrace of oral history" as an inherently egalitarian process that would "necessarily validate women's lives, empower them, and rewrite history."[59] Feminist historian Joan Sangster notes that this mistake in oral history practice "erroneously presents oral histories as essentially unmediated, ignoring the process by which the researcher and the

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[55]Davis and Kennedy, *Boots of Leather,* 15.
[56]Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History,* by Alessandro Portelli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 54 (emphasis in original); 49.
[57]Ibid., 56. While my work is situated squarely within the oral history traditions of sexuality and feminist scholarship, historians and activists from many communities have utilized oral history methods for recording and writing history as El Chenier point out in, "Hidden from Historians: Preserving Lesbian Oral History in Canada," *Archivaria* 68, no. 68 (2009): 252.
[58]Valerie Korinek, "Locating lesbians, finding 'gay women,' writing queer histories," in *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practices of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century,* eds. Franca Iacovetta, Katrina Srigley, and Stacey Zembrzycki (London: Routledge, 2018), 128.
[59]Iacovetta, Srigley, and Zembrzycki*,* Introduction to *Beyond Women's Words*, 7-8.

informant create the source together."[60] As succinctly as these scholars have presented this issue, debates about how to address it are layered and ongoing, often punctuated by post-structuralist insights about the complexity of narrative construction and language.[61]

Conversations debating and theorizing the use of interviews are, according to historian and psychologist Valerie Yow, "centred on a concern about the process of meaning-making."[62] This process is shaped by questions of memory, the relationship between the interviewee and interviewer, as well as what they individually bring to the process. She offers more immediate solutions to concerns about memory such as checking the "consistency within [a] testimony" as well as comparing it with other source material or other accounts.[63] The layers of interpretation and reinterpretation by the interviewee and the researcher are more difficult to navigate as "the qualitative researcher must be conscious of assumptions and interests that inform the work."[64] This is an integral component of conducting oral history research, though Sangster offers somewhat of a pragmatic counterpoint, suggesting that it is possible to overcorrect and lose grip on the impetus for utilizing oral history in the first place. She says she "worr[ies] about the dangers of emphasizing form over context [and] of stressing deconstruction of individual narratives over analysis of social patterns."[65]

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[60]Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 1 (1994): 7.
[61]Many of the debates and tensions in the practice of feminist oral history work as well as the expansion of the field itself can be observed by comparing the following two books published nearly three decades apart: Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History (*New York: Routledge, 1991); and Franca Iacovetta, Katrina Srigley, and Stacey Zembrzycki, eds., *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practices of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century* (London : Routledge, 2018).
[62]Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 1.
[63]Ibid., 21.
[64]Ibid., 9.
[65]Sangster, "Telling Our Stories," 22.

My work draws on the rich insights and unique traditions of feminist and sexuality historians who utilize oral history methodologies. Also, I am reminded by Sangster's caution and the above quotes by Davis and Kennedy and Portelli that there are similarities between the treatment of sources in oral history and various other methodological approaches. The fact that many oral history practitioners not only outline the strengths and limitations of their methodology but also must defend its practical and theoretical validity is political. Iacovetta, Srigley, and Zembrzycki write that "perhaps the true power of feminist oral history is emancipating it and ourselves from its constraints."[66]

The arguments and insights of this thesis are based on the narratives of six women (See Appendix A). Initially, I sought research participants who lived in Vancouver or Victoria during the 1970s, who identified as lesbian or bisexual during that time, and who were from working-class or low-income backgrounds. A call for participants was posted on Facebook on my profile as well as a "Lesbians of British Columbia" group; it was also disseminated by my supervisor Dr. Lynne Marks to contacts in her research project which had participants with overlapping selection criteria. I would have liked to distribute fliers or posters in community centres, bars, or other venues where lesbian, bisexual and queer women congregate to increase the number of voices in this study, but this was not possible due to the Covid19 pandemic.

When potential participants reached out, they were sent a consent form, sample questions (if requested), and potential dates and times to conduct an interview online via Zoom. My research project, including the consent forms (See Appendix C) and a set of sample interview questions (See Appendix B), were approved by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board. There were always a few initial questions about biographical information and

[66]Iacovetta, Srigley, and Zembrzycki*, Beyond Women's Words*, 13.

background, followed by questions that reflected trends in scholarship on working-class lesbians pre-1970, such as identification with butch/fem or experiences with state violence. There were also questions that reflected trends in scholarship on lesbians after 1970 such as experiences within activist communities or politics.

Some adjustments to the scope and content of the thesis had to be made early in the research process based on the specific participants and their memories. Only one lesbian who lived in Victoria during the period in question reached out to be interviewed and no one I interviewed identified as bisexual.[67] It was clear during the interviews and through analysis that many lesbians were quite transient (moving and travelling), and that locating memories of specific dates and timeframes was challenging for many interviewees. This resulted in the years studied being extended as it was clear that memories and impressions from the early 1980s were appearing as participants worked to recollect the 1970s; also, most memories from the 1970s were concentrated towards the end of the decade. Once extended, most impressions, thoughts, and examples made sense within the new time confines, apart from a few examples which still fell after the timeframe. These examples are used as representations of dynamics experienced within community, and such cases are explicitly noted.

Once interviewed, participants shared my contact and project information with other contacts, a process referred to as snowball sampling. As snowball sampling does not require cold calls or inquiries, it is a more consensual and ethical form of participant recruitment. However, it does increase the chances that interviewees will be personally connected and share similar social circles, which can jeopardize confidentiality and increase the likelihood that participants will share particular experiences or perspectives. Based on the narratives provided, I do believe

[67]I do not count this participant in the six interviewees, though I drew from her interview in a supplementary way to provide contextual support.

snowball sampling had this limiting effect on my work, as there was an overlap not only in the trends identified but also in some of the more detailed examples provided, as well as the identities of the participants. For example, all the participants were (to varying degrees) upwardly mobile and very involved in the feminist community, even though neither of those were criteria for participation in the project. Five of the interviewees are white and the sixth is Asian. While the one woman of colour I interviewed did speak to experiences of racism, the extent to which broader analyses can be made on the narrative of a single person is limited. I am cognizant of the fact that my interviewees are majority white and upwardly mobile. While scholars speak about an increase in education and mobility amongst women of this generation broadly, I would be interested in knowing if a greater diversity of voices would have produced more complex trends about the relationship between upward mobility and whiteness.

As noted above, the parameters of snowball sampling can be a source of methodological and analytical limitations. At the same time, these same parameters can strengthen the capacity for source interpretation and analysis. Having interviewees with some social overlap strengthens my capacity to double-check and cross-reference different narratives, which means when trends do emerge, they can be supported by various accounts. One or two interviewees having a different account adds nuance and does not necessarily indicate a falsity or misremembering. Davis and Kennedy noted that "contradictions frequently emerged in narrators' accounts of bar life" but this was "rarely due to idiosyncratic or faulty memory."[68] Instead, they found it reflected the complexity of bar life and "could be resolved by taking into account the different social positions of narrators."[69] Davis and Kennedy also stressed the importance of numbers, saying that they found "between five and ten narrators' stories need to be juxtaposed in order to

[68]Davis and Kennedy, *Boots of Leather,* 22.
[69]Ibid., 22.

develop an analysis that is not changed drastically by each new story."[70] Applying their wisdom to my own work would mean that with six interviewees, trends that emerge are significant historical patterns that likely reflect the experiences of the community beyond the group interviewed. Any differing accounts are included to capture the nuance and complexity of community and individual social locations, though the applicability of those experiences more broadly cannot be assumed until further research is conducted.

This project is also the beneficiary of archival efforts by gay and lesbian activists and scholars who have made source material (text and oral history) available. There are several queer archives and collections in Canada that vary thematically and geographically. However, the existence of archives and the accessibility of archives are two separate issues which became particularly apparent in the context of a global pandemic when it was unsafe to travel. I supplemented the analysis of my own interviews with archival sources that were accessible to me online or purchasable in print. I utilized oral history recordings from Chenier's *Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony* project which have been digitized and stored in collaboration with Simon Fraser University. In their film *Forbidden Love*, Lynne Fernie and Arelyn Weissman include recordings of the oral history interviews they conducted for the project; their film is available online through the National Film Board. The University of British Columbia Open Collections has digitized the oldest and longest running (1974-2001) feminist periodical in Canada, *Kinesis*, published in Vancouver. Finally, I utilize some better-known American auto-biographical writing and scholarship, published predominantly in the 1990s, such as Joan Nestle, Esther Newton, Patrick Califia, and Dorothy Allison.

[70]Ibid., 24.

There is the issue of archive accessibility, but as Chenier notes, there is also much oral history work that is completed but never archived:

> The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a surge of research activity undertaken by grassroots organizations [filmmakers and historians]. These researchers undertook extensive oral history interviews with lesbian and gay women who came of age in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, yet only some have donated their material to an archive.[71]

This problem not only amounts to a loss for gay and lesbian communities and historians of sexuality, but also poses a problem in terms of the accountability of scholars. It may not be possible to archive the oral history transcripts that result from this project, which will partially erase the narratives (and labour) of the interviewees, and will make it difficult for other researchers to verify my claims. While I cannot totally mitigate this issue, I can, following the footsteps of Davis and Kennedy, use "extended quotations which have been minimally edited."[72] This helps maintain at least a partial archive, regardless of whether my transcripts are later available.

Davis and Kennedy also opted for the use of long and unedited quotes to make clear the distinction and interplay between their own voices and the narratives of their interviewees.[73] In doing so, they recognize that "oral history as a method involves a personal relationship between the narrator and the researcher," and they work to make that relationship explicit.[74] An interplay between the researcher, the interviewee, and the narrative produced is inevitable, and this can be useful but it can also invite bias. In analysing her interviews, Ross noted that she was "deeply aware of the desire among the women [she] interviewed for a celebratory reclamation of this

[71]Chenier, "Hidden from Historians," 248.
[72]Davis and Kennedy, *Boots of Leather,* 25.
[73]Ibid., 25.
[74]Ibid., 21.

period."[75] She also admits that "a number of scholars, [her]self included, have wondered whether investigating the achievements *and* the limitations of lesbian-feminist organizing will lead to a sense of group frailty instead of robustness."[76] Further, Ross includes in her book her own identification as a "white, middle-class lesbian of the 1980s."[77] Readers will notice that she shares a class, race, and sexual identification with the majority of her interviewees.[78] These kinds of dynamics are inevitable, so naming these feelings and tensions provides methodological transparency by inviting the reader to consider their implications.

Davis and Kennedy said of their book that "despite [their] confidence in the analysis," they "leave visible the seams by which the story is constructed."[79] To add methodological strength to this work, I am going to provide information about myself and briefly introduce each interviewee. I hope doing so helps to reveal the "seams" of my work.

In 2014, I moved across British Columbia to start school at the University of Victoria, not fully appreciating how much that decision would impact my life trajectory. When I left my rural working-class hometown, I was not thinking about what getting an education would mean; I was thinking about arriving in Victoria in time for the Pride Parade. I had publicly announced that I was a lesbian in 2012, raising the number of out people in the town up to one. In my haste to leave, it did not occur to me that I would never really be able to return.

Three years later, sitting in an honours history seminar discussing Marx, one of my classmates said "well I assume most of us are middle-class or upper-middle-class," which was met with nods and a stream of words like "lawyer" and "civil servant." While I was not under the

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[75]Becki Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 18.
[76]Ibid., 19.
[77]Ibid., 4.
[78]Ibid., 17.
[79]Davis and Kennedy, *Boots of Leather,* 25.

impression that I was middle class, I had not previously realized that nearly everyone around me was. I have been fortunate in many ways; the working class is a broad spectrum, and by several metrics, I grew up closer to the top of it than the bottom. I also think rural living and whiteness acted as buffers for my family, shielding us from some of the most intrusive measures of classism. As a result of my education, I now think of myself as more lower-middle-class, or at the very least upwardly mobile, but I still regularly feel the impacts of my upbringing.

Many of the accounts provided by the interviewees reflect pieces of myself back to me. Throughout my thinking and writing process, I remain curious about the ways my emotional connection with the content might impact my analysis. I have provided some of my biography so that readers can do the same. I hope it makes me sensitive and perceptive to nuanced details of the narrators' lives, and that it drives rigorous analysis to do this history justice. I am cautious that it might encourage a projection of my own experiences, causing me to ignore important differences or be overly generous with my interpretations. I know for certain that my connection to the material has sustained my investment in this work when it felt very difficult to continue.

Marsha Arbour was born around 1950 in Niagara Falls Ontario. She grew up working class, is white, and identifies as a butch lesbian. Her father did shift work in a winery as a stationary engineer ("it's not like the kind of engineer that you need a degree for" and is more like a trade). Her father always maintained the same job, so while his income may not have been high, she seemed to experience more financial stability than some of the other interviewees. She moved to Vancouver at 24 and lived there primarily for the next 20 years. Arbour was honest that the 1970s were very difficult for her and she was drinking at the time. She struggled to remember

specific details but offered interesting perspectives as she was a bit less politically involved than the other interviewees.[80]

Chris Fox was born in Brighton, England in 1950 to working-class parents. She is white and a lesbian. She immigrated with her family to Ontario as her dad joined the Canadian army. She moved to Toronto in about 1970, where she stayed until the middle of the decade when she left to tour various feminist and lesbian communes. She arrived in Vancouver at the close of the decade. While she was only in Vancouver for the final few years of the period this thesis examines, her clever and specific recollections are useful for providing broad context, and as someone from England, she can offer commentary on the way that class is made invisible in Canada.[81]

Cy-Thea Sand, born in 1947, grew up in Montreal. She is a white lesbian from a working-class background. She moved to Vancouver when she was about 21, around 1970, and was there for two years. For a few years of the 1970s, she was teaching on the East Coast, before returning to Vancouver in 1973 or 1974. In addition to providing an oral history interview, Sand also published writing on women's literature in *Kinesis* that complements her testimony.[82]

Mary-Woo Sims was born in Hong Kong in 1956. She was born into a higher socio-economic class but due to "family circumstances," she ended up "living in poverty." Sims moved to Vancouver in 1970 where she worked alongside her mom from a young age cleaning houses. Sims identifies as biracial (Asian and Australian) and as a lesbian. Sims came out in 1974 when she was still a teenager and is the youngest of the interviewees. Sims is pensive and very

[80]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria; Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 5, 2022, Victoria.
[81]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria; Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 5, 2022, Victoria.
[82]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.

diplomatic; she provides great broad insight about her experiences and is the most generous in her accounts of the activist communities of which she was a part.[83]

Diana Smith was born in the 1950s and grew up in the south of England. She is a white lesbian from a working-class background. Her father worked as a printer in the same factory from the time he was a teenager until he was 65. She also worked in that factory as a teenager until she left at 16 to go to London. She arrived in Vancouver in 1968, and spent a few years travelling frequently and then living in the Comox Valley before returning to Vancouver. Like Fox, she offers interesting insight on class in Canada versus in England.[84]

The final interviewee opted to remain anonymous and is referred to throughout the thesis as "Jane" at her request. She has a phenomenal memory, though some details she provided were excluded to help protect her anonymity. She is a white lesbian who was born in the 1940s, and grew up in a rural area. She moved to Vancouver in the late 1960s, and remained there for the entirety of the 1970s.[85]

Conclusion:

This thesis has three chapters. Each chapter works to address a gap or tension in the field of lesbian history in Canada by centring working-class lesbian experiences. Situating my findings in relation to historiographical trends in lesbian historical scholarship both pre- and post-1970 allows for a complex series of interventions that are interrelated and compounding.

My first chapter, "'I've been lucky': Space, Homophobia and Culture among Vancouver's Working-Class Lesbians" works to situate the narrators in relation to trends identified in the scholarship that focuses on working-class lesbian communities. Chapter One ultimately reveals

[83]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria; Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 3, 2022, Victoria.
[84]Diana Smith, interviewed by Morgan Watson, January 19, 2022, Victoria.
[85]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.

the working-class spaces and cultures to which the interviewees did not belong. This is an unconventional approach, but it is important because it works to bridge the gap in lesbian history pre- and post- 1970. It does so by examining the relationship between working-class space and sexuality in Vancouver, and by tracing elements of lesbian bar culture into the 1970s. Situating the cohort of women I interviewed in relation to these themes reveals that they understood and experienced their lesbianism differently than many other working-class lesbians, a difference they ascribe to their feminism. I also attribute their differences to upward mobility. Trying to tease out these rifts reveals a complex web of ideas about lesbian culture, class, and feminist politics that is traced through the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two titled: "'Smashing all the nukes, including the nuclear family:' Tracing Political and Educational Pathways" examines how the interviewees understood their lesbianism, and examines potential roots of their upward mobility. I argue that together, politics and education, account for some of the differences between the interviewees and other working-class lesbians that were revealed in Chapter One. Many interviewees were involved in various movements within the New Left before becoming engaged in the feminist movement, and most also attended some form of post-secondary institution. While the link between post-secondary education and upward mobility is more obvious, I also argue that political engagement could have contribute to upward mobility.

Elements of the interviewees' experiences in Chapter Two can be connected to the upwardly mobile lesbians who intermittently appeared in Davis and Kennedy, Chenier and Chamberland's scholarship, and who were the focal point of Duder's work. My findings are similar regarding the way class and mobility shaped lesbians' relationships to community and culture. What is different in the 1970s, as is detailed in the historiography on that era, is the

emergence of formal lesbian activist (often lesbian feminist) communities that offered an alternative to the bars that did not require being closeted. Unlike Duder, I found that the working-class backgrounds of the interviewees continued to shape their experiences, regardless of upward mobility.

The final chapter, "'Just a hard luck story:' Working-Class Women in Vancouver's Lesbian and Feminist Movements," examines the experiences of the interviewees at the height of feminist, and especially lesbian-feminist, organizing in Vancouver. The results are complex and classed in contradictory ways. The previous two chapters demonstrate the distance between the cohort of narrators and more traditional working-class lesbian culture, including their upward mobility. When examining the ways feminist politics were classed, it is therefore not surprising to discover that the interviewees sometimes align with their middle-class counterparts. This is true of many of their accounts of butch/fem as well as their understanding of lesbianism and feminism being intrinsically linked. However, in other areas of politics, there is divergence. The feminist practice of downward mobility, conceptualizations of "women as a class," and certain politics pertaining to sex proved to be difficult for women who were working class. In addition to issues of class that appeared structurally within feminist politics, the chapter also examines more interpersonal and overt forms of classism.

Together the three chapters seek to bridge a gap between two discrete bodies of scholarship within lesbian history in Canada, and to provide insight into working-class lesbian experiences where they have been ignored. To do so requires sustained attention to the experiences of working-class lesbians after 1969, which reveals both continuities and significant changes. The complex and liminal class experiences of the interviewees prove to be useful in contextualizing the classed differences between various segments of the lesbian community in

Vancouver, and in beginning to challenge the classed divides between the two bodies of scholarship on lesbian history in Canada.

Chapter One
"I've been lucky": Space, Homophobia and Culture among Vancouver's Working-Class Lesbians

criticism surrounding lesbian sexuality in butch fem culture was merely one way in which a much greater difference manifested itself [...] The anti-butch and fem rhetoric popularized by the women's movement was not entirely a product of the ideological tenets of modern feminism but rather grew out of divergent social ideals that were grounded in class differences.

\- *El Chenier*[1]

Introduction:

This chapter is devoted to understanding patterns of working-class lesbian life in Vancouver in the 1970s. Using the minimal secondary source material about class and sexuality in Vancouver at the time, paired with insights from interviews conducted for this project and other select primary source material, this chapter will reconstruct patterns of culture and space in relation to class and lesbianism (or sexuality more broadly).

This chapter will also draw from scholarship on working-class lesbian culture in prior decades to explore continuities and differences moving into the 1970s. The spaces around which lesbian culture was organized, experiences of police and homophobic state violence, and the butch/fem relationship model will act as core entry points into the question of working-class lesbian experience. Examining these three themes provides a broader context for the lesbian community and its classed dimensions in 1970s Vancouver. However, this chapter will also situate the women that I interviewed in relation to these historical trends, revealing fractures within the working class itself.

Spaces of Sexuality and Class:

In the 1970s in Vancouver, spatial organizing around sexuality was concentrated in a few areas and key establishments. Becki Ross' work details the history of the West End stroll and

[1]El Chenier, "Tough Ladies and Troublemakers: Toronto's Public Lesbian Community, 1955-1965" (MA thesis, Queen's University, 1955), 185.

East Side red light district where many sex workers and erotic entertainers conducted their business. Whether in more upscale burlesque shows or street sex work, queer people were heavily involved in both scenes, and sold sexual/intimate encounters formally and informally, in establishments, and also in public and outdoor spaces.[2] These workers faced police harassment and arrest, as well as anti-sex work organizing and rhetoric by neighbourhood coalitions and politicians, including many gay men and feminists.[3] Reflecting on organizing with sex-workers in the West End, feminist Marie Arrington, recalled that once some gay men "had acquired respectability, having acquired property and good jobs. They align[ed] themselves with the right wing."[4] Similarly, she said after forming political alliances with sex workers she was no longer "an accepted member of many parts of the feminist community in Vancouver [and] many women that I organized with very closely in the past now walk past me."[5]

Ross documents that women of a variety of sexual orientations and class backgrounds were involved in the worlds of burlesque and sex work. In addition to people who did the erotic and sexual elements of the work, lesbians also comprised some of the behind-the-scenes labour, were patrons, and worked as Masters of Ceremonies.[6] Most of the sex workers who worked in the West End also lived in the West End.[7] In addition to commercial sexual spaces, the West End was also home to Vancouver's gay cruising grounds. These are among the reasons why the West End was "widely touted as the heart of gay Vancouver."[8] Ross paints a vibrant picture of

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[2]Becki Ross, "Sex and (Evacuation from) the City: The Moral and Legal Regulation of Sex Workers in Vancouver's West End, 1975-1985," *Sexualities* 13, no. 2 (2010): 199.
[3]Ibid., 207-208
[4]Maria Arrington, "Community Organizing," in *Good Girls/Bad Girls: Sex Trade Workers and Feminists Face to Face,* ed. Laurie Bell (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987), 105.
[5]Ibid., 105.
[6]Becki Ross, *Burlesque West: Showgirls, Sex and Sin in Postwar Vancouver* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 135.
[7]Becki Ross, "Sex and (Evacuation from) the City," 202.
[8]Ross, "Sex and (Evacuation from) the City," 199.

sexuality and class in the West End at this time; it represents some of the only work that offers substantive consideration of working-class sexual minorities after the 1960s. As the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, this world was not frequented by the women I interviewed.

While much of the sex industry operated in the West End, Vancouver's "red-light district" was actually located in the East Side, on Main Street. This area was also frequented by queer people, and a higher concentration of the workers and clientele belonged to racial and ethnic minorities than in the West End. Ross explains that "[i]n the city's popular, racist imaginary, the historic Chinatown stroll on the east side – the red light district – remained the 'logical' and 'natural' repository of sexual iniquity and racial otherness."[9] Ross' historical arguments are reflected in the memory of Haida lesbian Amanda White, who recalls that "the only place that we could go to entertain ourselves when we had some free time back then was down at Main and Hastings. Because that's where all the First Nations people went [...] that was the place that we would all congregate."[10] White was involved in what she calls "street life" for a couple of years, despite having a Degree in Education from the University of British Columbia, due to racist hiring practices.[11] White further recalls:

> a majority of the women who were working and around the streets or into the drugs or into prostitution or into the dancing were lesbian women…They were with women, they wouldn't identify themselves as lesbian or gay or anything… there was just an unwritten code: they were with women.[12]

Despite a swelling of feminist and lesbian organizing beginning in the 1970s, Ross asserts that it was still "safer and more lucrative for lesbian and bisexual dancers to stay in the closet at

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[9]Ibid., 210.
[10]Amanda White, interviewed for *QMUNITY's Stories of Older Queers Project*, December 28, 2009, Vancouver, Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony. Main and Hastings is near the "stroll" that Ross references.
[11]"Amanda White" in *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives,* film, directed by Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie (National Film Board of Canada, 1992).
[12]Ibid.

work."[13] This is due to the fact that "gay establishments were denied necessary licensing [and] clientele were subject to police harassment."[14]

There were scenes in Vancouver that were more formally built around sexuality or queerness, but there were also spaces that may not be visible within the historical record or that might appear more heterosexual on the surface. Similar to queerness being integral, though unnamed, in commercial sex spaces, White reflects on her experience in a club in Vancouver:

> I ended up going to a Black club and at that time they were considered 'the Black club' and basically what it was, what attracted me to it was the music was really good, it was funky and everybody dressed really snazzy and that's when I wanted to get into. I thought 'oh this is what I'm looking for.' This was part of fulfilling my fantasy of looking good and being cool, and it was fast, it was cool and it was in the nighttime so that's where I ended up. Actually, that's where I ended up coming out was in there not in Vanport but in a place which was supposedly a straight bar but wasn't a straight bar because there was people from the street going to this bar [...] but the thing I liked about it you could be whoever you wanted to be in that bar. It didn't matter cause there were actually Black people in there, there were people of white heritage, there were Asian people in there and Native people in there. So, it was a place where everybody belonged there, nobody judged you for who, or for whatever you did.[15]

White's reflections, paired with the work of Ross, demonstrate that there were spaces and scenes where queerness may have been accepted or even expected but were never explicitly queer spaces, and have not been recorded as such. If more records or testimonies of the lesbian, bisexual, and queer women in these spaces were available, I suspect that this thesis, as well as the landscape of lesbian history in Canada, would be far more complex, diffuse, and multi-faceted. As an example, my research was designed to examine the experiences of lesbians who are "working-class." White discusses that in her Nation (Haida) "our cultures and our values and our beliefs are much different. I wasn't brought up with Christianity. My first language is not

[13]Ross, *Burlesque West*, 138.
[14]Ibid., 139.
[15]"Amanda White" in *Forbidden Love.*

English."[16] She provides an example of the difference: "ownership of materialistic things was not part of my values. But [what] I realized when I came to the city is that this society places the value of a person on what job they do and what they own."[17] White's reflections do not just provide a more nuanced portrait of working-class lesbian history; they also call into question the stability, analytical usefulness, and cultural roots of class categories as a whole.

There are spaces that have been explicitly remembered as queer spaces, such as the aforementioned Vanport, which is easier to excavate for lesbian history. The Vanport hotel, which sat just off the East Side strip, was a pivotal lesbian space in Vancouver. The Vanport was a working-class bar that served as a lesbian community hub. The Vanport was a space that was tolerant or even protective of its lesbian clientele and, therefore, was understood as a lesbian bar of sorts, despite not technically being one. It was one of the more explicitly gay spaces in Vancouver pre-1970, and it remained a significant space where lesbians, especially those who were working class, would congregate. Most eye-witness accounts describe the Vanport as a seedy bar with a very rough crowd. Unlike her experience in the Black club, White recollects her experience in the Vanport unfavourably. She recalls that:

> it was really hurtful too because everybody was either drunk out of their mind or stoned out of their mind and to me what I was trying to run away from was exactly this and it was just like back home and I realized that this was not what I wanted.[18]

A very similar sentiment was echoed by one of my interviewees, Jane, who explained that when she went to gay venues with her first lesbian partner "it was really clear to [her] that [she] wasn't interested in the Vanport and in that particular group of women."[19] She shared her recollections:

> My first partner and I went to the clubs a couple of times as we were breaking up and the first one we went to was down this dark set of stairs. And then they had a little thing

[16]"Ibid.
[17]Ibid.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.

> where they opened and looked out to see who was there. And we went in and shortly afterwards, there was a big fight in the bathroom and there was a sink torn off the wall. And I remember thinking, 'no, this isn't why I came to Vancouver. I want a different life than that.' That reminded me too much of my childhood [...] And, you know, Vanport the same there.[20]

Chris Fox also recalls visiting the Vanport with a partner and she said, "we were only there the once and we never went back. Somebody up-ended a table and that was it - we left."[21] While many first-hand accounts of the Vanport speak about it as a seedy bar, and describe violent encounters, not everyone experienced the bar that way. Cy-Thea Sand remembered the Vanport fondly:

> I felt very comfortable in the Vanport. [...] because in my experience with the Vanport, there wasn't violence [...] everyone would, you know, be drinking and having a hell-of-a good time. So, I didn't witness the violence. I could understand that people would have different comfort levels. But I was kind of familiar with that because of my aunt.[22]

From an early age, Sand spent time in bar environments as her aunt owned a bar. When Sand recounts her earlier years spent in bars, it is clear that she was not bothered by interactions or events that might be categorized as violence by a different person. For example, while in a bar at 17, Sand witnessed a bar patron lift up a chair to hit another person, and she remarked that she "just moved away" and that "there was some part of [her] that just wasn't afraid of that."[23] This is important, as it demonstrates that the interviewees' differing accounts of the Vanport hotel bar do not necessarily indicate a contradiction in what altercations or events occurred in the Vanport, but instead, demonstrate that people's perceptions of the events are subjective and could differ greatly. Sand also made fleeting references to an ex-partner and a friend who were part of the working-class lesbian crowd at the Vanport, both of whom had done sex work and one of which

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[20]Ibid.
[21]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[22]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2022, Victoria.
[23]Ibid.

had gone to prison.[24] While I do not have first-hand accounts of those women's experiences, these few details share thematic similarities with the working-class lesbian communities captured in the literature before the 1970s, which will become clear in the next section of this chapter.

When the interviewees for this thesis spoke about their memories of being lesbians in Vancouver during the 1970s and into the early 1980s, what became clear is that they could not neatly fit into the existing scholarship on working-class lesbians or working-class sexual spaces more broadly. Sand proved to be one exception in the fact that she frequented the Vanport and enjoyed her time there (although there were other rifts that emerged between Sand and the clientele of the Vanport which will be discussed later in this chapter). Other than Sand, the interviewees did not share memories of time spent in places like the stroll or the Vanport. In fact, some interviewees even noted their distance and avoidance of those spaces and the people in them. The next two sections examine how belonging to, or avoiding, particular spaces or social circles shaped the way that people, including the interviewees, experienced their class and sexuality.

Homophobic and State Violence:

After reviewing the literature and sources on homophobic policing and state violence, one surprising trend in my interviews was the women's lack of stories pertaining to those two topics. Although many cited examples of homophobia that they experienced socially, many reported a distinct lack of police harassment or institutional violence (such as being fired or hospitalized for homophobic reasons). It is difficult to ascertain why these women were fortunate in this regard, but it raises several questions: Was there less violence in Vancouver than other places in Canada during this time period? Was there a general decrease in homophobic

[24]Ibid.

state/institutional violence after the 1960s? Or, did these women not frequent the spaces and get involved in the circles that were most targeted by policing? It is possible that several of these factors occurred simultaneously.

Looking at lesbian life prior to the 1970s, the historiography reflects recurring themes of violence and harassment by police both in the United States and in Canada. Early lesbian communities often took root in working-class bars in "tenderloin" and industrial districts, which put them at risk of police interference, not only due to homophobia, but also due to proximity and overlap with other targeted groups, such as people who were low-income, belonged to racial or ethnic minorities, or were involved in organized crime or sex work. There was considerable overlap between the lesbian community and sex workers, with many women belonging to both groups. This connection not only brought increased police intervention but also violence from men.[25]

In their exploration of the lesbian community in Buffalo in the 1950s, Davis and Kennedy found that many lesbians had encounters with police and with the homophobic public. Davis and Kennedy examined several bars in various locations but mentioned that "the bars tended to be in or adjacent to the downtown section" and they quoted an interviewee saying that gay bars were "looked down on so they never opened in halfway decent neighbourhoods."[26] Fights within the bars were often between heterosexual men (non-police) and butch lesbians who were trying to defend themselves, the fem lesbians, and/or their right to the bar itself. This culture of defence was a point of pride for many butches, but was also necessary to combat

[25]For a more detailed explanation of the relationship between sex work and the lesbian community in Buffalo, including the various ways different lesbians were involved in the trade, see Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 97-104.
[26]Ibid., 39.

rampant homophobia.[27] As police generally did not enter the bars during this time period, much of the harassment and arrests of lesbians by police happened in the streets surrounding the bars.[28] Davis and Kennedy note that "most tough bar butches had been arrested at least once for skirmishes with straight men, or even the police."[29] The threat of arrest was amplified for Black lesbians who were not only targeted around the bars but also had police involvement in their own neighbourhoods and at private gatherings such as house parties.[30] "The police would use any excuse" Davis and Kennedy argue "to arrest a group of Black lesbians."[31]

Similar themes and trends were found in El Chenier's thesis, which examined the working-class lesbian community in Toronto from the mid-1950s to 1965. The core of the lesbian scene was a hotel bar, called The Continental, which was housed in the heart of Toronto's Chinatown.[32] Intense racism towards Chinese-Canadians, in the social sphere as well as in immigration law, resulted in a drastic gender imbalance (there were significantly more men) in the Chinese community in the mid-twentieth century, which made this section of town lucrative for white anglophone sex workers.[33] Chenier noted that "prostitution, gay women and the Chinese community were intimately woven together during this period."[34] The significance of sex workers in helping establish the lesbian community in Toronto is stressed more heavily in Chenier's thesis than in Davis and Kennedy's work:

> gay women and prostitutes appear to have played mutually beneficial roles to one another. Additionally, prostitutes were often lesbians or bisexuals themselves. It is quite

[27]Ibid., 91.
[28]Ibid., 92.
[29]Ibid., 92.
[30]Ibid., 126-128.
[31]Ibid., 127. It is important to note that while Davis and Kennedy captured important source material on the experiences of Black lesbians in Buffalo their analysis of racism within the lesbian community has been critiqued. See Rochella Thorpe, "'A House Where Queers Go': African-American Lesbian Nightlife in Detroit, 1940-1975," in *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America*, ed. Ellen Lewin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 41-42.
[32]El Chenier, "Tough Ladies and Troublemakers," 126.
[33]Ibid., 127-128.
[34]Ibid., 140.

> plausible that it was lesbian prostitutes and their female lovers who initially created a 'public' working-class culture of same-sex relationships between women, a culture which ultimately attracted other gay women.[35]

Similar to the findings of Davis and Kennedy, Chenier records police harassment of lesbians in the streets surrounding the bar.[36] The police harassment ranged from lesbian women being taken into custody and held overnight with no charges, to experiencing extreme physical and sexual violence at the hands of police.[37] Chenier also examines a less overt form of state violence, which was the interventions of Child Services and the courts into the lives of lesbian mothers based on the belief that lesbians, and especially butch women, could not be good parents.[38]

Some of the best insights into the early lesbian community in Vancouver are found in the 1992 film *Forbidden Love.* It can be difficult to distinguish the precise years the interviewees are discussing in the film, but the ages of the lesbians interviewed about Vancouver should place many of their stories in approximately the 1960s. The class backgrounds or identities of the lesbians who were interviewed are also not specified, but they certainly patronized the working-class establishments that informally housed Vancouver's lesbian scene. Stephanie Ozard describes the location of the New Fountain Hotel bar, which served gay and lesbian clientele as "a choice area. It was on Cordova Street where Gas Town is now but then it was drunks and drug addicts. It was really really skid row."[39] She described the clientele of the Vanport in similar terms saying:

> There was drug addicts, there was drug dealers, there were hookers, there were housewives, there were all these wonderful butchy women who drove trucks and taxis and everything they could do that was unfeminine.[40]

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[35]Ibid., 125.
[36]Ibid., 148.
[37]Ibid., 148; 150-151.
[38]Ibid., 167-168; 169-170.
[39]"Stephanie Ozard" in *Forbidden Love.*
[40]Ibid.

Another interviewee, Ruth Christine, offers a more detailed description of the inside of the Vanport Hotel bar which she describes as a "dive bar":

> It was filthy; it was in an old, old building […] but it was cockroaches running around on the walls, and the floors were filthy. If you walked across the floor your feet stuck to whatever fell on the floor. If you dropped a cigarette, you didn't bother picking it up. I don't think they ever changed the little terry towel covers on the tables. People would pull the little threads out and set them on fire.[41]

Ozard also talked about fighting and issues with the police. She gave a specific example about an officer in Vancouver:

> This one big cop. His wife had run off with another woman and he was mad and he was mad at all of us. He didn't care who we were. And he would harass us and follow us into the street. He would come up to us on the street and say, 'I want your name and address and I'm keeping it in my book' and he had it in his book. He had a book with everybody's name and address and he said 'I don't care if you're jaywalking or what you're doing I am gonna nail you if I ever catch you.' And he went after Clara one night and she was mad! I mean this woman weighed 275lbs was about 5 foot 7 and it took seven cops to put her in the bun wagon. He had to bring six of his friends cause she was scrappin'.[42]

Although less extensive than the work on Buffalo and Toronto, these glimpses into 1960s Vancouver demonstrate comparable themes to other lesbian bar scenes.

As outlined in the Introduction, scholarship after 1969 does not discuss working-class lesbian spaces and culture. Chenier notes that, "In the annals of gay history the postwar era - characterized by anti-homosexual witch hunts, aversion therapies invented by psychiatrists, and dimly-lit gay bars - came to an abrupt end in the late 1960s."[43] However, I encountered anecdotes that suggest some continuity of these trends well into the 1970s in Canada. For example, Chris Fox, during her time in Toronto, was in a club that was targeted by the police. She was charged with smoking marijuana and was taken, along with two of her friends, to the

[41]"Ruth Christine" in *Forbidden Love.*
[42]"Stephanie Ozard" in *Forbidden Love.*
[43]Chenier, "Tough Ladies and Troublemakers," 182.

police station.[44] Fox felt this charge was homophobic on the basis that the police only came to the club because it was a known gay bar. She also noted the added layer that she was an immigrant, which put her in a more vulnerable position with the police. Fox explained that "there was a section that says persons engaged in homosexuality, pimping or prostitution are liable to deportation if they're not Canadian citizens."[45] This not only demonstrates ongoing homophobic state violence but also indicates that queerness and sex work had an intimate link (whether real or in the imagination of law enforcement) that was maintained after 1969.

The experiences of Susan Strega, a lesbian who grew up in Winnipeg, suggest not only a continuation of homophobic state violence, but also of lesbian bar culture in the 1970s. Strega remembers that police not only enacted homophobic violence, but they were also unwilling to respond to crimes committed by civilians against gay people:

> I had an experienced of being gay-bashed. I wasn't the only one, I was probably the most badly injured and the police refusing to press charges and I think about there was a lawyer lesbian who had also been at the event that I got gay-bashed at and I just assumed that she would be able to get the police to do something or charge these guys. And it didn't happen, you know, so certainly, I mean, it's a different time, eh? I mean, the police raided places all the time still in the '70s, that was a very common thing. Police beat people up, I had my arm broken, you know, that was just, stuff that happened that you understood was part of it.[46]

Working-class lesbian bar culture is also something Strega experienced in the 1970s. In fact, her involvement in lesbian bar culture caused an initial mistrust of feminist politics:

> I would say, and I think this is true for a lot of lesbians of my particular generation, we were very hesitant, or I would even say opposed to feminist politics initially, right? Because I think there was a lot of concern that we were going to have to give up being who we were, right? Which was a real bar culture. No other way to describe it. I would say it's a real bar culture.

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[44]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[45]Ibid. The following article verifies the legal precarity of homosexuals who had immigrated to Canada: Philip Girard, "From Subversion to Liberation: Homosexuals and the Immigration Act 1952-1977," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 2 (1987): 1-28.
[46]Susan Strega, interviewed by Christine Hughes, Lynne Marks and Morgan Watson for *Alternative Visions: the Politics of Motherhood and Family among Indigenous, Immigrant, Racialized and Low-income Activist Women's Groups in Canada, 1960s-1980s,* April 23, 2021, Victoria.

The dynamic identified by Strega will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter, but it is important to note that working-class lesbian bar culture was maintained into the 1970s. To contextualize Strega's experiences in relation to the historiography, it also relevant to note that Strega also experienced incarcerationn and worked as a sex-worker. Of her class background she said "I'm never too sure about [calling myself] working class. I always think poverty class is more accurate."[47] This demonstrates that many of the themes pertinent in working-class lesbian communities prior to the 1970s continued for lesbians who belonged to particular intersections or who were involved in particular groups and spaces.

Towards the end of the 1970s in Winnipeg, Strega recalls the homophobia she experienced while in psychiatric care:

> I had a psychiatric admission shortly after I graduated with my bachelor's degree. And, I mean, this is a weird thing, but, you know, I happened to know that the psychiatrist's daughter, my psychiatrist, that his daughter was a lesbian and when I said something about that, when he was interviewing me, he actually jumped across the desk and started to strangle me. They had to call orderlies to pull him off, you know, so I mean, I certainly had, I mean, certainly it was, a dangerous time, to be identified.[48]

Strega's memory also indicates that she was not alone in her experience:

> When I was [in] that psychiatric admission, there was another lesbian there and her psychiatrist said to her that he wasn't discharging her until she wasn't a lesbian anymore. And in fact, I also had to do this to get discharged. There was a guy on the ward who also really wanted to be discharged. And so we decided that we would pretend to date and this made everybody on the ward so happy and we were both discharged. So it was [laughing] yeah I mean. Man, I mean you tell these stories these days and people just do not believe that that maybe actually happened. And that is the '70s you know, that is 1978.

While only one lesbian's experience, Strega's anecdotes are significant as their occurrence in the 1970s suggests that particular elements of gay culture and patterns of homophobic state violence

[47]Ibid.
[48]Ibid.

continued after decriminalization in 1969. While Strega's experience of psychiatric violence occurred in Winnipeg, there are similar stories from elsewhere in Canada.

Published in 1985, *Still Sane,* by Persimmons Blackbridge and Sheila Gilhooly is an art exhibit presented in book form that captures Gilhooly's experiences of being institutionalized for being a lesbian in early 1970s Ottawa. Gilhooly's first hospitalization was initiated by her counsellor after she admitted to being gay, and she spent the next three years in various psychiatric institutions where she was subject to a range of abuses including forced sedation, shock therapy, and sexual and physical assault.[49] The book includes stories and commentaries from several lesbians who had similar experiences of homophobic (and sexist) treatment within psychiatry, also noting that homosexuality was not removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) until 1973.[50] While most stories in the book are from the 1970s, one story was about a lesbian, Suni, who received a day pass from a psychiatric facility in Vancouver to see the *Still Sane* exhibit when it opened in 1984. Her story, which took place in the 1980s, also details mistreatment including the non-consensual administering of drugs and homophobic treatment of her and her partner.[51]

However, when asked about police violence, the interviewees I spoke to had little to say about their own experiences. Sims said that the police "knew where all the bars were and would be cruising around," but said she never experienced "any kind of negative [interaction], the kind of homophobia or other ill-treatment that [she] knew existed at the time."[52] She followed this by saying:

> I really do feel blessed. You know, I know that's not everybody's story. And so, I acknowledge that my story, I've had actually maybe good luck not to have had that

[49]Persimmon Blackbridge and Sheila Gilhooly, *Still Sane* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1985).
[50]Ibid.
[51]Ibid.
[52]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.

> experience. But I definitely acknowledge that that's not everybody's experience of course.[53]

Arbour also said that she felt "lucky" to not have experienced violence by the police because she knew that other people had experienced "horrendous things."[54] She said she did experience homophobia, but it was from laypeople in the streets. She gave the following example:

> I was walking down the street in Vancouver [...] and I was with a friend, we weren't lovers, but I really loved her and we were holding hands and that's when this man was walking with his wife and his two kids and, he kind of put them behind him like, 'don't look, don't look.' And then he spit on the street [...] you know, it hurts your heart a little bit, but it doesn't hurt you, you know?[55]

These women's "luck" could be the result of being from a younger generation than the lesbians who came of age in the 1950s and early 1960s. The anecdotes of violence that I provided post-1970 were largely from other cities in Canada, so it could be that homophobic police violence was not as extensive in Vancouver. Sims did say that she "just [did not] remember it (police violence) being as prominent in Vancouver."[56] However, she also shared:

> it's hard because the women who ended up in prisons, right? If you look at the numbers probably high Indigenous numbers, high sex work and I've no doubt that when they were arrested, they were probably subjected to some police violence. And then the nature of how they have to live probably subjected them to violence.[57]

Here, Sims is suggesting that police violence, and violence more broadly, was likely still occurring, but for queer people who sit at different and more marginalized intersections. A comparable comment was made by Jane:

> I was never in a club that was raided. I think if I had hung out at the Vanport a lot, that might have been more of an issue. Because you're already in a place where… what would I say? The police are much more involved with all the people down there. There's more violence, there's more poverty, there's more drugs, you know, all of those issues. I

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[53]Ibid.
[54]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[55]Ibid.
[56]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 3, 2021, Victoria.
[57]Ibid.

> mean, certainly, we smoked dope et cetera, but there was not the same degree of interest.[58]

Moira Ryan remarked that she never had negative experiences with the police but that she had "a friend that was in a residential school that I ran into in the Vanport who was on the streets and I think she did have some interaction with [the police]."[59] Sand mentioned that there were often interracial lesbian couples in the Vanport as "white working-class women were often in relationships with Indigenous women" though I did not encounter this information elsewhere.[60] As a majority of the interviewees were white, and all six women experienced some degree of upward mobility, if there were different experiences occurring at different intersections that could easily have been missed in this research.

Based on anecdotes from elsewhere in Canada, the knowledge that there were many queer spaces that are not remembered as such, and controlling for the particular demographics of the interviewees, I argue police harassment and other forms of state violence were likely ongoing in Vancouver. There were likely lesbians in certain communities or spaces who continued to experience such violence, and therefore it is important to recognize that various forms of state violence were an ongoing part of lesbian history in Canada after 1969.[61]

Working-Class Lesbian Culture:

[58]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[59]Moira Ryan, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 29th, 2021, Victoria.
[60]Personal email correspondence with Cy-Thea Sand, February 22, 2022.
[61]The types of violence I refer to here are police and medical violence. There is work detailing state violence from a different perspective that focuses on government surveillance and the expulsion of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people from the military and government. Such scholars argue that criminalization of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people did not cease with decriminalization in 1969 but took on new and different forms. See Gary Kinsman, "'Character Weaknesses' and 'Fruit Machines': Towards an Analysis of the Anti-Homosexual Security Campaign in the Canadian Civil Service," *Labour* 35, no. 35 (1995): 133–161; and Patricia Gentile and Gary Kinsman, *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010).

When reflecting on the different social circles she occupied in Vancouver, Arbour mentioned that she related better with the women she worked with at *Kinesis* than the women she played with on the women's hockey team, because the women at *Kinesis* were feminists.[62] Though Arbour assumed most of the women on her hockey team were gay, "I never saw them anywhere else. I never saw them at a dance. I never saw them at a meeting or a group or a march."[63] All the women interviewed identified as lesbians and feminists. Many of them perceived that this made them different from the women in the bars with whom they shared class backgrounds. In fact, the interviewees I spoke with had some difficulty with elements of the lesbian bar scene even beyond the violence mentioned above. The Vanport continued to attract lesbians in butch/fem relationships. This was an aspect of working-class lesbian culture that most of my interviewees took issue with to varying degrees. The women I interviewed had varying opinions on lesbian cultural norms as they pertained to class. Some of the working-class lesbians interviewed held beliefs that were more consistent with their middle-class counterparts.

In their work on Buffalo in the decades prior to 1970, Davis and Kennedy found that butch/fem relationships were central to social organizing in the working-class lesbian communities they studied. There were many characteristics associated with being butch or fem including particular behaviours, mannerisms, and aesthetics which encompassed "all the little details of presenting one's self - manner of walking, sitting, holding a drink, tone of voice."[64] Davis and Kennedy argue that while the aesthetics of butch and fem followed fashion trends in broader heterosexual society, they took on increasingly lesbian-specific elements as the community grew over the decades, especially as older lesbians could model or explicitly

[62]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[63]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 5, 2022, Victoria.
[64]Davis and Kennedy, *Boots of Leather,* 167.

influence younger lesbians.[65] Broadly speaking, butches were aesthetically masculine and would wear one or a combination of the following: tuxedo shirts and button-downs; sports jackets, shorts and chinos; or blue jeans and t-shirts.[66] Butches also frequently wore their hair short or slicked back, and many bound their chests to look flat.[67] According to Davis and Kennedy, the stylistic differences between fem lesbians and heterosexual women were more subtle.[68] Fems generally had a "more overtly sexy look," including nylon stockings, sheer, and tight-fitting clothing, makeup, and feminine hairstyles.[69] However subtle the differences, they were certainly felt by the research participants, who reported that fems were "glamourous" with one even noting that she was "intimidated by the sophisticated and sultry appearance of the fems."[70]

In addition to the various norms of behaviour and fashion, Davis and Kennedy found that the crux of butch and fem identity was particular sexual roles. And while "in most instances [...] image and sexuality were congruent, in the sense that the more masculine appearing woman was also the more aggressive sexually," this was not always the case.[71] In cases where sex role and image were incongruent, what ultimately determined if someone was butch or fem was how they engaged in sexual behaviour.[72]

In Canada, Chenier and Chamberland had similar findings. In Chenier's work on Toronto, butch/fem relationship models were observed, with Chenier noting that to be butch required behavioural components such as "toughness" and sexual initiation, as well as stylistic components, ranging from "short hair[...] a shirt and slacks to a suit, a tie and bound breasts."[73]

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[65]Davis and Kennedy, *Boots of Leather,* 158; 193; 165.
[66]Ibid., 159.
[67]Ibid., 160-161.
[68]Ibid., 162.
[69]Ibid., 162-163.
[70]Ibid., 158; 162.
[71]Ibid., 192.
[72]Ibid., 192.
[73]Chenier, "Tough Ladies and Troublemakers," 94-95.

Chenier argues that fems overlapped in fashion with their heterosexual counterparts, but their willingness to pursue their sexual interests in the bars was an "enormous risk" and was behaviourally transgressing gender norms.[74] In Montreal, Chamberland said that to be butch in this context required masculine dress (suits and rings) and manner (low-pitched voices) and many opted to be referred to with masculine nouns and pronouns.[75] Chamberland argues that fems were flashy, wearing make-up and revealing dresses, and in this way "expressed sexuality in too flagrant a way for them to be taken for pure young girls or respectable wives."[76]

In Vancouver, the aforementioned Vanport bar was a hub of the lesbian community and culture, including a legacy of butch/fem relationship models. Esther Shannon, who was a lesbian who grew up low-income, remembers visiting the Vanport in around 1976:

> The Vanport was a lesbian bar - half of it was lesbian and the other half was a biker bar- and it was out of the era when lesbians were still very devoted to butch/fem roles - extremely devoted to butch/fem roles… So we went there and I was instantly engaged, I was instantly fascinated although nobody I saw resembled anything that I was thinking of or knew about.[77]

She elaborated on the butch and fem aesthetics she saw and reflected on how they connected to class:

> Quite seriously, the butches were heavy-duty butches in the black leather jackets and the fems were heavy-duty fems with the bee-hive hair and like, it couldn't have been a more different environment for somebody whose identity at the time was kinda like more of a hippie person. Later I understood that not only were they from a different era, they were working and lower-class women but I had already started to assimilate in a certain way into a middle-class lifestyle cause really that's what the hippie movement was about and I had no class-consciousness at that time.[78]

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[74]Ibid., 100.
[75]Line Chamberland, "Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal 1955-1975," *Journal of Homosexuality* 25, no.3 (November 1993): 241.
[76]Ibid., 241.
[77]Esther Shannon, interviewed by Erin Flegg for the Lesbian Generations of Vancouver Project, August 9, 2013, Vancouver, Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony. The exact year she made this visit to the Vanport is unclear, but she realized she was a lesbian through having an affair and falling in love with a woman and they visited the Vanport together and she placed this relationship and coming out in 1976.
[78]Ibid.

The element of class that Shannon touches on will be a recurring theme in this section. However, I am not examining middle-class women's opinions on butch/fem; I am interested in working-class lesbians' opinions on butch/fem. This is slightly more complex than the dichotomy that Millward characterizes as "closeted middle-class professionals" differentiating themselves from "working-class bar dykes."[79] Nevertheless, the women I interviewed were, for the most part, not aligned with the cultural legacy of butch/fem.

Many interviewees seemed to struggle with the politics and history of butch/fem, often presenting contradictory ideas in the same quote. For example, in the following quote by Sims, where she comments on her lesbian predecessors, she grapples with whether or not butch/fem replicates heterosexuality:

> I've got my sort of my view that is for pre-seventies like the sixties were very much of a liberal era and for those who expressed their sexuality before that did so in a very… I think adopted for survival or for the mirror that there were no examples other than a heteronormative model of relationship. And so it was very much butch/fem, right? And that's okay. I mean people who wanna express their sexuality through that kind of a relation, it's okay. It doesn't necessarily mean that you've adopted the heteronormative ways of relating either, right? It's just… this is what you're used to, and this is what you're comfortable with, or this is how you wanna express your sexuality.[80]

Sims' quote aptly demonstrates one of many tensions in conversations around butch and fem roles. While the culture of butch/fem and the related political disagreements are better documented in the US, Millward argues that "the extent of Canadian butch-fem culture is hard[er] to gauge."[81] However, she did find that some Canadian lesbians "perceived both influences and differences" between the broadly known American butch/fem culture and their own experiences.[82] I found similar patterns amongst my research participants, observing that age

[79]Millward, *Making a Scene,* 22.
[80]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.
[81]Millward, *Making a Scene,* 39.
[82]Ibid., 39.

(generation), class, and political affiliations were all significant determinants in how lesbians thought about or related to butch/fem roles. The same forces have subsequently shaped how the history of butch/fem has been written.

Trying to discern some patterns in post-1969 Vancouver, which echoed patterns and trends elsewhere, proved to be a more difficult task than I anticipated. As noted above with reference to the quote from Sims, interviewees often posited contradictory points about butch/fem and also contradicted one another, even though they were talking about the same time period. While Shannon's recollection of the Vanport conjures a picture of very rigid butch/fem roles, when asked about whether she identified with butch/fem, Diana Smith, responded "no, I was just lesbian. Lesbian. Yeah. I didn't identify, the *butch/fem was a little before my time*."[83] Interestingly, Smith arrived in Vancouver in 1968, and spent the next few years living in and around Vancouver and Vancouver Island, while Shannon recollects seeing butch and fem lesbians in the second half of the 1970s though she notes that they were "from a different era." This suggests that there were enclaves of lesbians that did not overlap or interact. It also points to how age and generation factored into identifications with butch/fem. At a cursory glance, this may seem to contradict my argument that butch/fem continued after the 1960s; however, many of the butch and fem lesbians who occupied the working-class bars of the 1940s-1960s would have still been alive after 1969, as is evidenced by several of the primary sources cited above. Lack of interest/connection with those women by their younger lesbian contemporaries or subsequent researchers may have led to the erasure their ongoing presence.

Lesbian feminists and anti-ageism activists Cynthia Rich and Barbara Macdonald, write about the failure of the younger lesbians, feminists, and researchers to consider age and the lived

[83]Diana Smith, interviewed by Morgan Watson, January 19, 2022, Victoria. Emphasis mine.

reality of aging women in their communities. Rich argued that the feminist movements suffered from "silence on the subject of the status of older women. As if our old women were indeed too depressing for us, or an embarrassment to us, or beyond the reach of our feminist analysis."[84] Macdonald offers specific insight into how ageism touches the process of history formation:

> We take in the fact that you come to us for 'oral histories,' for your own agendas, to learn your feminist or lesbian or working-class or ethnic histories, with not the slightest interest in our present struggles as old women.[85]

Macdonald's argument, in addition to criticizing a lack of interest in the everyday lives of older women, points to an issue in the writing of scholarship. History often centres on what people were experiencing when they were younger adults, an oversight that this thesis is also perpetuating. What are the implications of considering historical actors "from a different era" or "before [one's] time" when they are still alive? While a full-fledged account of the intersection of ageism and sexism and its impact on history is beyond the scope of this thesis, my preliminary examination suggest that ageism is a factor in why working-class bar lesbian bar culture has been disappeared in scholarship, and even memory, post 1969.

There also were lesbians who came of age in the 1970s for whom butch and fem roles or culture continued to hold meaning. In contrast to Smith, Arbour immediately identified herself as a butch lesbian.[86] She also reflected on her confusion about people's rejection of those labels, saying:

> so my experience with that issue is more about confusion or wondering why my friends, who are in couples don't call themselves, but it's like, why not? 'Oh, I just never like the, I don't like labels.' It's like, yeah, but you're butch, you know, we wouldn't say that to

[84]Cynthia Rich, "Aging, Ageism and Feminist Avoidance," in *Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism,* eds. Cynthia Rich and Barbara MacDonald (San Francisco: Spinsters Inc., 1983), 53.
[85]Barbara Macdonald. "Outside the Sisterhood: Ageism in Women's Studies," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 1/2 (1997): 49.
[86]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 5, 2022, Victoria.

> them because they don't, you know, because they don't wanna go there, but I never got it.[87]

In contrast, not taking up the label "butch" could be an important personal and political decision. As an example, Fox recalled that it was a problem for her that "lesbians might assume that I wanted to be more butch than I did."[88] She explained further:

> And in fact, we were quite not interested in doing that and that has remained the case for my whole life. And, you know, periodically I have had well-meaning friends who are flirtatious and who identify as fem think that perhaps they could bring me out as a butch but it's not what it's not, it's not who I am (...) Yeah. I identify as woman. I love women.[89]

Fox's decision not to use the moniker "butch" was a choice she maintained throughout her life. This is different than the experience of Sims, who in the present is "very comfortable with the terminology of butch or boi," but who did not take up this identity until later in life for political and strategic reasons.[90] Her reasons for not taking up this identity earlier were twofold. As she was just "growing into [her] professional career and also into being a spokesperson for the LGBTQ movement," she did not want to contribute to people's stereotypes about gay people.[91] She remembers: "I didn't wanna contribute to stereotypes. For a part of my working community life, you know, I would dress in dresses and different ways to just say 'if you want a pigeonhole us as looking this way, then I'm gonna look that way'."[92] This was compounded by the fact that Sims is Asian. She recalls people responding with shock at the very existence of gay Asian people.[93] During these decades, Sims was representing multiple communities, and considered the weight of her public image. However, she now reflects:

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[87]Ibid.
[88]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[89]Ibid.
[90]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.
[91]Ibid.
[92]Ibid.
[93]Ibid.

> now that I'm kind of like retired pretty much, also we are in a different, you know, this is 2022, right? So, you know through time, I think just in terms of people being more comfortable with presentation, like shorts and a t-shirt is pretty well my standard outfit. And then if I'm going out with my partner, we're usually, we're a butch/fem couple, and we're happy with that. And so, you know, that's how we present and that's okay.[94]

While Sims' reasons for not being in a butch/fem role during this time are specific, preliminary research done on the butch/fem roles after the 1960s in the United States show that she was not alone. Sara Crawley analyses trends in women-seeking-women personals ads in *The Village Voice* in New York in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. She notes a steep increase of the use of butch and fem in the 1990s, and suggests that stigma due to anti-butch/fem feminist ideology may have been why numbers were lower in prior decades.[95]

In one way, Sims' thoughts on butch/fem relationships differed from the other women I interviewed, as she did not see it as intrinsically working class:

> if you look at, you know, upper class, even in those days they wouldn't have called them, but, you know, like Vita Sackville West you know, if you look at some of the pictures of some of those, the lesbians that were in the twenties, thirties, forties, not all of them were working class. I think it was just sort of how one expressed their sexuality in a way that kind of gave a clue to other people that, oh, by the way, you're, you know, you're different.[96]

Both the fact that she strategically chose not to appear butch and the fact that she does not see butch/fem as a classed relationship model indicate particular parameters Sims has for what constitutes butch/fem. Her account of butch/fem is heavily related to the aesthetics of masculinity and femininity. Other interviewees discussed additional criteria that were a part of what it meant to be butch/fem, which included aesthetics, but also the work that a person did, and their interpersonal dynamics.

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[94]Ibid
[95]Sara L. Crawley, "Are Butch and Fem Working-Class and Antifeminist?" *Gender & Society* 15, no. 2 (2001): 188.
[96]Ibid

Arbour shared an anecdote that demonstrates that while aesthetics may have mattered, it was also about the specific relationship between two lesbians and norms within lesbian community. Although she identified as butch, she described moving into a more fem role while in a relationship with a woman who was "more butch" than her:

> she was more butch than I was. So, we had this affair and I started feeling like, I didn't do anything. Yeah, I didn't change my clothes, I didn't get new wardrobe, I didn't carry a purse. But in relation it was, it was an amazing experience. And I wouldn't and I wouldn't say it was sex either. It was just sort of in the world, she felt more butch than I did. So, like I giggled more. I remember doing that. It's like really weird. It was really weird, but interesting. Very interesting. Because it's a dynamic, right? Yes and no, I guess it's a dynamic in the world, even if you're individual, but in couples, it's a dynamic.[97]

This demonstrates that part of the criteria delineating who was butch and who was fem was the interpersonal particularities found between two women in a relationship- the patterns and roles that played out in the couple's interactions ("in couples, it's a dynamic"). But also, how those interpersonal particularities are understood through frameworks within lesbian community (it's a dynamic in the world").

Though Jane argued that butch/fem, for her, was ultimately working class, her analysis of the relationship between class and butch/fem is nuanced or even contradictory. For example, Jane raises an important tension about whether a person's class is intelligible:

> I certainly knew women who were butch, but they weren't feminist. They, there were sort of an expanded kind of lesbian community had a number of women who would've called themselves butch and many of them *working at working-class jobs, not necessarily from working-class backgrounds* and they had a lot of cache socially, which was interesting because there was also, you know, we weren't supposed to be in roles.[98]

It is interesting that Jane specifically indicates that many women who were butch "weren't feminist," as it echoes Arbour's earlier point that those who identified with feminism fell heavily along class lines. However, Jane also suggests that there were butches who appeared

[97]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 5, 2022, Victoria.
[98]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria. Emphasis mine.

to be working class but were actually from middle-class backgrounds. This could be linked to the politic of downward mobility (to be explored in Chapter Three), and also to a trend observed by Ross in *The House that Jill Built* in which many lesbian-feminist couples had dyadic relationships that were reminiscent of butch/fem aesthetically and interpersonally but went unnamed.[99]

Jane remembers knowing "a couple of women" who were "really strong lesbian feminists" who were "very much in the butch category" as they "were real caretakers, they could fix the car, and do all those things."[100] Similar to Arbour, Jane's concept of butch/fem seems to include criteria beyond aesthetics, such as the work and tasks they did and the dynamic they had with their partners. She presents ideas about butches and their relationship to class and feminism which are somewhat contradictory, likely speaking to the complexity and expansion of the categories in these decades. However, the rhetoric around butchness could have classed connotations regardless of the actual class backgrounds of the butch individuals in question. For example, Jane noted that the butches who were "strong lesbian feminists" were also "not intellectual" which has classed implications.[101]

When asked if she identified with butch or fem, Sand said she "wasn't into that" and that she would, in fact, "give lectures on it" to the lesbian clientele of the Vanport.[102] She recalls that there was "a lot of butch/fem going on, and [...] the roles were very clear," and she remembers "sitting there talking to them about 'oh no, we can't have butch/fem roles because it's imitating hetero-sex.'"[103] Sand's recollection of this interaction was light-hearted, or even comical, noting

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[99]Becki Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 132; 89-90.
[100]Ibid.
[101]Ibid.
[102]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2022, Victoria.
[103]Ibid.

that "they weren't offended at all" and instead would "just smile and pass [Sand] another beer."[104] Regardless of whether the recipients of Sand's lectures felt offended or insulted, her interpretation of the Vanport clientele shows a similar linking of feminism with intellectualism, which she did not associate with lesbians in butch/fem relationships. This is demonstrated by the following quote:

> I was just… because the feminist theory and that the whole power of the social movement was just there. And so, for example, I would leave sometimes, I would say there's a play on, I really wanna see. And the three of them would look and say, no thanks. So, I would go off to the play and then I would come back and drink with them.[105]

In her interview with Milward, Sand made a similar point in a more direct manner saying that, "the working-class part of me felt at home in the Vanport; the queer side did too, but I had to go elsewhere for the intellectual stuff."[106] Though the trend appears a couple times in my interviews, in the Canadian literature that discusses the rifts between feminism and butch/fem culture, I have not encountered much overt discussion about working-class butches and fems being cast as unintellectual.

Anecdotes that explicitly support such trends can be difficult to find, so I widened my search to include lesbian writing from the United States. The most explicit example I encountered was in the writing of New York lesbian Lyndall MacCowan, who received push back for identifying as fem "because [she] was 'too tall/too intellectual/too small breasted/too rarely seen in skirts'."[107] MacCowan remembers that early lesbian books taught her that "butch-fem 'roles' were inhibiting to personal growth[...] a product of false socialization, proof of

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[104]Ibid.
[105]Ibid
[106]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed in Milward, *Making a Scene*, 44.
[107]Lyndall MacCowan, "Re-collecting History, Renaming Lives: Femme Stigma and the Feminist Seventies and the Eighties," in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader,* ed. Joan Nestle (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992), 315.

identity confusion, sexually limiting, artificial and most likely to be found among 'lower-class' lesbians in bars."[108] Outside of her reading, MacCowan did not hear people discuss butch/fem in the 1970s, though she noted "butch-looking women were simply called 'apolitical,' and any woman who looked feminine was treated as straight."[109]

Ideas about butches and fems being less intellectual seems to be an undercurrent to the criticisms that middle-class and radical feminists levied at butches and fems, but instead of being explicitly stated, it is imbedded in the conflation of intellectual with feminist with proper with political, all things that butch/fem lesbians were charged with not accomplishing. I am not alone in sensing this classed undertone. While introducing her book, *The Persistent Desire,* one of the most comprehensive works detailing first-hand, working-class, butch/fem lives, Joan Nestle argues that:

> The issue of class and its unanswered challenges run through many of the pieces presented here - but I am not satisfied. The connections between class and the swirl of debate around butch-femme women needs to be explored further.[110]

Ester Newton, an American lesbian from an upper middle-class background, struggled to find her butch identity in a context of homophobia and feminist rhetoric that was critical of butch/fem roles.[111] When she later reflected on that period in feminist history, she wrote:

> The 'role playing' of the working [...] class was anathema to the new feminism. Working-class women, black, brown and white, gay and straight, had 'low consciousness' unless they 'cleaned up their act,' i.e. became more middle-class. Unfortunately, these were largely old class putdowns clothed in new political sanctity.[112]

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[108]Ibid., 11. The book MacCowan refers to is Sidney Abbott and Barbara J Love, *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972).
[109]MacCowan, "Re-collecting History, Renaming Lives," 11.
[110]Joan Nestle, Introduction to *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader,* ed. Joan Nestle (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992). It is important to note that Nestle herself is a working-class fem lesbian.
[111]Details of her gradual acceptance of herself as a butch lesbian are detailed in her autobiography: Esther Newton, *My Butch Career: A Memoir* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).
[112]Esther Newton and Shirley Walton, "The Misunderstanding: Toward a More Precise Sexual Vocabulary," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality,* ed. Carol Vance (London: Pandora Press 1992), 248-249.

In the Canadian context, Chenier makes a similar argument by tracing the assimilationist politics of a prominent lesbian activist group, Daughters of Bilitis, in Toronto prior to the emergence of feminism. According to Chenier, this group worked to demonstrate that lesbians could be respectable and to do so, they distanced themselves from bar lesbians and critiqued butch/fem culture.[113] Their issues with butch/fem are parallel to the criticisms feminists would make a decade later, defying the notion that critiques of butch/fem were purely the result of feminist ideology.

Nestle shares similar reflections as Newton about the question of "consciousness" as she spent much of the 1970s and 1980s trying to resist what she saw as misunderstandings of butches and fems in feminist spaces:

> even raising the issue, even entertaining the possibility that we were not complete victims but *had some sense of what we were doing*, was enough to encourage a call for silence by feminists who feared our voices.[114]

It is difficult to demonstrate how butches and fems were considered unintellectual from a few short quotes because the accusation is indirect. However, ideas that they were apolitical, had low political/feminist consciousness, or could not comprehend what they were engaging in are examples of how this dynamic surfaced.

As feminists increasingly critiqued the politics, lifestyle, and relationships of butch and fem lesbians, it is not surprising that the stigma was keenly felt by members of that community. Sims reflected on the ways butch and fem lesbians were socially excluded and dismissed in Vancouver:

> I had a lot of, I did have a lot of, butch/fem friends. And as I said, unfortunately, because they were true to who they were as butches and fems, they were actually ostracized and doubted, you know, in terms of their sexuality. Like there's a lot of fems who felt that they were, you know, weren't considered as a lesbian because they were too femmy right.

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[113]Chenier, "Tough Ladies and Troublemakers," 189-192.
[114]Joan Nestle, "The Fem Question" in *Pleasure and Danger,* 239. Emphasis mine.

> And then the butch lesbians were considered as you know buying into the male masculine ideal.[115]

While Sims' account of the social and political rejection of butch/fem lesbians is reflected in the American literature on the same time period, not everyone experienced this. Arbour, for example, said she did not "recall feeling any judgement at all" and that she "didn't feel that [she] had to prove anything or defend the way that [she] was" even though she identified as a butch lesbian. Though, she did qualify this statement by saying she was "not hard butch" but "soft."[116]

Although the definitions and experiences of butch and fem lesbians after the 1960s may have grown more nebulous and less rigid, these interviews suggest that the categories did continue to take on functions and meanings in the lesbian communities. This appears to be particularly true for those who were working class or low income, even if the interviews simultaneously suggest that the class backgrounds of butch and fem lesbians may have been less exclusively working class than in previous decades. The politics of feminism at the time, in its staunch rejection of gender roles, clashed with a core tenent of working-class lesbian community and culture. This may have been difficult for lesbians who were both working-class and invested in feminism, such as Fox, who did feel politically and personally aligned with resisting any kind of gendered roles, but who also was raised with class politics. She said that "because of the class consciousness, I had empathy for [butches and fems] and because I knew how hard it was to come out, I wasn't prepared to trash the butch/fem culture of the working-class bars."[117]

Shannon's recollection of strict butch/fem roles at the Vanport indicates that this culture survived into the 1970s. However, only Arbour identified with that label during that decade and noted that she was a "soft butch." The lesbians interviewed for this project give varying accounts

[115]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.
[116]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 5, 2022, Victoria.
[117]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.

of the butch/fem model in terms of its prevalence after the 1960s, the definitions of butch and fem, and the extent to which it was a classed phenomenon. However, the majority indicated the ongoing existence of butch/fem and its classed dimensions, even if they were not identical to patterns of the 1960s and earlier. This raises questions as to why five of the six women interviewed, though all from working-class or low-income backgrounds, did not identify with this relationship model and its categorizations. In the case of Sims, the external pressures of being a community spokesperson was cited as part of the reason.

A recurring thread in several of the interviews is the way that feminist politics, class, and lesbian culture seem to be interacting during this time period. This complex interaction can be seen in the feminist categorization of butch and fem lesbians as less political and less intellectual, and the difficulty interviewees seemed to have in teasing out the relationship between class and specifically butchness. Millward argued that beginning in the 1970s:

> a new embodiment of classed difference emerged in the form of a young university or college student. She was not necessarily as closeted as her professional foremothers, she might be the first generation of her family to attain postsecondary education, she was displaced from working-class culture, and she did go drinking and dancing in bars. Thus different classes of lesbians rubbed shoulders with different outcomes depending on where in the country they were[118]

This broad shift is useful in contextualizing the lesbians I interviewed in terms of their education, as well as their political and cultural affiliations. In doing so, it complicates how these women are situated in terms of class, not only in relation to their middle-class lesbian counterparts, but also in relation to other lesbians from working-class backgrounds. The interviewees quoted in this section tie neatly with Millward's assertion that many young lesbians in this time period were "displaced from working-class culture." Additionally, Millward's formulation of the relationship between education and class distinctly aligns with the memories and analyses of the

[118]Millward, *Making a Scene*, 22.

women I interviewed. The above quotes have already shown that the working-class butch and fem clientele of the Vanport were deemed less intellectual/political, and butches regardless of class background were seen as non-intellectual. Jane, for example, whose earlier quotes in this section clearly show a struggle to make sense of class in relation to butch/fem, concluded that while class was a significant factor in shaping butch and fem experiences, that education, regardless of class background, was also significant:

> it seemed to me that the dividing line was education too, class background, but also education. So, you could drive a truck for a while, but if you actually had a degree, or two, you would eventually gravitate toward, whatever that professional area was and get away with having short hair and wearing pants to work.[119]

I do not want to fall into the easy analysis of conflating education, politics, and class, because that erases working-class participation in both formal education and politics, and risks framing people who were or remained working class as apolitical, or even problematic/ignorant. At the same time, there are clearly connections that have to be drawn between education, both in a formal, institutional sense and in the political sense, and people's relationship to their class backgrounds. The specific formal and political education attained by the interviewees will be examined more closely in the next chapter.

Millward uses the language of "classed difference" to describe the emergence of a new generation of lesbians that had more options and mobility than their predecessors. While there is ample evidence that this "classed difference" applies to the women I interviewed, their working-class backgrounds defy the neatness of Millward's assertion. The nexus of education, political knowledge, feminism, lesbianism, and class that shaped these women's lives was complex, and resulted in them existing in a liminal zone of conflicting class cultures and values. As will be demonstrated later in this thesis, the accounts of these women clearly indicate that they felt the

[119]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.

weight of being working class acutely, especially in spaces with middle-class lesbian and feminist communities, but their estrangement from the spaces and cultures of the working class is also significant and worthy of analysis. The particular feminist spaces these women occupied and the political beliefs they held are one arena where this tension can be witnessed and explored. When asked if being working class shaped her experience of her lesbianism, Arbour responded:

> I think there's [...] a connection between class and feminism much more than there's between class and lesbian, you know, because my thinking about it is that is that feminism is, you know, it's an ideology. Sexuality isn't. Sexuality is who you are from my perspective [...] Anyways, I've always connected the class more with feminism than with lesbianism.[120]

Conclusion:

This chapter provides a broad and brief overview of significant trends in working-class lesbian history in Vancouver as they relate to broader patterns in Canada and the United States. To do so, I examined space (geographical space as well as establishments), homophobia and state violence, and working-class lesbian culture (the butch/fem relationship model). These themes are prevalent in scholarship written about working-class lesbian communities in the 1950s and 1960s; however, tracing them into the following decade proved to be a more difficult task. While the available literature suggests a sharp decline in lesbian working-class bar culture and the social and political patterns thereof, there is primary source material that at least partially defies this conclusion. Examples of ongoing state and homophobic violence, and evidence of working-class bars and butch/fem codes persist well into the 1970s.

The new lesbian spaces and organizing that emerged in the 1970s are the primary focus of literature written about lesbian community after 1969. Instead of understanding this as proof

[120]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 5, 2022, Victoria.

of a disappearing world, it may instead reflect the greater interest and easier access that scholars have to the stories of younger or more middle-class lesbians.

The women I interviewed do not neatly fit into either category. They shared overlapping class backgrounds and sexual identities with the lesbians who created and maintained working-class lesbian bar culture; however, they were perhaps, as Millward has argued, "displaced from working-class culture." Many of these women studied at colleges and universities and were heavily involved in feminist politics and organizing, which they noted as a difference between themselves and other working-class lesbians, particularly those who spent their time in more working-class spaces such as the Vanport. Therefore, the next chapters are devoted to tracing interviewees' experiences in the communities that they were in and did relate to.

Chapter Two
"Smashing all the Nukes, Including the Nuclear Family": Tracing Political and Educational Pathways

The dilemmas, anxieties, and confusions of educated working-class women have seldom been addressed, and I, for one, live and breathe them every day.

\- *Cy-Thea Sand*[1]

Introduction:

Chapter One demonstrated several ways in which the interviewees were removed from working-class lesbian culture. Interviewees posited that a reason for this difference was involvement in feminism, which was articulated as connected to their lesbian identities. This chapter, therefore, traces these women's experiences with the women's movement, broadly situating it within the history of the New Left in Canada. This provides an understanding of how these women related to their lesbianism, as Chapter One's discussion of butch/fem bar culture does not provide this insight.

This chapter supports the conclusion that feminism is part of the rift between the interviewees and traditional working-class lesbian culture. However, it also pushes further to include an analysis of upward mobility. Moreover, this chapter provides preliminary evidence that in addition to formal education, engagement with politics helps precipitate the eventual upward mobility of these women, in addition to their formal education. If their upward mobility is, as I will argue, related to their political engagement and post-secondary education, then the roots of their upward mobility would have begun quite early in their lives and could account for the unique classed experiences of this cohort of working-class lesbian. However, I also caution that, despite their mobility, it is too simple to count them amongst the middle-class lesbian feminists as has largely been the treatment in prior scholarship. The interviewees departure from

[1]Cy-Thea Sand, "Getting Clearer on Class Issues," November 1, 1985, in *Kinesis* (Vancouver: Vancouver Status of Women), 27.

elements of working-class lesbian culture, while certainly true, does not negate the fact that they were working-class.

Finding Feminism Through the New Left:

The impact of the New Left on political movements in Canada was profound and its reverberations are clearly traceable in the several decades of activist work that followed.[2] In Vancouver specifically, the impact of American draft dodgers, the hippie movement, and the labour politics of the 1960s had significant cultural effects. Historian Eryk Martin aptly demonstrates in his work on anarchism in Vancouver in the 1970s that various leftist and counterculture movements were rooted in the earlier politics of the New Left.[3] Martin argues that "the New Left, student, anti-war, and women's liberation movements" formed a complex matrix that "expanded rapidly" during the 1970s.[4] Therefore, hippie culture, labour politics, and early iterations of the women's movement were all part of the broad set of politics that is monolithically referred to as the New Left. For many women, activism in the New Left served as a catalyst to the more specific forms of organizing that would later develop, such as lesbian-feminism. For several of the interviewees, their introduction to politics did not begin with feminism, but with other political movements or communities, such as the hippie and labour movements. Jane and Fox were both involved in the hippie community prior to embracing lesbian-feminism.

Many hippies and other leftists in the United States, being anti-war, opposed the draft and fled to Canada, bringing their political perspectives and education with them. American draft

[2]The New Left emerged in the sixties "as a series of broad transformations in the development, organization, and meaning of left-wing activity." See Eryk Martin, "The Blurred Boundaries of Anarchism and Punk in Vancouver, 1970-1983," *Labour*, no. 75 (2015): 13.
[3]Ibid., 12.
[4]Ibid., 17.

dodgers had a significant impact on leftist movements in Canada.[5] Hippie culture was one piece in the mosaic of the New Left affected by the flow of ideologies over the 49th parallel, and the exodus of American intellectuals and activists. Consistent with scholarship on the era, Jane noted that she encountered "transplanted Americans who had gone through the late sixties protesting against the Vietnam War" and who had been involved in the labour movement.[6]

Fox lived in both Toronto and Vancouver over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, and took part in the hippie movement in the early 1970s in Toronto. She recalls that "hippies were being a little more gender-neutral, even amongst heterosexuals."[7] Later, reminiscing on both the broader impact of the hippie movement as well as her working-class background, Fox shared:

> being working class, you don't come from a repressed background and you, you know, have already been kind of exposed to the hippie free love and possibly some drugs [...] and of course at the time we were, you know, trying to smash all the nukes included the nuclear family.[8]

Fox spent her hippie days in Toronto, but her observations are relevant to Vancouver, where she moved at the close of the decade. Historian Henry John notes that "Vancouver was the third most popular destination in Canada for American exiles after Toronto and Montreal."[9] Fox's observations, therefore, mirror trends that were occurring in every Canadian urban centre experiencing an influx of American immigrants.

Hippie culture surfaced in Vancouver's Kitsilano neighbourhood in the mid-1960s, trailing behind the emergence of hippie culture south of the border, namely in San Francisco.[10]

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[5]For broader history on the influence of American social movements, culture, and immigrants, see Lara Campbell, Dominique Clement and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).
[6]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[7]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[8]Ibid.
[9]Henry John, "American Exiles Beyond the Politics of the Draft: Nudity, Feminism, and Third World Decolonization in Vancouver, 1968-71," *BC Studies,* no. 205 (2020): 38.
[10]Lawrence Aronsen, *City of Love and Revolution: Vancouver in the Sixties* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2010), 15.

Intimately tied with sentiments of love, peace, and anti-capitalism, many people were drawn to this alternative culture, politics, and lifestyle, as it seemed to offer a departure from the violence and rigidity that characterized Western life.[11] Although many Canadian cities were influenced by American hippies, Vancouver's relationship to the heart of hippiedom (San Francisco) was so strong that "the political border almost seemed to disappear."[12] Therefore, the lifestyle associated with hippies was particularly potent in Vancouver. This non-conformist culture was characterized by long-haired, unkept, and colourful aesthetics, use of mind-altering substances, lax gender and sexual norms, and ethics rooted in love and peace.[13] Historian Lawrence Aronsen asserts that sexuality was an "issue on the fault line between mainstream and hippie culture," as hippies were inclined towards more liberal and public displays of nudity and sexuality.[14] Hippies in Vancouver were no exception, as was evidenced by one of the hippie community's more public endeavours, in which they pushed for the creation of a nudist space at Wreck Beach.[15] The hippie attitude toward gender and sexuality was a part of both the initial appeal of the movement, as well as its eventual decline.

Jane remembers that the hippie movement was among the first political movements to pique her interest.[16] In the process of exiting a four-year relationship with the first woman she had ever been with, Jane recalled that she "was really interested in the hippie movement that was going on" and felt that she was missing an opportunity by not partaking.[17] When she sought out

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[11]For a broader understanding of the origins and politics of the hippie movement see Damon Randolph Bach, "The Rise and Fall of the American Counterculture: A History of the Hippies and Other Cultural Dissidents" (PhD dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2013). For a Canadian example, see Stuart Robert Henderson, *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).
[12]Aronsen, *City of Love and Revolution,* 12.
[13]Ibid., 11; 20.
[14]Ibid., 20.
[15]Ibid., 21.
[16]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[17]Ibid.

the hippie community, she quickly discovered that her previous relationship, and her interest in women more generally, were not considered an issue. In fact, her memory proves quite the opposite: "I started dating men and it was cool that I had been with a woman. I just never said four years, right? I was open enough about that, that people knew, and it was just seen as being cool."[18] This is demonstrative of how hippies could be more accepting or tolerant of sexual differences than wider society, but also indicates a possible limit to the openness, as Jane felt the need to downplay the seriousness of her prior relationship.

Despite the more relaxed attitude toward gender and sexuality as described by Fox and Jane, the parameters of gender and sexual freedom in the hippie movement remained, by and large, dictated by men.[19] In the early 1970s, "the hippie phenomenon was beginning to change and fragment" as people left seeking more radical or specific movements such as women's liberation, gay rights, environmentalism, and various other counterculture groups.[20] For example, Fox initially felt more comfortable being a hippie than participating in lesbian spaces, due to her discomfort with the rigid emphasis on butch and fem roles.[21] However, just a few years later, Fox was a lesbian-feminist separatist, reflecting the rapidly evolving nature of political movements in the 1970s.[22]

"The Canadian sixties," according to historian Ian Milligan, can be "understood around the central question of the working class and labour unrest."[23] The coalition of various working-class people in Canada, the Wildcat strikes, and the growth of unions in that era of Canadian

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[18]Ibid.
[19]Aronsen, *City of Love and Revolution,* 21. For a more detailed account of how hippie sexual politics were patriarchal or exploitative to women see Henderson, *Making the Scene,* 95; 158-159.
[20]Ibid., 29.
[21]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[22]Ibid.
[23]Ian Milligan, *Rebel Youth: 1960s Labour Unrest, Young Workers, and New Leftists in English Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), 4.

history certainly bolster Milligan's claim.[24] However, unlike the hippie movement, the labour movement strongly persisted through the subsequent two decades. A majority of the interviewees were versed in labour theory and/or were involved with unions. While the younger interviewees were only touched by the vestiges of the hippie movement, all the interviewees lived through (and several were directly involved with) waves of the labour movement. Socialism and other leftist economic philosophies were integral to the foundation of Vancouver's political scene, and heavily influenced many other movements.

Ben Isitt, a historian and legal scholar, argues that British Columbia's working-class labour movements were specific and strong. In the post-war period, the province saw "the political development of one of the most militant, unionized, and politically independent working classes on the North American continent."[25] According to Isitt, as BC workers grew increasingly disillusioned with more commonplace models of socialism, they turned to fringe groups such as Trotskyists and Maoists, who then "sunk roots in unions, youth organizations, and emerging 'new social movements.'"[26] This was particularly true of Vancouver which Isitt maintains was "a bastion of Trotskyist strength in Canada."[27] This phenomenon may have been compounded by the fact that in Vancouver, as John notes, "Canadian nationalism held far less sway than in its heartlands of Ontario and Saskatchewan."[28] John argues that American immigrants thrived politically in Vancouver due to this shared anti-nationalist ethos.[29] The association of Trotskyists

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[24]For deeper context on the emergence of working-class and labour movements in the 1960s, see Ian Milligan, Introduction and "Punching In, Walking Out: the Challenge of Young Workers," in *Rebel Youth: 1960s Labour Unrest, Young Workers, and New Leftists in English Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), 3-12; 37-63; and Bryan Palmer, "Wildcat Workers: The Unruly Face of Class Struggle" in *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 211-243.
[25]Benjamin Isitt, *Militant Minority: British Columbia Workers and the Rise of a New Left, 1948-1972* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 18.
[26]Ibid., 109.
[27]Ibid., 110.
[28]John, "American Exiles," 56.
[29]Ibid.

with other movements, as well as their prominence in Vancouver, are reflected in Fox's memory of trying to network with lesbians in Vancouver while still living in Toronto:

> To make my connection in Vancouver was actually another bit of working-class usefulness. To begin with, I knew people who knew people [...] but also, you know, some even straight Trotskyists, I think that I worked within the labour movement would put me onto other lesbians they knew in Vancouver.[30]

The interconnected nature of Vancouver's various political movements did not detract from their differences; this was increasingly true over the course of the 1970s.

Hewitt and Sethna open their chapter in *Debating Dissent,* stating that at the close of the 1960s, "fledging women's liberation groups composed mainly of young, white, middle-class university women disillusioned with the male dominance of the New Left student politics challenged women's inferior position in society and began organizing on their own."[31] Hewitt and Sethna's conclusions highlight several important points. One, it reaffirms that women's liberation movements in Canada had their roots in the New Left. Two, it shows that despite being a movement with origins in socialism and class consciousness, middle-class intellectuals and university students still formed the majority of the leadership.

Fox's experiences with unions in the 1970s were largely in Toronto. However, she makes broad observations about Canadian and American culture pertaining to class that are applicable to Vancouver. Fox, having been born in England, and raised by working-class communist parents, was acutely aware of the silence surrounding issues of class in the social and political movements of Canada and the United States.[32] She said that even within communities of other working-class people in Canada and America, she could observe cultural differences around

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[30]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[31]Steve Hewitt and Christine Sethna, "Sex Spying: The RCMP Framing of English-Canadian Women's Liberation Groups during the Cold War," in *Debating Dissent*, 135.
[32]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.

class, and cited the example of being berated for her "improper" use of cutlery by fellow working-class women.[33] Fox elaborated on the issue, pointing out that their investment in the cutlery etiquette was because it was "a symbol of the middle and upper class."[34] Therefore, by reprimanding Fox, these community members revealed an unconscious embracing of middle-class respectability, or even a hidden class aspiration. Speaking about Canadian and American working-class activists, Fox observed: "They're not proud of it [working-classness]. They're not assertive about it. They think it's wrong. Their aim somehow is to be middle-class."[35] This stands in stark contrast to Fox, who was taught that "scum rises" and was proud to be working class. This criticism was not only directed at laypeople who were not class conscious, but also at people in the labour movement, reflecting the earlier point about leadership in the labour movement being classist. Fox shared:

> I mean, he [Fox's father] was a card-carrying communist when he joined the Canadian army, not that they knew. But [my parents] didn't do anything with that in Canada, we never joined a communist group or anything like that. And my father thought the people running the communist movement were as fucked as everybody else.

Growing up, Fox's father would ridicule the leadership in such movements, mimicking their thinking and behaviour by quipping: "the working class can kiss my ass. I've got the boss' job at last!"[36]

Smith, another English-born working-class lesbian, made similar observations about the distinct differences between England and Canada regarding culture and social class. She noted that, unlike in England, there was no broad sense of class in Canada: "I grew up in England, [...]

[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid.
[35]Ibid.
[36]Ibid.

which has a very rigid class system. So, you understand, in Canada, class isn't something that people live and breathe. In England, people live and breathe class."[37]

Whether the interviewees' experiences in unions and the labour movement were positive or not, discovering such politics led many of these women into feminist politics. Jane, for example, recalled how she was introduced to feminism:

> I met my first feminist in the labour movement […] And she, this woman, had worked with Chavez, organizing farmworkers in California. So she had quite a bit of cache in the union movement and the fact that she was also a feminist I just found really interesting.[38]

However, when Jane subsequently got involved in the labour movement, she found that she "was the only woman" in her union, and that many of the men and "especially the head of that particular union, were really sexist. So there was a lot of [...] sexual harassment."[39] For example, Jane experienced comments regarding her body and outfits.[40] She also fought against gendered pay discrepancies in her union job.[41] Although Jane persisted through much of this problematic behaviour, she also explained that she "was a feminist and also a lesbian and [...] there wasn't really room for that in the unions as [she] knew them in the mid-seventies."[42] Even as late as 1978, when Jane attended the first Vancouver Pride March, she realized part-way through that fellow union men might see her in the news and felt nervous about it.[43]

Smith, who worked in unions in the early 1980s trying to establish same-sex benefits, said that even then "it was horrible."[44] At the annual conference of the BC Federation of Labour, her work to address gay and lesbian issues within the labour movement was met with hostility.

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[37]Diana Smith, interviewed by Morgan Watson, January 19, 2022, Victoria.
[38]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[39]Ibid.
[40]Ibid.
[41]Ibid.
[42]Ibid.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Diana Smith, interviewed by Morgan Watson, January 19, 2022, Victoria.

For example, Smith and her fellow activists worked to distribute pamphlets for a conference event that was intended to discuss issues faced by gay and lesbian people, but many of the materials were ripped up or thrown out by other conference attendees.[45]

The frustration resulting from these experiences of bigotry within labour organizing was likely exacerbated by the fact that so many women felt an important connection to labour politics regardless. Smith, for example, recalled meeting a Marxist-Leninist who used socioeconomic theory to explain an interpersonal dynamic Smith had witnessed and her recollection of the experience was: "[he] just gave me a framework in which to see everything and everything fell into place like about the world, but [also] about my own situation in it."[46] However, she concluded this example by stating that "instead of becoming a Marxist-Leninist," she "became a feminist."[47] This choice undoubtedly reflects the reality that many found feminism was a better political home due to the sexism in other branches of activism. However, this does not negate the fact that many women still felt very invested in labour and class politics. For example, when Smith reflected on her introduction to scholarship on feminism and class, her response is surprising for someone who chose to be a feminist "instead of" a Marxist-Leninist: "even though I was in the women's movement and certainly I read some of the early feminist books, which were very exciting, when I read about class I just loved… I mean, it just was like oxygen."[48]

Despite a plethora of issues within labour movements, some people did find supportive factions of men and workers. Sims worked in the BC Telecommunications Worker's Union during the latter half of the 1970s. Although with regard to sexuality, Sims felt that union environments were operating under a "don't ask, don't tell" paradigm, she also sometimes felt

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[45]Ibid.,
[46]Ibid.
[47]Ibid.
[48]Ibid.

bolstered by the support she received from people in those spaces.[49] For example, she said she drew strength from people in the labour movement who encouraged her to keep fighting by reciting sentiments, such as "sister, you know you're doing the right thing [...] just keep at it!"[50] The types of emotional support offered in labour organizing and unions is best exemplified using Sims' own words:

> Some of the men who were very supportive, they came at it from very much a working-class, social justice background, right? And very much around labour rights. And labour is made up of people, and people are different. That people need to be treated fairly, right, not just in terms of wages but in terms of how they're managed and dealt with by an employer. So, I think that was a really good attitude that I really appreciated from the men at the time.[51]

Sims' experiences of camaraderie, Smith's intellectual and personal interest in labour, Jane's discovery of feminism, and Fox's working-class pride made the gendered and homophobia issues in the labour movement extremely challenging, dismissive, and personal. Regardless, many women remained tied to labour movements in some capacity throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s. Unlike hippiedom, labour continued to be a substantial political arena in Vancouver which is reflected in the interviewees' significant, if challenging, relationships to the movement(s). However, in addressing issues of gender, large swaths of mainstream labour organizing would not prove to be sufficient, and increasing numbers of women sought refuge in feminism.

For many lesbians who lived through the 1970s, their lesbianism felt personally and politically intertwined with the emerging women's movement. The scholarship of Hewitt and Sethna cited above, and first-hand recollections of interviewees suggest that middle- and upper-

[49]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.
[50]Ibid.
[51]Ibid.

class women were increasingly involved in the women's movement and coming out as lesbians in the late 1960s and 1970s. Sims reflected on her experience in Vancouver:

> I do think that most of them [feminists] were in the working class they had working-class backgrounds and then as the liberation movement grew, I think that more people in the upper classes, if you will, decided it was safer to come out.[52]

Fox thought that being out may have been easier for women who were working class because they "didn't have a lot of privilege that [they] were about to lose," suggesting that middle-class women came out in greater numbers when doing so posed less of a threat monetarily and in terms of status.

The women's movement and the subsection of lesbian feminism that grew within it began organizing in new forms in this decade.[53] Feminist organizing expanded, but unlike the fracturing that would occur in the 1980s, the 1970s saw a more heterogenous mixture of women trying to work together. Conflicts did emerge between various subgroups of feminism (lesbian-feminists, socialist/Marxist feminists, radical feminists, etc.) with people belonging to one or several factions. One major tension existed between straight and gay feminists, though this history is better documented in the United States.[54] Sand, however, remembered similar issues surfacing in Vancouver and remarked that it was parallel to the anti-lesbian sentiment below the border:

> That was the beginning of my coming out [...] and then I got involved with the British Columbia Federation of Women, BCFW, which was the organizing structure at that point of the women's movement in Canada, specifically in BC. And so, a lesbian caucus formed because we would talk about the fact that we were fired if we were teachers, we couldn't come out, housing was a problem, a woman lost custody of her children because she came out. So, all these issues, we said, 'look, we've gotta form our own caucus to raise awareness and everything else.' So that's what I did in the early seventies. And we had conferences and there were a few kind-of heated meetings - the same thing

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[52]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 28, 2021, Victoria.
[53]For an account of shifts in politics and organizing in the women's movement more broadly see, Joan Sangster, "Liberating Feminisms," in *Demanding Equality: One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2021).
[54]For an overview of anti-lesbian sentiments in the women's movement and the sex wars in the United States, see Whitney Strub, "Lavender, Menaced: Lesbianism, Obscenity Law, and the Feminist Antipornography Movement," *Journal of Women's History* 22, no.2 (2010): 83-107.

> happening in the United States- what was called the lavender menace and that some women at the beginning [...] because so many lesbians were doing a lot of work and you can't separate the issues that lesbians have with what women have in all kinds of ways. So that was the whole stream of the women's movement was lesbian feminism, but a lot of people in the conferences were uncomfortable because gay people tend to be pinned into this idea of sexuality.[55]

Sand formed this lesbian caucus in the mid 1970s. The decision to work on lesbian issues within a larger feminist organization may have been reflective of the time. As noted above, deeper fractures around class and race lines began in the 1980s, when many feminists took stronger measures to mitigate political differences or discrimination, sometimes exiting organizations entirely. For example, Sims, who was involved in the anti-violence organization Rape Relief, remembered having difficulty making leadership consider diversity amongst women:

> I mean, it was in Rape Relief [...] it was really interesting because when you think about the women's movement both in America and in Canada at the time, it was still emerging, like it was still emerging as a women's rights issue. And there were conversations around -'cuz there were a lot of lesbians in both Rape Relief and WAVAW- and we had a voice but at the same time, because there were all these things around 'well, let's not really focus our discussions on lesbians' and so on 'let's just talk about women's rights' as though women is, you know… basically they're talking about white, straight women that we provided services to. [There] really wasn't at that time, any discussion really around race and sexual orientation and definitely, you know, at that time not gender identity.[56]

Smith, who also worked at Rape Relief, recalled the intensity of the leadership and the absence of consideration of class, despite the involvement of many working-class women in the organization:

> I remember working when I first worked at [Rape Relief], there were working-class women in Rape Relief very clearly [...] And then what happened- I mean the history of [Rape Relief] there was a huge conflict in the women's movement, right? So, between Rape Relief and WAVAW. And [one of the leaders of Rape Relief] was very political and class it didn't really come up but I always appreciated [her] thinking, even though she was a bit heavy-handed I think, and you know alienated people but really strong in her politics.[57]

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[55]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.
[56]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.
[57]Diana Smith, interviewed by Morgan Watson, January 19, 2022, Victoria

The conflict Smith refers to fractured Rape Relief and WAVAW emerged as a result. Sims was involved in this organizational breakdown:

> I think that was difficult, but I think we just wanted all to like end violence against women, sexualized violence against women. And so, I think some of the, at least from my perspective, it's like, 'what is our goal here? And let's work on that goal and then we'll, we will integrate as we go along, you know?' And if not then you know, we've gotta, you know find different places to put our energy into. So, I did, it was one of the reasons why I moved from -why a number of us, not just lesbians, but a number of us- didn't find our place with Rape Relief anymore and went on to found WAVAW.

In 1982, the newly founded WAVAW wrote a statement, published in *Kinesis*, addressed to "The Vancouver Women's Liberation Movement."[58] It details many criticisms of Rape Relief, including accusations that Rape Relief was "hierarchical," had "entrenched elitist leadership," was "anti-lesbian," and refused to hold themselves accountable to anyone.[59] The letter was signed by the new members of WAVAW, including Sims, who indicated (as did 14 others), that she was an ex-member of Rape Relief.[60] Another 39 Vancouver feminists signed to say they supported the statement and the newly founded organization.[61]

The lack of consideration for different facets of women's experiences was clearly an identifiable issue. At the same time, class was so invisible that sometimes even working-class women had difficulty identifying manifestations of classism and class difference. Arbour's recollection of working at *Kinesis* demonstrates this:

> So, like I can name a handful of women I worked with at Kinesis that kind of stuck around maybe some of them were employed or you know, like, Kinesis was in the same building as Status of Women. We shared offices with Vancouver Status of Women, which is a different organization. So, I remember all those women, and probably the majority would be middle class, but not all of them.[62]

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[58] Women Against Violence Against Women, "Vancouver Feminists Withdraw Support from Rape Relief," *Kinesis* (Vancouver: Vancouver Status of Women), May 1, 1982, 17.
[59]Ibid., 17. These are select entries to corroborate what Sims has said but they are taken from a much longer list of criticisms.
[60]Ibid.
[61]Ibid.
[62]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2022, Victoria.

Arbour was correct in her assessment of *Kinesis* as majority middle-class; it was also predominantly white. In the 1980s, "white, middle-class women composed the majority of paid positions" at both *Kinesis* and Vancouver Status of Women (the organization that published Kinesis).[63] Further, before a policy of affirmative action was adopted at Vancouver Status of Women in 1992, "women of colour and Indigenous women only held part-time/contract positions that were marginal and precarious."[64]

Post-Secondary Education, Political Engagement and Upward Mobility:

As mentioned in the previous chapter, many women were "dislocated" from working-class culture. There could be various reasons as to why this occurred, but one core theme that emerged in the interviews I conducted was education, both formal education such as post-secondary, but also political education from involvement in feminism, labour movements, etc. These women were in middle and mixed class contexts, and received formal and/or political education in said contexts. Through this process, they were also exposed to cultural norms and beliefs of the middle-class (even if they were not explicitly named as such), as is alluded to in Jane's quote above. Chapter Three will discuss how white and middle-class norms were built into certain feminist politics. This final section of Chapter Two is focused on outlining interviewees' access to formal and political education and considering how this may have shaped the trajectory of these women's lives.

Several interviewees in the last chapter identified their interest in feminism as something that set them apart from other working-class lesbians, especially those involved in bar culture. The recollections of interviewees supplemented with accounts from American butch/fem lesbians

[63]Emma McKenna, "The Labour Feminism Takes: Tracing Intersectional Politics in 1980s Canadian Feminist Periodicals" (PhD dissertation, McMaster University, 2019), 152.
[64]Ibid., 153.

revealed a subtle dichotomy with working-class, butch/fem lesbians on one end, and politically engaged feminists on the other. The butch/fem lesbians were charged with being apolitical, while feminists and their interests were considered politically correct and intelligent. It is outside the scope of this thesis to unpack, define, or refute what constitutes "intelligence,"[65] but in some of the interviews, what is deemed intelligent certainly has classed implications. I do not want to slip into or reinforce this line of thinking, so I want to make clear a few points from the outset. First, I do not want to suggest that intelligence or worth can be measured by involvement in particular politics or access to post-secondary education. I also know that what is recognized as "political" is not simple. For example, Nestle argues that the working-class bar butches and fems of the 1950s were both deeply political and feminist but in their own particular ways.[66] However, for lack of better or more discerning language, I am going to use "political/politics" narrowly for the purposes of this section to refer to the labour and women's movements and lesbian-feminist politics that emerged over the 1960s and 1970s, as outlined earlier in this chapter. In conclusion, I am presenting different facets of the interviewees' lives to identify patterns pertaining to their upward mobility, but I am not making an argument that any of these trends mean that the interviewees uniquely earned or deserved upward mobility, or were more intelligent than any other person. Every person deserves stability and freedom from classism and poverty.

Millward argues that the generation who attended post-secondary from the late 1960s to the early 1970s were "members of a new class of Canadians, exposed to postsecondary education

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[65]For a critical analysis of "intelligence," Juan Carrillo's work offers a succinct case study on how concepts of "intelligence" can be problematic. Though Carrillo is discussing a very particular context, his study on working-class Latino students demonstrates how "intelligence is a social construct deeply tainted by the definitions of those in positions of power" because "historical roots of intelligence are interconnected within varying dimensions of power, whiteness, Eurocentrism, and middle-class cultural capital." See Juan F Carrillo, "I Grew Up Straight 'Hood: Unpacking the Intelligences of Working-Class Latino Male College Students in North Carolina," Equity & Excellence in Education 49, no. 2 (2016): 159-160.

[66]Nestle Joan, "Butch-Fem Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s," *Heresies* 12 (1981): 23.

at higher rates than their parents."[67] She attributes this trend to a rapid increase in the number of Canadian universities that were established in the 1960s and noted that, through access to education, many students were exposed to "theoretical critiques of Western culture, including socialism and anti-colonialism" and beginning in the 1970s, also to "feminist analysis and pedagogy."[68] Millward connects this to the emergence of lesbian conferences which were popular in the 1970s and 1980s and drew together lesbians from all over Canada.[69] She notes that exposure to the culture of academic conferences "had a major impact on nascent lesbian and gay groups, particularly on their ideas about how to form a movement and where to meet in order to foment change."[70] Similar to Hewitt and Sethna, Millward's work demonstrates a close link between formal education and trends in social movements.

While formal education played a role in the women's movement, informal political education also proliferated during this period. Consciousness-raising (CR) and education efforts were central to feminist and lesbian organizing in the 1970s and 1980s.[71] CR groups and book clubs were common occurrences. According to Taylor Antoniazzi, the opening of a series of feminist bookstores in Canada and America was pivotal to the women's movement, as they provided spaces where groups could meet, or individuals could seek out information.[72] Millward similarly argues that bookstores were crucial to providing space for lesbian community.[73] There

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[67]Liz Millward, *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community across Canada, 1964-84* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 171.
[68]Ibid., 171.
[69]Millward devotes an entire chapter in her book, *Making a Scene,* to lesbian conferences as they were major social and political events that helped forge lesbian community during these decades. See Milward, "'It was an Incredible Conference': Getting Together," in *Making a Scene,* 169-199.
[70]Millward, *Making a Scene*, 172-173.
[71]Becki Ross, *The House That Jill Built: a Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 43-45.
[72]Taylor Antoniazzi, "Books By Women, For Women, About Women: An Oral History of Everywomans Books in Victoria, B.C., 1975-1997" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2020), 29-30.
[73]Millward, *Making a Scene*, 133-135.

was an enormous increase in journals, books, 'zines, and pamphlets pertaining to feminism and lesbianism during this time period, and reading the popular literature was one way to participate in the emerging feminist and lesbian communities.[74] In Antoniazzi and Millward's interviews, the work of scholars such as Jill Johnson, Shulamith Firestone, and Robin Morgan are mentioned along with novelists such as Rita Mae Brown and Jane Rule.[75] In addition to specifics writers/thinkers, many people refer to reading social or economic theory more broadly, as well as more practical literature on a range of topics such as motherhood/parenting, women's health, birth control, relationships, etc.[76] Being involved in feminist, and especially lesbian-feminist community, would mean exposure to theoretical frameworks, thinking conceptually and developing critical analysis.

In addition to political education, women participating in the feminist movement would necessarily acquire skills in a broad range of areas. Millward writes that in their efforts towards developing feminist frameworks and tackling feminist issues, "many women gained valuable experience in organizing events, campaigns, and groups."[77] In her work on LOOT in Toronto, Ross gives a more detailed account of the kinds of skills lesbian organizers developed:

> The breadth and depth of their expertise covered these areas: direct action (organizing and participating in demonstrations and 'zaps'); administration (fund-raising; accounting; booking halls, performers, and equipment); education (public speaking, drafting briefs and grant applications); publishing (newsletters, press releases, newspapers, and leaflets); and counselling (leading coming out rap groups, answering crisis calls, providing information and referrals).[78]

[74]Ross, *The House That Jill Built,* 42.
[75]Millward, *Making a Scene,* 134; and Antoniazzi, "Books By Women, For Women, About Women," 64; 70. Ross offers a more comprehensive list of examples in her book. See Ross, *The House That Jill Built,* 78.
[76]Milward, *Making a Scene,* 135; and Antoniazzi, "Books By Women, For Women, About Women," 61-62.
[77]Millward, *Making a Scene,* 19-20.
[78]Ross, *The House That Jill Built,* 67.

Moreover, Ross found organizers also experienced personal growth in the areas of "self-confidence, consciousness of oppression, a sense of their own capabilities, and the power of working together."[79] Ross' examples demonstrate in more concrete terms how political education and engagement could result in tangible skill-development.

Singular details of the interviewees' lives cannot be easily credited or linked to the upward mobility these women experienced. However, considering the trends in formal and political education outlined above, alongside the political work and educational backgrounds of the women I interviewed, this section demonstrates patterns between their various forms of work (both paid and unpaid); their learning (both informal and formal); and their varying degrees of upward mobility. It is important to note that I am not arguing that these women were middle-class during the period this thesis examines. Instead, I am taking a long view of their lives to trace possible roots of their upward mobility to account for why their experiences were distinct from the anecdotes of other working-class lesbians and different from what working-class lesbian scholarship would suggest.

After arriving in Canada in 1968, Smith "immediately went back to school and I was in school 'till 2011. Because I was so hungry for education."[80] Smith went to several schools such as Simon Fraser University (SFU), Emily Carr, and Langara.[81] She often attended part-time, and also worked in various paid community projects through the Local Initiative Programs (LIP).[82] She named a few: "I worked at The Vancouver Status of Women, I worked at Vancouver Rape

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[79]Ibid., 67.
[80]Diana Smith, interviewed by Morgan Watson, January 19, 2022, Victoria.
[81]Ibid.
[82]LIP grants were a Federal Government program that funded community and arts projects as a means to address unemployment. For more context, see Michael McKinnie, "Bees, Horseshoes, and Puppets for the Elderly: The Local Initiatives Program and the Political Economy of Canadian Theatre," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15, no. 4 (2005): 429-431.

Relief, did a booklet on self-defence. So, I would have these sort of part-time jobs that were involved in the movement."[83] In 1983, she returned to school:

> I went back to BCIT for two years and took an Occupational Housing Safety Certificate and then I got a job with the federal government as a Safety Officer. I worked there 23 years, but that meant right away, I was a member of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, so I was very active in the union [...] my activism in the union was trying to get same-sex benefits.[84]

Smith's formal education led to a career that was related to and influenced by her politics in labour and lesbian-feminism.[85] Reflecting back she said: "you can take the girl outta the class, but you can't take the class outta the girl. So, I have a large house, I'm quite well-off all that kind of thing. So, I don't consider myself working class anymore, but I feel working class."[86]

Sand completed a degree in English literature at Concordia, and put that degree to use in her political work in the lesbian feminist community. Sand was a member of the Vancouver Lesbian Literary Collective, and a writer and editor at *Kinesis*. In the early 1980s, Sand co-founded *The Radical Reviewer*.[87] *The Radical Reviewer* discussed women's and especially lesbian writing from a feminist standpoint. She also attended feminist conferences and lesbian discussion groups at the Vancouver Women's Bookstore and was a contributor/guest editor for several publications focussed on women's writing and feminist politics.[88] Not all her political work was literary; Sand was also a founding member of the lesbian caucus in the BCFW, as was mentioned in the previous section. This experience was educational for Sand, who reflected that "that lesbian caucus really was powerful, I learned so much from those women."[89] Out of all the interviewees, Sand's politics, education, and vocations were the most clearly intertwined, as

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[83]Diana Smith, interviewed by Morgan Watson, January 19, 2022, Victoria.
[84]Ibid.
[85]Ibid.
[86]Ibid.
[87]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.
[88]Ibid.
[89]Ibid.

Sand went on to have successes in academia. These successes included completing a Master's in English literature (focussing on women writers), teaching at the McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women, and becoming a professor in the Women's and Gender Studies Department at the University of Winnipeg.

Arbour remembers that Vancouver was where she "found her crew" not just in terms of "being a lesbian, but the feminism of the time."[90] She said: "I worked at *Kinesis* in Vancouver, so, you know, lots going on [...] you'd meet people by going to a rally, you know, Take Back the Night March, and all of that stuff. And there was a lesbian conference."[91] Arbour worked at *Kinesis* in printing, as she was a visual artist and had gone to "3 or 4 art schools" including Sheridan College and Emily Carr.[92] Arbour was certainly immersed in the lesbian community as she would "read all the popular stuff," such as *Ruby Fruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown and *Desert of the Heart* by Jane Rule, though she said she "wasn't really much for groups."[93] Arbour, unlike many of the other women also, "didn't read the sort of - highbrow is the wrong word- but like I've never read the *Feminine Mystique* for instance. I think I started to try to read *The Well of Loneliness,* but Ugh! Even just the language of it was like really hard to do."[94] Arbour did not talk about doing paid political work in the way the other interviewees did. However, she had opportunities in the arts facilitated through connections in the lesbian community:

> I was at art school then in Vancouver and I'd met somebody and she identified me as a lesbian [...] the artwork I was doing was body based and, so she saw this and she 'oh, you should get in touch with Persimmon Blackbridge. [...] I didn't know her, but there was this conference coming up and Persimmon was organizing the art show. And so, I contacted her and she saw my work and. she said, 'Oh yeah, you should be in this show,

[90]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[91]Ibid.
[92]Ibid.
[93]Ibid.
[94]Ibid.

> but it's closed. It's already sort of, it's already curated, but look, I'm gonna take down two of my pieces so you can put two pieces up.'"[95]

However, her education in art also enabled her to get art-related work: "I did layout and paste-up for a newspaper, I did industrial silk screen printing, I taught darkroom techniques to girls at a private school, I taught silk screen printing to adults at Vancouver School Board [...] I also had a freelance sign painting business for a short time."[96] In terms of a career, Arbour noted that she was different in that she "didn't wanna go back to school" like feminists she knew in Vancouver who "as they got into their thirties and forties [...] went back to school and became professionals."[97] Arbour said it was "only in my last 15 years when I worked at [an art] store and I was the manager that I got a decent wage and was able to retire."[98]

Fox did extensive political work and received formal education. In Ontario, she worked in early gay and lesbian liberation movements, unions, and the women's movement. She worked at a peer counselling service for gays and lesbians, and as an educator on gay and lesbian issues for high schools and other agencies.[99] Her contributions as a union leader at the municipal library in Toronto were significant as she "helped start that union and was their first president and did get a letter of intent, an agreement with [the union] not to discriminate on the basis of sexuality."[100] Fox's work in the women's movement was precipitated by a desire to find lesbians. She was advised that "'you can probably find a lot of lesbians if you can find a feminist group in Toronto.' So I found a feminist group in Toronto called Toronto Women's Liberation."[101] Fox said that women's liberation "really [was] mostly straight" but she learnt a lot politically from

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[95]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 5, 2022, Victoria.
[96]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[97]Ibid.
[98]Ibid.
[99]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.
[100]Ibid.
[101]Ibid.

American immigrants as "we're always getting the cream of [the United States'] political crop."[102] Her involvement in women's liberation included helping found *The Other Woman Newspaper*, "and then on the weekends, we had consciousness-raising groups, we would meet outside of the regular meetings, we would take actions."[103]

It was not only Fox's politics that shaped her education; she also reflected on the impact of her parents' politics:

> Because I came from England and because my family were communists [...] I was also taught to think I was taught, I had books from an early age. People were taking me to the library in England before I was four and I learned to read by then. When I entered kindergarten, I already knew.[104]

While such an upbringing could foster a proclivity for school, Fox's educational journey was not straightforward. Fox intermittently attended post-secondary education at institutions such as Trent University, Rochdale College, and SFU, but she had concerns about the impact of attending university. She remembered "the first time I quit university [...] I actually wrote and told my father that I was quitting because I thought they were gonna turn me into… you know, make me a member of the middle class."[105] It took Fox 25 years to complete her BA, but she now has a Doctorate in English, having completed her dissertation on Canadian queer literature.[106] Fox, like Smith, talked about how she is now middle class:

> I do have a certain level of guilt for having as much privilege as I do and that just makes me a little more generous in sharing it and supporting things that I think are important [...] and I am thrilled that I own a house. [My partner] and I, who also has a working-class background, often say to each other, 'oh my gosh, whoever thought two little working-class girls would do so well.'[107]

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[102]Ibid.
[103]Ibid.
[104]Ibid.
[105]Ibid.
[106]Fox's dissertation is entitled: "Queer Outburst: A Literary and Social Analysis of the Vancouver Node (1995-96) in English Canadian Queer Women's Literature" (PhD dissertation, University of Victoria, 2009).
[107]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2021, Victoria.

Fox's explicit discussion of her current class position (her privilege and homeownership) paired with her tumultuous relationship to school suggests two interesting things. The first, more obvious point, is that she clearly transitioned from one class into a higher one. The second is that, ultimately, ending up middle class did not prevent her class background from impacting her trajectory through school. I highlight this to reinforce that, as I said at the start of this section, I am examining their upward mobility, and not making an argument that interviewees were middle class during the period in question.

Jane felt that she learned a lot from her time within the feminist community. Jane was involved in many discussion groups and more formal organizing. She remembered:

> I got involved with this group and on paper we were helping mothers re-enter the workforce. In reality, we were organizing what was called a women's rally for action, which, SoCreds had taken over again after the NDP and they had cut women's programs all over the place. So we organized this big rally where women came one or two women from each riding came and we lobbied the government to try and get them to rescind some of these changes, they didn't, They were really right-wing and the people who were our contacts in the government knew what we were doing so there was a certain amount of collaboration that happened back then that probably couldn't happen now […] And I consider that and other experiences like that really a very helpful part of my education.[108]

In addition to political and organizational learning, Jane also shared a story about learning from a middle-class feminist friend, which demonstrates the way being in a community with middle-class people can result in the acquiring of particular knowledge:

> [My friend] basically had real skills at travelling on the cheap and said, 'well, here's how I did it. And here's how I saved money.' And I grew up in a family where there was never money to be saved and it didn't occur to me to be saving money. And so, I really learned from her and she was from, you know, a good solid middle class, urban family, but she would walk and save the 25 cent bus fare and she was extremely frugal.[109]

[108]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[109]Ibid.

Similar to Fox, Jane's experiences at school were shaped by class, so it took her many years to complete her degree. Jane began her education at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and even the application process felt classist to her. She remembered:

> there was a question on the application form, about 'where did your parents go to university' and I think there was a specific [question] about, 'did they go to UBC' and of course my parents didn't go to university and so it was sort of already skewed to select people who weren't like me.[110]

Further, she had less support through school than her middle-class friend. She provided an example:

> I was really pretty charged about not working through university. While I was going to classes, I wanted to have more of a full experience and I remember talking to somebody about how hard it was and she said, 'well, I put myself through university' and I thought about this and it just wasn't sitting right. So suddenly I got it. And I said, 'where did you live?' - 'With my parents?' [...] What she meant was she worked in the summer to pay for her tuition. Period. And what I meant was I had to pay my rent, my food, my transportation, my books, all of it.[111]

Jane ended up returning to school in her forties to complete her degree, and then went on to teach university classes in the field.

Sims was the only interviewee who did not talk about attending post-secondary school, but she was similarly involved in the women's movement and labour/unions. From an early age, Sims was engaged in feminist politics, namely in anti-violence work. For example, she remembered "I, by the way, was involved in the women's movement. So I was involved with Rape Relief in Vancouver and then was a founding mother of the Vancouver Women Against Violence Against Women."[112] Sometimes her two spheres of politics (labour and feminism) overlapped as she advocated for women within labour: "with the labour movement, we started

[110]Ibid.
[111]Ibid.
[112]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.

talking about sexual harassment policies in the workplace, and [...] equal opportunity."[113] Sims remembers how her work in unions transitioned into her later work in human rights:

> I got involved with the union, the telecommunications workers union, and then got involved in the equity issues that were being discussed at the time. And then got a term position at the then human rights commission. And that really is sort of like the way in which my human rights career, started. So that pretty well sums up the seventies.[114]

Sim's career in human rights was quite successful:

> I achieved quite a bit in my career and I would consider myself right now as being fairly comfortable, well off. [...] I was definitely working class in the seventies and I would definitely argue somebody [that] what your current class may be does not necessarily define you. It's your income bracket, it's your comfort level, but in terms of your mindset and approach to how you deal with others and how you deal with life and so forth, that's definitely a different, story altogether.[115]

There are several patterns amongst the interviewees' formal and political educations that point to the relationship between post-secondary school, engagement in politics, and upward mobility. One interviewee, Sims, did not discuss post-secondary school, and one interviewee, Arbour, suggested that she was less involved in political organizing than other lesbians in her feminist community. These exceptions to the trends strengthen my argument, as they demonstrate that political education or post-secondary education can contribute to upward mobility even when the other is absent. For example, Sims had a very successful career which she directly connects to her early participation in politics. Arbour did not receive higher pay until nearer to the end of her career, which she attributes to not returning to school. However, when she did acquire higher paying work, it correlated with her arts education.

Trends that emerged around the interviewees in this chapter and Chapter One appear similar to trends outlined in scholarship on prior decades. Particularly, themes overlap with the

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[113]Ibid.
[114]Ibid.
[115]Ibid.

writing on upwardly mobile lesbians, as was detailed in the historiography at the start of this thesis. However, unlike the "uptowners" or "upwardly mobile" lesbians in Chenier and Davis and Kennedy's work, interviewees for this thesis had more options for being out and connected to lesbian community, especially lesbian feminist community. Duder's work offers the most details about women he calls "lower-middle class" which he likens to the "upwardly mobile" lesbians in other scholarship. However, Duder does not differentiate the lesbians he interviewed by their class backgrounds, suggesting that their experiences of their class are comparable even if they originated in different classes. This does not align with my findings.

During her time at *Kinesis* in the early 1980s, Arbour remembers that she was "happy to be surrounded by lesbians" but also that she struggled with feeling like she did not belong which in hindsight she believes was the result of her class background:

> You know, working at Kinesis and it was a huge, very, very strong community. I think like, it's really changed now, you know, like we have our community here and we're all so much older now, but it's not, it's not the same. Like it was potent. Very potent community-wise and I guess I felt like that I fit, but I didn't, I knew that I didn't fit perfectly and that was probably class.[116]

Her reflections expose a difficult tension. Here Arbour reflects that she struggled with fitting in in feminist spaces, even predominantly lesbian spaces, likely due to a difference in class while also acknowledging the importance and strength of that community. However, she has also said that spaces that were more working class but not explicitly feminist (such as her hockey team) did not feel like a great fit either. She offered reflections on working in a job where she did feel that she belonged:

> I got a job in a warehouse [...] the people there were lefties and the warehouse was filled with lesbians. Like, the downstairs part of the warehouse where you pulled all the bags of green peas, you know, upstairs, there were lesbians up there too, but the upstairs was

[116]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2022, Victoria.

> more in taking the phone calls and all of that. So, I still found a place where I fit but it was labour.[117]

Arbour was not the only woman who experienced an internalization of class difference. Sand also discussed the way that classism is internalized and how an accident she had reminded her of this:

> I mean, [my partner] was working-class, she was an ex-con. […] I'm living in North Van with [her] and I'm friends with this woman and we're doing anti-psychiatry stuff from a feminist perspective. And she worked at an organization, I wanna say Elizabeth Fry, but I'm not sure if that's what it was. So, she said to me, I was substitute teaching at the time, she said, 'why don't you apply Cy-Thea? You would be fantastic.' So, I applied and I was told that because I was living with an ex-con, they wouldn't hire me. Yeah, so I had, let's say quotation marks, 'middle-class qualifications' but they wouldn't hire me. Now talk about internalizing, shortly after that, I severed fingers with an electric lawn mower. And so, I have fingers that are missing and I always associate that with whatever I internalize from that. Internalized homophobia, internalize class stuff, 'cause if I had been hired there, it would've given me esteem because that's how capitalism works, right?[118]

Jane similarly alluded to the psychological impacts of being from a financially precarious background when talking about the self-assurance and security that middle-class women seemed to have. She stated: "Well, one thing that I would say about the middle-class people I knew in the seventies and still now is 'you're so secure in who you are, you've not had to question any of it.'"[119] Although there is a material security that accompanies being middle-class, there is also a feeling of belonging and confidence that Jane felt she could not access:

> I knew that it became an issue, my career partner, and I got involved in 1980, but I knew her before that and one of the things that we ran into early on was I found it really hard at first to read nonfiction. It was just I was a voracious reader but I found it really hard to read nonfiction […] at that time I could talk about any of those ideas. I always had lots to say but reading some of -we were all reading, all kinds of feminist stuff back then- I found it difficult. And I considered that to be about class and there were things like… a woman we knew was an artist and she had an art show and I was really nervous. I was totally out of my element. And I didn't know, I don't know. I had some idea that I needed to know a different language to be comfortable there and I'm not sure that's so, but that's

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[117]Ibid.
[118]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.
[119]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.

> how I felt and I almost didn't go. So, there were circumstances like that that were about class.[120]

This last quote not only speaks to internalized notions of class, but also to potential cultural differences between people from different classes. Jane, when reflecting on the impact of education, said "it [school] changes how you relate to your family of origin because you're now part of a different culture. And it is, it is like a cultural difference."[121]

I provide these last few examples of internalization of classism and class difference to emphasize that these women being working-class in origin needs to be considered, even if there is upward mobility or a shift in class culturally or monetarily. Particularly during the 1970s and early 1980s, the cohort of lesbians I interviewed were experiencing a separation from elements of working-class culture, exposure to mixed class contexts and middle-class culture, without being middle class themselves. The importance of acknowledging these complex and seemingly competing ideas and experiences of class will become even clearer in the next and final chapter.

Conclusion:

The idea that feminist politics separated the interviewees from other lesbians, especially those who were working class and in butch/fem roles emerged in the previous chapter. This chapter examined that division further, demonstrating how politics and education shaped these women's lives and contributed to upward mobility. It does so by tracing their political journeys, introducing basic dynamics of the feminist community in Vancouver, and outlining their educational backgrounds.

A tangential link was made between the interviewees and the "upwardly mobile" lesbians who appear in prior scholarship on working-class lesbians. However, the difference in time

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[120]Ibid.
[121]Ibid.

period warrants more investigation. Moreover, the most significant work examining such lesbians had a very different approach to analysing class and rendered different findings than this thesis. Despite their mobility, each of the interviewees shared feeling or memories that point to an ongoing identification with working-classness or discomfort with middle-class culture. Some spoke about internalization of class difference or about maintaining a semblance of a working-class identity even if they shifted classes in material terms. The next chapter will demonstrate how these women's complex class position did not shield them from classism as they navigated feminist politics and community in Vancouver.

Chapter Three
"Just a hard luck story": Working-Class Women in Vancouver's Lesbian and Feminist Movements

Once one has, at least for me, that working-class background. That's your formal years as a working-class person, you never lose sight of how that is for you and how that is for others. So that's where I come from.

- *Mary-Woo Sims*[1]

Introduction:

This chapter looks exclusively at feminist organizing in Vancouver, and how that feminist community and the politics therein were experienced by a specific cohort of working-class lesbians. Specifically, it examines how classism appears politically, culturally, and interpersonally within lesbian-feminist community. As this chapter will reveal, lesbian feminism was of huge importance to the interviewees, as it served not only as a bedrock for their beliefs and politics, but also as their home and community. All the interviewees spoke with immense fondness, gratitude, and pride about the lesbian-feminist movement, as it clearly shaped who they are and how they made sense of the world around them. And it is the poignancy of the love and strength garnered from the lesbian-feminist community that makes these women's experiences of classism so challenging and important.

This chapter requires a preface clarifying my accusation that the feminist, and lesbian feminist, movements were white and middle class. The conclusion that feminist and lesbian organizing during this era was white and middle class is not derived from an analysis of demographics, or a reflection of whose labour sustained the movements. Instead, this conclusion comes from asking questions such as: who generally made up the leadership, who had more organization/institutional backing, whose issues got centered, and whose cultural norms were reflected in the politics? It is important to remember that there were working-class women and

[1]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.

women of colour (and women who were both) who contributed to the lesbian feminist movement and were in lesbian feminist community. Therefore, when I say the lesbian-feminist movement was white and middle class I am not providing a headcount, I am analyzing power.

Lesbian-Feminism:

Lesbian-feminism began to emerge as a distinct inner core of the women's movement in Canada in the 1970s. The work of lesbian feminists in the United States created a political framework for a feminism that was radical and specifically lesbian. This lesbian-feminism, which articulated a joint political venture against the forces of homophobia and patriarchy, purported to centre on more radical goals than its liberal and straight counterparts. One of the first lesbian-feminist manifestos in the United States, "The Woman-Identified Woman," published in 1970, offered this critique of more liberal strains of feminism:

> Insofar as women want only more privileges within the system, they do not want to antagonize male power. They instead seek acceptability for women's liberation, and the most crucial aspect of the acceptability is to deny lesbianism.[2]

This political sentiment was born not only in response to the oppression of women and male violence, but also to the homophobia experienced by lesbian women both in general and specifically at the hands of other feminists. Becki Ross, in her book *The House that Jill Built*, maps the spread of a lesbian-feminist politic in Canada which was influenced by, but distinct from, the United States. Her book specifically focuses on Toronto and the push of largely urban, middle-class white lesbians to build a community around lesbian-feminism in the early 1970s

[2]Radicalesbians. "The Woman-Identified Woman," in *Feminist Manifestos,* ed. Penny Weiss, 221–226 (New York: New York University Press, 2018). Originally published independently by Radicalesbians in 1970.

through education, publishing, conferences etc.[3] The size and diversity of Toronto allowed for several groups and spaces that were centred around, or even exclusive to, lesbians.

The emergence of lesbian-feminism in Vancouver shared a similar timeframe and ideological overlap with Toronto. However, the women I interviewed did not (in the 1970s) organize as independently from straight feminists as lesbian-feminists were able to in Toronto. In fact, Fox was the only person I interviewed who spoke of being a separatist, but her separatism developed in Toronto, and she had grown "disillusioned" with it by the time she arrived in Vancouver toward the end of the decade.[4] Her recollection of her earlier separatism in Toronto reveals a rigid stance that was not echoed in Vancouver by Fox or the other interviewees:

> when I was a separatist, my separatism didn't include being friends with straight women [...] but my separatism didn't come with a lot of hate. Although I cared about the separatism, I think just temperamentally. I don't, don't like hating[...] and I always have more sympathy for straight women, of course, because for start, they were less of a threat to me than straight men, for instance. So they weren't, you couldn't really count on them as allies adequately, which is why separatism, but they were not the enemy as honestly, the stats seemed to show men really were.[5]

While the separatist edge that touched some lesbian-feminist organizers in Toronto did not take root in the same fashion in Vancouver, there was still a recognized need to carve out space for lesbian issues. This is why, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Sand helped found a lesbian caucus in the BCFW. Her summarizing of the political difference between liberal and lesbian feminists certainly echoes the concerns that caused Fox's separatism and that inspired the original lesbian-feminist manifesto:

> What are some of the concerns, I mean, that's the thing, right? Between liberal feminism and lesbian feminist or socialism. [...] liberal feminism, it really is about getting a piece of the pie, but the pie stays in place. Radical feminism was about, no, we have to change

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[3]For a broad overview of homophobia in the women's movement, lesbian-feminism taking root in Canada as well as its specific development in Toronto, see Becki Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).
[4]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 5, 2021, Victoria.
[5]Ibid.

> these structures cuz so many people are excluded from them, including lesbians, working-class people, disabled women, Francophone women.[6]

While the distinction in Sand's example is useful conceptually, the reality of politics on the ground was much more complex. Although the interviewees recounted a strong lesbian-feminist community in Vancouver, and many of the women had politics from lesbian-feminism, Marxist/socialist theory and their time in leftist labour movements and unions, they found it challenging to get issues unique to particular marginalized groups brought into the political frameworks of the feminist or even the lesbian-feminist community.

In Toronto, Ross documented a breakdown in feminist organizing between different factions of the community. For example, Ross found that there was a group of predominantly straight socialist-feminists who had a falling out with a group of predominantly gay lesbian/radical feminists and Ross' interviewees readily identified themselves in relation to the groups. Many of the women I interviewed identified with feminism, lesbianism and socialism, Marxism, or communism and, unlike the majority of Ross' interviewees, the interviewees for this project were from the working class. In the 1980s, the interviewees would attempt to establish separate political groups (such as a working-class feminist group) but in the 1970s, they often stayed within larger feminist organizations and pushed for more consideration of class, race, or other differences among women. Sims explained the difficult necessity of political organizing across differences but also gave examples of how ignoring these differences could manifest in potentially harmful ways:

> I think that our experiences inform how we're gonna approach organizing and how we approach the public. It's true in GLBTQ organizing as well, and feminism as well that the more the person shares the same background as you, the easier it is to talk to them. Because you've got a shared culture, you've got shared religious background, you've got a shared familial back[ground]. Well, whatever it is that you share in common, it's absolutely gonna be easier to get work done. But at the same time, I think that you can't

[6]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.

> exclude people. [...] It was frustrating at times, it's like, 'why don't we get that this would be harder on this group of people than on this group of women?' Right? For example, one of the earlier cases that went to the Supreme Court of Canada was about the right of a woman to have, I think, a nanny or something, I can't remember the case, but, you know, the thing is… 'really is that the first case that we wanna get up to the Supreme court around a particular issue?' So that's the kind of thing is in decision making, you know like who gets to gain from going forward with this versus that, you know? Even in the GLBTQ movement, I remembered that when we were talking about equal families, for example, in Ontario people were saying that, you know, if my partner and I both get recognized by law, we're going to lose some of the, you know, we live in poverty already and [we're] gonna be even worse off as women, because they're gonna expect that the woman with a higher income is gonna look after us, and, you know, so we lose some of the benefits that we [have] as single women. So, it was it, you know, so there's always gonna be those kinds of tensions. And I think it's just tough to really think about who's benefiting and who might be left out and try and find ways of addressing the issue so that most people will benefit.[7]

While the examples Sims provides were not specific to Vancouver in the 1970s, she offered them as examples which were representative of the types of tensions and issues that Sims saw emerging across her long activist and professional career, which began in Vancouver in the 1970s. When reflecting on how white and middle-class lesbians and feminists interacted with her in the 1970s, Sims insightfully stated:

> No, I think, well, I would, wouldn't say, you know… it's difficult when you're invisible, like when aspects of self are invisible, you know, is that being treated differently? Or are you being treated the same, but without regard, or interest in the fact that 'Hey, you know what, I'm a racialized woman, I've got something to say about [...] like finding more volunteers from my community or from other communities' you know, 'Hey, what are we doing about…'[8]

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[7]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 3, 2021, Victoria. Sims is referencing the 1993 Supreme Court case, *Symes v. Canada,* in which a woman unsuccessfully fought for the right to claim childcare as a business expense on her personal tax return:https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1093/index.do Warner provides an overview of the history of activism and law around same-sex marriage in Canada beginning in the mid-1980s. It touches on critiques of marriage equality and the many groups who were excluded by it though the undercurrent of the chapter mostly frames the issue in terms of a "liberationist" and "assimilationist" divide and does not touch on the distinctly classed elements Sims is pointing to. See Tom Warner, "Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Relationships," in *Never Going Back a History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 218-246.

[8]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.

This quote touches on a core pillar of the frustration that interviewees articulated with feminist organizing and community during the 1970s, which was less about overt community-wide disagreements and fragmenting and more about erasure or minimizing of difference. Jane remembered how middle-class feminists would respond when she tried to engage in conversations about class:

> because well, women used to argue that women are a class. So, it's like 'your class background doesn't matter,' and 'oh yeah well it's a hard luck story' and it wasn't so much a hard luck story as a difference.[9]

The next section examines more specific ways that middle-class feminists ignored class difference which invisibilized the experiences of working-class women and enabled classist behaviour by middle-class feminists, often in the name of a feminist politic.

Downward Mobility:

The trend of downward mobility amongst feminists in Toronto is explored by Ross in *The House that Jill Built.* A politic of downward mobility both in Toronto and Vancouver included political, lifestyle, and aesthetic commitments. Ross described the "lesbian-feminist fashion" of the 1970s as "the daily worn, hallowed uniform of short hair [...], hairy legs and armpits, flannel shirt, blue jeans, and work-boots."[10] According to Ross, lesbian-feminists wore this "uniform" not only to resist patriarchal beauty standards and ideas about middle-class (capitalist) respectability, but also to signal their lesbianism publicly and to "unite lesbians under the illusion of shared class membership."[11] Ross draws on quotes from gay-liberationist Fiona Rattray who provided a succinct analysis of the downward mobility of middle-class lesbians in the Lesbian

[9]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[10]Ross, *The House That Jill Built,* 89.
[11]Ibid., 89; 92.

Organization of Toronto (LOOT). Having been a former member of LOOT, Rattray's insight into the politics is sharp and succinct:

> Women around LOOT were mostly middle-class, but it was hard to tell because it was 'politically in' to be downwardly mobile. You'd get into a blue-collar job and live as cheaply as you could [...] money and capitalism and patriarchy all went together and that was evil and bad. And the way women were dressing if you walked into 342 Jarvis [LOOT's address], you'd think everyone was coming from a working-class background because you're all wearing jeans and flannel and sneakers or boots and that gave you a shared facade. Of course everyone had their own little attitudes that would leak out and you'd discover them.[12]

Scholar Julia Creet also discussed similar aesthetics in Vancouver feminist circles and how it specifically played out in the Lesbian Caucus of the BCFW:

> Clothes became a symbol of the politics. Lesbian Caucus members thought about what clothes to wear to meetings; although jeans and plaid shirts were worn by lesbian and heterosexual feminists alike, it did not help to look too much like a 'dyke.' [...] For some lesbians, dressing in comfortable, rugged clothes was an inheritance from working-class background, as well as a symbol of sexuality.[13]

Creet argued that most of the members of the Lesbian Caucus were of working-class backgrounds, so this differs from Rattray's account of LOOT; however, the aesthetic itself is described similarly.[14] Interviewees recollections align with Ross and Creet. Sims said that, "in those days [androgyny] was definitely more of- I think it was more political, you know, associated with the evolution of feminism as well as lesbian expression."[15] Jane offered a more detailed description and, similar to Rattray, noted that the outfits hid class difference:

> we were all sort of, how would I put this, especially in the feminist community, schlumpy, you know, we wore tattered, old jeans and every- there was a uniform. And we all looked the same and we talked about the same things. And so, it wasn't until class came into a conversation, always initiated by me or by a couple of the other women.[16]

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[12]Quote in Ross, *The House That Jill Built*, 92-93.
[13]Julia Creet, "A Test of Unity: Lesbian Visibility in the British Columbia Federation of Women" in *Lesbians in Canada,* Ed. Sharon Stone (Toronto: Between the Lines Press 1990), 183-197, 193.
[14]Ibid., 197.
[15]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 3, 2021, Victoria.
[16]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.

While there was clearly a downwardly mobile aesthetic, attempts at downward mobility extended beyond clothes. Housing security was another arena where the politics of downward mobility played out and felt counterintuitive to two of the interviewees. Jane remembered:

> we [Jane and her husband] bought a house and that took a lot of maneuvering to try and figure out how to do this. Neither of us had any background in mortgages or anything like that, but we pulled it off in the end and all of our friends were just horrified. Like, 'how can you do this? Why are you buying a house? You don't need to buy a house.' And I remember we said to a couple of our friends, 'you know, when you're ready to buy a house, your parents will give you the down payment.' And they did. In fact, a couple of years later they got a house. Well, more than a down payment, it was pretty much paid off by parents. And so, we tried to talk to people about, 'well, we don't have that. So, we have to live our lives different. We have to plan differently.' So that takes us up to about '74.[17]

This above example occurred when Jane and her husband bought the home, but criticism of her continued over the years she lived in the home. She continued:

> I was in a lot of groups back then, mid-seventies. I was in a group where we were trying to get government funding for women in skilled employment. I worked for unions during this time as well so we were trying to get money to train women to be carpenters, etcetera. And so, one day the meeting was at my place, which I was still living in the house and my husband had moved out and I had a bunch of roommates. [...] And this woman came early and she was from quite a wealthy family back east. And she said, 'well who owns this house?' And I said, 'well, I do with my ex.' And she said, 'you should sell it and give the money to the women's movement.' And so, we had some conversation back and forth, and I was thinking, why am I so security conscious? That I shouldn't feel like I have to have a home, but I had lived in about 60 different houses at that point in my life. And I really wanted that stability. And she just couldn't understand why somebody would want to own a house. Well, she became a stockbroker about two years after that. And that's, you know, I've got millions of stories like that. Where the criticism was quite open about, well, you know, 'you shouldn't have a car' or 'you shouldn't have a house'.[18]

Smith encountered the same criticism when she and her partner bought a house:

> This is what I noticed, the women I was mostly around, which I think were middle class, you know, they were gonna get an inheritance. They were downwardly mobile, which meant that they didn't want to own a house. They were predominantly in housing co-ops they lived in housing co-ops a lot. I who never had a house, wanted a house. [...] We bought a house together because we didn't have any, you know, worries about that. We

[17]Ibid.
[18]Ibid.

> wanted a house we wanted security. Now, you know, over the years, all these people who didn't want a house, all have houses.[19]

There are two ironies in these examples Jane and Smith shared. One is the fact that many of the women who criticized Smith and Jane went on to be homeowners as well. The other is that middle-class women's political preference to live in communal/co-op housing or poorer areas of the city was actually detrimental to less class-privileged women. Jane, having an excellent memory, was able to recollect several examples of such issues. On middle-class women living in housing co-ops, Jane remembered:

> And it was also a time in Vancouver when, and there were a lot of things happening, like co-op housing was really big during that time. And very privileged women were getting into these rent-controlled apartments instead of women from working-class backgrounds and single mothers who were poor and had children. So, there was a real lack of understanding about what poverty meant and right through to now, I would say when I bring up class with people who from different backgrounds, they really wanna say, 'well, that's over now, you know, that was your childhood.'[20]

The question Jane's memory raises about co-ops is an interesting one. A critique was printed in *Kinesis* by two former members of a workers' co-op in Vancouver. The women, Nina Rabinovitch and Sarah Shamai, challenge the assumption that workers' co-ops "recognize the importance of the struggle of working class people."[21] In practice, they argued, "there is really nothing innate about co-ops that makes them supportive of working class people."[22] Their conclusion was that instead of "chang[ing] the system" co-ops "set up a comfortable community for the people who work in them."[23] More research on this is needed, but my preliminary interpretation of these examples is that a project having the language or appearance of class-

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[19]Diana Smith, interviewed by Morgan Watson, January 19, 2022, Victoria
[20]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[21]Nina Rabinovitch and Sarah Shamai, "A Successful Worker's Coop: at What Cost?" *Kinesis* (Vancouver: Vancouver Status of Women), November 1, 1982, 26.
[22]Ibid.
[23]Ibid.

consciousness does not mean that it considered, let alone prioritized, the needs of working-class or low-income people.

Jane also remembered class-privileged women choosing to live in poorer neighbourhoods and conditions that suggested financial hardship:

> Now again, class came up because I had always, you know, from a pretty young age, bought my own clothes. Once I was away from home, I paid my own rent. I was very poor as a student. The people that I hung out with were from much more advantaged background and they basically a lot of them -which I found really shocking- lived with… For example, one woman I worked with at a summer job, I went to her place and she was sleeping on a mattress on the floor with no sheets and I thought, 'oh my God, this is really bad', you know, to be this poor. Well, she wasn't poor at all. It, you know, as things unfolded, a lot of people I knew back then who were really happy just to be kind of camping and wherever they happened to live were people who were choosing that. They didn't just land there because they had no other way to be, to live. They landed there because they were choosing it and that became really clear to me but it took a while, you know. I'm jumping to [the mid-seventies] now I was part of a few groups where I had a car and there were women [...] who lived in the Downtown Eastside and were really poor. And I would always make sure I drove them home and then one day in one of the groups -it was a political study group- we decided to talk about class backgrounds and one of the women that I drove all the time was from sort of ruling class, New York, not just middle-class, but way, way up there and was choosing this. And it was, I sort of felt, I was kind of rescuing people from being poor because I had been poor. And still was poor, but not by choice.[24]

The degree to which middle-class women had a choice, regardless of how their circumstances seemed, is also reflected in Jane's memory about the employment of a middle-class feminist friend:

> I had a friend back then who got a job working at The Bay as a cashier and I was just horrified. I thought, 'oh my God, she must, she must be really down and out.' And so, when I saw her, I said, 'well, how is it working at The Bay?' And she said, 'well, you know, I have to stand all and blah, blah, blah. But I really wanted to get a sense of what it would be like.' She wasn't doing it because she needed work or money. She was doing it to have the experience of it. Before she moved into her co-op.[25]

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[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid. Downtown Eastside is "one of the oldest areas in the city," and it is predominantly men but of the women who there "70 to 90% of them live below the poverty line." From: Jan De Grass, "Women Face Violence, Welfare Struggle," *Kinesis* (Vancouver: Vancouver Status of Women), September 1, 1982, 8.

In *Kinesis*, Sand wrote a piece that alludes to the trend of downward mobility, highlighting the discrepancy between people who were experiencing poverty and precarity and those who were "poor" by choice. Although slightly past the time frame for this thesis the criticism is applicable:

> Forty thousand people are homeless in Canada, working-class jobs are disappearing, and poor prostitutes are forced to work on cold and dangerous streets while members of our community walk around wearing *nouveau pauvre (New Poor)* buttons.[26]

In addition to renouncing middle-class norms, comforts, and work in the name of feminism; critiques of education and academia also began surfacing. This is counterintuitive considering, as this thesis has demonstrated throughout, the interrelated nature of the women's movement, feminism, and education. This irony was lost on many white middle-class feminists, but it was certainly felt by more marginalized feminists. After attending a workshop at a Women's Studies conference, Sand critiqued:

> This workshop, as a whole, spoke to the anti-academic tone of the women's movement that has concerned me for some time. This tone reflects, too often, the middle class make-up of the feminist movement to date. Certainly it is easier to denigrate a privilege you were expected to embrace, but for working class people, women, and people of colour, higher education is often the ticket out of limited opportunity. Academia must be broadened and enriched rather than dismissed as elitist and irrelevant.[27]

Examining the politic of downward mobility at this time offers insight into how feminist politics could be insensitive to class difference. The erasure of class differences between women made middle-class women comfortable encroaching on resources that were meant for more marginalized women while criticizing the attempts of working-class feminists to increase their security.

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[26]Cy-Thea Sand, "Getting Clearer on Class Issues," *Kinesis* (Vancouver: Vancouver Status of Women), November 1, 1985, 27.
[27]Cy-Thea Sand, "A Report on the National Women's Studies Association Conference, Humbolt State University, Aroata, California, held June 16-20, 1982," *Kinesis* (Vancouver: Vancouver Status of Women) September 1, 1982, 18.

Downward mobility as a politic is a more potent example of how classism could be embedded in feminist politics. Politics around sex was another area where class difference emerged, though its manifestations were more subtle and difficult to pin down.

Class, Feminism, and the Politics of Sex

An interesting manifestation of class difference surfaced in conversations around sex and sexuality. Similar to other trends discussed in this thesis, interviewees shared political overlap with their middle-class counterparts in regard to sexuality, yet elements of their experience were also shaped by their class backgrounds. The final section of this chapter looks at a complex interweaving of lesbian sexuality, feminist politics, and working-classness.

Debates about what constituted a feminist sexuality were polarizing and contentious. These debates raged from the late 1970s into the 1980s in a period referred to as 'the sex wars,' in which feminists attempted to establish what would be considered proper sexual identity, conduct, and fantasy across a range of topics including sadomasochism (S/M), butch/fem, sex work, pornography, and bisexuality. Radical and lesbian feminists frequently took the position that sexuality was a core pillar of women's oppression, and were therefore critical of any sexual acts involving intentional power imbalances, gender roles, or for some feminists on the more radical end of the spectrum, even sex that involved men or penetration.[28] Broadly speaking, radical feminist thinking valorized lesbianism and egalitarian relationships and sex acts, suggesting that sexual activity outside of those parameters was influenced by oppressive social conditioning. In her 1976 book *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics,* leading radical feminist writer and thinker Andrea Dworkin wrote:

> All forms of dominance and submission, whether it be man over woman, white over black, boss over worker, rich over poor, are tied *irrevocably* to the sexual identities of

[28]Many of the stances of various radical and lesbian feminist thinkers are compiled in the book: Robin Ruth Linden et al. eds., *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis* (Palo Alto: Frog In The Well, 1982).

> men and are derived from the male sexual model. Once we grasp this, it becomes clear that *in fact* men own the sex act, the language which describes sex, the women whom they objectify. Men have written the scenario for any sexual fantasy you have ever had or any sexual act you have ever engaged in.[29]

This argument captured the essence of the sex-critical arguments and demonstrates some of its limitations. Particularly, this argument suggested that all forms of "dominance and submission" stem from gender, which was a common conceptualization of power/oppression among middle-class and white feminists. This chapter has already demonstrated that this kind of feminist logic minimized and erased other forms of structural power, and therefore ignored how women could benefit from and oppress through such structures. It is, therefore, not surprising that some interviewees' reflections on sex and sexuality indicated that they differed from their middle-class counterparts, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The other side of the sex wars saw pro-sex and anti-censorship feminists and lesbians express concerns over social and state regulation of women's sexuality (as well as sexuality in general). These activists resisted legacies of sex negativity inherited from medicine/psychiatry, Christianity, law etc., and challenged the idea that sexuality is innate. One of the earliest proponents of anti-censorship feminism was Gayle Rubin, who warned about the dangers of increased state regulation of sexuality, cautioning that regulation has historically been weaponized against already marginalized people.[30] Rubin called for renewed systems of sexual ethics and politics that would not reproduce sex negativity or increased state regulation:

> [Western] sexual morality has more in common with ideologies of racism than with true ethics. It grants virtue to the dominant groups, and relegates vice to the underprivileged. A democratic morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity and

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[29]Andrea Dworkin, *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). Emphasis in original.

[30]Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Deviations: a Gayle Rubin Reader,* 131-187 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Originally presented at Barnard College (New York) in 1982 at the Barnard Sexuality Conference.

> quality of the pleasures they provide. Whether sex acts are gay or straight, coupled or in groups, naked or in underwear, commercial or free, with or without video should not be ethical concerns.[31]

The formulation of sexual ethics put forward by anti-censorship feminists was more sensitive to differences among women. This politic could better accommodate consideration of class in conversations about sexuality; however, the women I interviewed certainly did not align with elements of the pro-sex stance. For example, the resistance to butch/fem many interviewees held is more aligned with a radical feminist analysis of sexuality than a pro-sex one. A quote from Jane shows a clear comparison between how she felt around working-class butch/fem lesbians versus women in the lesbian feminist community:

> I was always really stimulated by the intelligence of the women in [the feminist] community at that time which was very different than the few lesbians I met toward the end of my time with my first partner and this is a class statement actually. They were working class and they were in roles and I remember going out to visit her with her new partner and there was this other couple there and they had puppies and they were calling themselves mommy and daddy to the puppies and [...] I couldn't get over a woman calling herself daddy. It just, and they had motorcycles. So, I was fascinated on one hand, but it wasn't the same. It wasn't the level of…I didn't have the intellectual interest that I had in the feminist community.[32]

This quote revisits the complex and ongoing thread of education, politics, and class that surfaced in Chapter One, which is not lost on Jane who specifically pointed out that her statement is a classed one. Although Sand also took issue with butch/fem, she was also able to recognize that many of the debated topics of the sex wars were classed. She reflected on a feminist bookstore banning work on BDSM:

> The Vancouver women's bookstore, they banned Coming to Power.[33] Do you know about that book? [...] that book was banned at the women's bookstore. And I went to hear

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[31]Ibid., 154.
[32]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[33]Samois, *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*, (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1982). Originally, this book was self-published by Samois in 1981. This book is a collection of pictures, graphics, and writing on lesbian BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism) edited and published by the lesbian BDSM group Samois. Samois was founded by Gayle Rubin as well as Patrick Califia who was a contributor to *Coming to*

> [Patrick Califia] talk in Seattle and there were women lined up as you walked in the college door with candles. God, that's a whole other thing I haven't thought about for years, the sex wars. Oh my God. and a lot of that was class-based for sure.[34]

Sand is not alone in her understanding of the feminist sex wars as a classed phenomenon.

Esther Newton and Shirley Walton who both lived through that time period, argued that "the sexual significance of middle-class predominance in the [feminist] movement is that, historically, the middle class and the upwardly mobile working class have tended to be anti-sexual and anti-difference."[35] This meant that sexual norms, behaviours or identities historically associated with the working class were subject to ridicule and more middle-class norms around sex became enshrined in what was considered 'proper' feminist sexuality. This is supported by anecdotes of many working-class lesbians who were invested in butch/fem. For example, fem lesbian Dorothy Allison actually founded a group in 1981 in New York, called the Lesbian Sex Mafia to address these kinds of frustrations and discuss sex.[36] Of the group, she said "we chose a deliberately provocative name and concentrated on attracting members whose primary sexual orientation was s/m, butch/femme, fetish specific, or otherwise politically incorrect. We drew more women from the lesbian bars than the feminist movement."[37] Similarly, Joan Nestle recalled that she "quickly got the message in [her] first Lesbian-feminist CR [consciousness raising] group that such topics as butch/fem relationships and the use of dildos were lower class."[38] While these fem lesbians fell sharply on the pro-sex and anti-censorship side of the sex wars, interviewees for this thesis cannot be quite so easily placed.

Power and an editor of its sequel *The Second Coming: A Leatherdyke Reader,* eds. Patrick Califia and Robin Sweeney (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1996).

[34]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.

[35]Esther Newton and Shirley Walton, "The Misunderstanding: Toward a More Precise Sexual Vocabulary," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carol Vance (London: Pandora Press, 1992), 248.

[36]Dorothy Allison, *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1994), 105-108.

[37]Ibid., 106.

[38]Nestle Joan, "Butch-Fem Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s," *Heresies* 12 (1981): 24.

While there were certainly pitfalls in feminist analyses around class and sexuality, the interviewees also felt that the feminist movement positively contributed to their understanding of their sexuality, both in general and specifically in regard to their lesbianism. As the previous chapter demonstrated, many women experienced their lesbianism and feminism as deeply intertwined. For example, even Arbour, who is previously quoted saying that feminism was an ideology while sexuality was innate, admitted that:

> lesbian without feminism was, you know, hard to relate to [...] I mean, I could relate to it on a personal [level] it's like, yes, I'm a lesbian, I love women and my partner's a woman and we sleep together and I don't need to talk to you about anything else.[39]

Sand and Smith actually understood their sexual awakening to women as related to their feminist political awakening. Smith clearly articulated how she experienced her interest in women and feminism in tandem:

> But it was not only physically, you know, what was happening in my body, but there were women mentally, it was like women came that were politically fascinating and exciting and stimulating. I mean, my mind was as stimulated as my body, perhaps even more, well, you know, equally. It was just amazing. [...] And I just got very involved in the women's movement right away. I remember I lived near, there was a lesbian drop-in in the basement, I think, of the Vancouver Status of Women.[40]

Sims' echoed a nearly identical experience:

> I think, for me, it's just that they're joined, like to me, it happened at the same time. And it wasn't really like a conscious, 'oh, I'm now a feminist, so let's be a lesbian too.' It was just right. I'm outing myself as a lesbian and a feminist and growing in my, you know, understanding of feminism and activism at the same time.[41]

Sand shared a similar sentiment, but she also expressed feeling that feminism helped reveal women's sexual potential which was otherwise clouded by patriarchy:

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[39]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 5, 2022, Victoria.
[40]Diana Smith, interviewed by Morgan Watson, January 19, 2022, Victoria.
[41]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.

> You know, it was such an awakening, a sexual awakening, a political, an intellectual awakening because I think this is what they're hiding from women. This kind of power, this kind of connection between women.[42]

She noted these shifts were occurring for many women at that time and likened the experience to a second youth:

> And, you know, of course, a lot of us were just discovering that sexuality that had been… you know, like women left husbands and, you know, women felt like, 'Oh my God' you know, it was like teenagers, all of over again, like discovering sexuality.[43]

Understanding, or relating to, lesbianism through a feminist lens was certainly reflective of broad political trends at the time. "Feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice" was a popular mantra.[44] As liberating as elements of this politic may have been, others also remembered it as restrictive (or prescriptive) in ways that felt distinctly classed and even puritanical. When asked about class and sexuality, Fox was surprised to recollect that most of her partners had been working class also:

> When I think about it, you know, I hadn't really thought about this, but just about every girlfriend I've had has, and especially the longer-term relationships, but even the short ones, really, almost every one of those women is also working class.[45]

While Fox said that being working class was certainly not a prerequisite she held for partners, she did note a difference in the way working and middle-class lesbians approached sex:

> Well, I don't think I ever thought, you know, I didn't have a checklist. People had to adhere to, by any means. I was just working on physical attraction most of the time, especially in my twenties, my God we were very busy, I will say. Uh, especially if, you know, if you're not coming from a repressed background, speaking of other benefits to being working-class, you don't come from a repressed background.[46]

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[42]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Margaret Hillyard Little, "Women's Sexuality: On the socialist feminist road to discovery," *Problematique*, no. 1, (1991): 88.
[45]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 12, 2021, Victoria.
[46]Ibid.

The idea that working-class women had a more relaxed relationship to sexuality was also shared by Sand, who recalled:

> Well one thing I noticed is that the working-class gals were a bit more raucous and out about sexuality and talking about sexuality. I found a lot of the middle-class women. [...] I've often been told to quiet down, right. To not be so passionate. That's what, that's one of the things I've learned about passion versus reasoned argument which I think is very much a middle-class framework, or I shouldn't say middle- a class framework [...] So, you know what I'm saying? Like, there's a difference. Now I also have to put this in perspective. I was drinking at the time. So I have a tendency to lecture when I was drinking and you know, be flirtatious, all that stuff cause my group was at that point, most of us were working class.[47]

Even outside of the realm of sexuality, Fox said she has found that "working-class people maybe generally are a little more comfortable being loud."[48] Sand suggested that the emergence of the feminist sex wars made the class differences in sexuality more pronounced:

> A lot of that stuff about S and M and sexuality, I think harkens back to what I said earlier about my own experience. Now, some people argue that I'm like this because I grew up in Quebec, which is a very expressive culture, but because I talked a lot and freely about sexuality, when the sex wars happened, you know, people were very uncomfortable, but I think [...] to me it hearkens back to working-class people, or let's say working-class lesbian feminists, talked more freely about sexuality. And there was kind of a tight-assedness about some middle-class people. So once, you know and a lot in my experience, some middle-class lesbians had to get drunk before they could really enjoy sex. And so, this idea of puritanism, I didn't experience that growing up.[49]

Sand and Fox's arguments that working-class lesbian-feminists could have more relaxed and comfortable attitudes towards sexuality is epitomized in reviews given by Fox in the Toronto feminist newsletter *The Other Woman.* Reviewing the lesbian sex manual *Loving Women,* Fox offers candid and graphic discussions and descriptions about sex, and pushes against some feminist conventions. She wrote that "many of us are just recovering from insisting that our

[47]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.
[48]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 12, 2021, Victoria.
[49]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.

sexuality -even in fantasy- be politically correct."[50] She critiques *Loving Women* for lacking discussion about group sex saying its omission "could be considered downright puritanical by some."[51] However, she also credits the book for shifting her perception about dildos from being "anathema to the 'liberated' lesbian" to being "objects that could enhance pleasure."[52] She admits to enjoying the erotica in the manual so much that she suggests the *The Other Woman* should start a pornography page in their newsletter.[53]

Fox wrote this review in 1976, during a decade in which, according to Ross, "openly talking about the use of dildoes was especially incorrect."[54] For example, Ross cites a Vancouver lesbian who recalled the feminist disavowal of penetrative sex: "well-read girls knew that fucking was a vestige of the hetero-patriarchal power structure. Women, we all knew, came by clitoral not vaginal stimulation.[55] Considering the matrix of class, education and politics this thesis has been highlighting, the possible implications of "well-read" are clear.

The interviewees for this project who spoke more explicitly about sexuality discussed gender, lesbianism, and class. In the context of the sex wars, class is cited as a fissure between feminists. However, the cultural norms alluded to are more than just classed. By conducting an analysis on the Vancouver Status of Women and *Kinesis'* stances on pornography and sex work in the 1980s, Emma McKenna argues "that race and class privilege pervaded the way in which white, middle-class norms of sexuality and bodily integrity were reproduced in feminist

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[50]Chris Fox, "How to Handle a Woman: Two Reviews by Chris Fox," *The Other Woman,* March 1976: 21. Note: Fox did not choose this title and complained that it was sexist to the editors in the following issue. The manual referenced is: The Nomadic Sisters, *Loving Women* (Sonora: The Nomadic Sisters, 1975).
[51]Ibid., 21.
[52]Ibid., 21.
[53]Ibid., 21.
[54]Ross, *The House That Jill Built,* 129.
[55]Ibid., 130.

discourses of prostitution and pornography."[56] McKenna, similar to Sand, is implicating the cultural differences that accompany different class backgrounds in the context of the sex wars.

White and middle-class cultural norms being ensconced in feminist politics and presented as universal and neutral facts about women (and sexism) have been critiqued by feminists belonging to class, ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities. Patrick Califia argues that ideas about sexuality amongst antipornography feminists are steeped in traditional (white and middle-class) views of women's sexuality "including the belief that women do not enjoy pornography, casual sex, genital sex, or sex outside the context of a romantic relationship."[57] He satirically critiques this "ideal" image of women's sexuality:

> As I understand it, after the wimmin's revolution sex will consist of wimmin holding hands, taking off their shirts, and dancing in a circle. Then we will all fall asleep at exactly the same moment. If we didn't fall asleep, something else might happen — something male-identified, objectifying, pornographic, noisy, and undignified. Something like an orgasm."[58]

In addition to discussing sexuality and gender, Amber Hollibaugh and Cherríe Moraga locate class and race in feminist conversations around sex. As working-class, butch and fem lesbians, one of whom is Chicana and the other white, they agreed that "in a movement largely controlled by white middle-class women the values of their cultures (which may be more closely tied to an American-assimilated puritanism) have been pushed down our throats."[59] For Hollibaugh and Moraga this is the answer to the rhetorical question they conclude their chapter with: "Why is it

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[56]Emma McKenna, "The Labour Feminism Takes: Tracing Intersectional Politics in 1980s Canadian Feminist Periodicals" (PhD diss, McMaster University, 2019), 153.
[57]Patrick Califia, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex* (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1994), 111.
[58]Ibid., 161.
[59]Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga, "What We're Rollin' Around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism, A Conversation Towards Ending Them," in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader,* ed. Joan Nestle (Alyson Publication, 1992), 253.

that it is largely white middle-class women who form the visible leadership in the antiporn movement."[60]

American scholar and Black feminist, bell hooks, discusses the importance of "cultural codes" and the difficulty of "recogniz[ing] that a behaviour pattern in one culture may be unacceptable in another, that it may have different signification cross-culturally."[61] hooks recalls cross-cultural interactions in her classes in which white women felt they were experiencing "hostility and aggression" from classmates because "white, middle-class females[...] had been taught to identify loud and direct speech with anger."[62] The other students, who were predominantly Black women, characterized the same interactions as "playful teasing and affectionate expressions."[63] While hooks was able to mediate conversations about these differences in a fruitful way in her class, in broader feminist organizing and politics where middle-class, white women hold disproportionate amounts of power, these sorts of encoded cultural norms were enshrined prejudices that were often invisible (perhaps wilfully so) to those who held them. In a Canadian context, Lynne Marks has examined similar dynamics in her work on antisemitism within Canadian feminist organizing in the 1970s and 1980s by demonstrating that Jewish feminists were characterized or stereotyped as "pushy" by their white, gentile counterparts.[64] One Vancouver-based Jewish feminist Marks interviewed said:

> You know, [other feminists would say] well, we're uncomfortable around you because in their opinion, I have a personality that is abrasive. When really what I have is I have a culture that they're uncomfortable with. And I think if I were to say to those people that you don't get it because I'm Jewish, they'd be mystified.[65]

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[60]Ibid., 253.
[61]hooks, bell, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 58.
[62]Ibid., 58.
[63]Ibid., 58.
[64]Lynne Marks,"'Pushy Jewish Feminists' in the Canadian Women's Movement, 1960s-1990s," paper presented at "Feminist Provacateur: Conference in Honour of Franca Iacovetta," October 2022, Toronto.
[65]Ibid., Tsvia (pseudonym) interviewed by Lynne Marks.

Ruth Dworin, a Jewish lesbian interviewed by Ross in *The House That Jill Built,* made similar remarks, saying "I came from a culture that valued assertiveness […] but when I spoke up around LOOT in the seventies, I was branded as pushy" which she partly attributes to covert antisemitism.[66] These examples show how feminists sitting at privileged intersections can enshrine their cultural norms by assuming they are universally applicable, and then enforce them in ways that are harmful. Marks concludes that the trope of "pushy Jewish women" was not only harmful to Jewish feminists but also "to many others who did not fit the middle-class WASP norm that has existed within Canadian feminism."[67]

Another dynamic that emerged in feminist communities during this time was women taking on a lesbian feminist identity to situate themselves politically who may not have been romantically or sexually involved with women. In the radical feminist discourse of the 1970s and especially into the early 1980s, "lesbian feminists asserted that lesbianism [was] not simply a sexual practice but a way of life and political struggle - a challenge to the institution of heterosexuality."[68] In this formulation, women could identify with lesbianism politically regardless of their sexual inclinations. Several interviewees shared memories pertaining to political lesbianism in Vancouver such as Smith who recalled a political lesbian that she knew:

> I remember one woman she ended up being with men but she called herself a lesbian. I mean, politically, she was a lesbian, [...] she didn't have any relationships when I knew her, then later she was involved with a man. But she called herself a lesbian.[69]

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[66]Ruth Dworin interviewed in Ross, *The House That Jill Built,* 102.
[67]Marks, "Pushy Jewish Women."
[68]Diane Richardson, "Constructing Lesbian Sexualities," in *Modern Homosexualities: Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experiences,* ed. Ken Plummer (Routledge, New York, 1992), 194. For more background on the historical origins of political lesbianism, see Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence (1980)," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 3 (2003): 11–48.
[69]Diana Smith, interviewed by Morgan Watson, January 19, 2022, Victoria.

Jane noted that "in those days there were a lot of women who were out for a few years then not."[70] The difference between women who took up lesbianism politically versus women who had a lesbian sexual orientation (especially from a young age) was felt acutely by Arbour:

> I don't like to give too much of myself to people. I don't know. And I was just thinking, I was just ruminating earlier today about it thinking, 'oh, that's my protection from… forever.' You know, because I'm a lesbian; because when I was a tiny little, little thing, I was nonconforming. So, I had to protect myself 'cause I felt like I was always getting shit thrown at me or just simply disapproval or 'please be different.' And so there was that kind of protection. And so, what I was thinking, how this relates is that most of my lesbian friends didn't grow up like that. [...It was] a decision, a choice: 'Okay I'm gonna be like this now.' Right? Or, I mean, I'm not, -it's not a judgment- or they found out that they are like this, you know?[71]

The difference between lesbianism as a sexuality and lesbianism as a politic was also felt by Sand who clearly recalled the phenomenon of political lesbianism:

> There were lesbians who came out politically. They weren't necessarily sleeping with men, they might have been more celibate, right? The people I'm thinking of I can't think of specifically [...] but I know it existed at the time that they wouldn't be in a sexual relationship with a woman and I'm not sure they were really that open to that, but they weren't interested in sleeping with the enemy either. And so, they call themselves lesbians and could be accepted as lesbians to a certain degree. But yeah, I was always more comfortable with people actually, you know, did also sleep with women.[72]

For Dorothy Allison, the emergence of the political lesbian was problematic, and although she did not explicitly name it, her critique reads as informed by class. She mentioned how the "theoretical lesbian" was conceptualized as an "advanced feminist, [a] rare and special being endowed with social insight and political grace."[73] As far as sex was concerned, Allison argued that:

> Political lesbians made the concept of lust, sexual need, and passionate desire more and more detached from the definitions of lesbian. The notion that lesbians might actually be

[70]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[71]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2022, Victoria.
[72]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.
[73]Dorothy Allison, *Skin*, 141.

> invested in having orgasms with other lesbians, that lesbians might like to fuck and suck and screw around as much as gay men or heterosexuals, became anathema.[74]

Considering the cultural norms enshrined in "proper" feminist sexuality which this chapter has already discussed, it follows suit that political lesbianism would be susceptible to similar pitfalls.

Ironically, while it was possible to be a lesbian in a political sense which could be a desexualized concept, there were still expectations as to what proper or good sex looked like which, again, could be linked to class values. Radical feminist ideas of proper sex were broadly outlined above, though Sand recalled a more specific example in Vancouver and how she would resist this notion:

> The Vancouver women's bookstore started having a lesbian discussion group. [...] one thing I do remember is that a lesbian at that point -so this is the women's bookstore, mid-seventies, '74- around this time the best lesbian or the lesbian who had more kudos was one who had never slept with men. That was very strong. And so, I would speak out and I would go -cause I was really into sex- so I would speak out and I'd say, 'wait a minute, I had good sex with men. I never felt oppressed.' Or I said, 'It was not that I was dominant, but I certainly felt equal.' And before I came out with Linda, you know, I had sex with men.[75]

Anxieties around what constituted a feminist sexuality were laced with middle-class sexual sensibilities. On the one hand, these formulations did not align with the way interviewees understood their lesbianism or their sexualities more broadly, a rift which was articulated as classed. On the other hand, interviewees found that feminist politics were inextricably linked to their lesbianism and did share some ideological overlap with middle-class feminists, even on issues that were central in the debates on sex (such as butch/fem).

Interpersonal Classism

Understanding the inherent erasure of class difference in the feminist politics of downward mobility and the sex wars is core to understanding how and why the working-class

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[74]Ibid., 140.
[75]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.

cohort I interviewed experienced classism. However, an exploration of politics alone does not capture all of the ways that classism manifested in these women's lives. Classism also surfaced in interpersonal relationships, both platonic and romantic. Examining classism in more personal areas of women's lives is significant, as the erasure of class through the development of particular feminist politics is more covert, while classism surfaced more overtly in interpersonal relationships. Incidents of more (inter)personal classism demonstrate that classism was not only a structural by-product of narrow politics and dogma, but also the result of pejorative and stereotypical ideas that middle-class feminists held about working-class people.

Many middle-class feminists displayed shock or disbelief when they realized women they found to be intelligent were also working-class. Some of the interviewees for this project were on the receiving end of such reactions. Jane and Chris provided a few examples of such reactions. Jane, for example, shared:

> I remember in this group, that I talked about just being utterly shocked at the background of the other members of this group and that people said things that they didn't mean to be insulting, but they were. Like, 'you're really smart considering where you come from.' Or 'I've never known anybody who lived the way you describe.' For a period of time as a child, we didn't have running water and electricity and all of those things and so the comments were interesting sometimes.[76]

Assumptions that working-class people were "not capable of intellectual thought [and] don't read" was also something Chris experienced to the point where Chris was met with disbelief about her background.[77] "I didn't like having to convince people I was working class," Chris explained, "Why have I had to convince people that are supposed to be on the same side as me?"[78] Sometimes the disbelief could also show up in less direct ways, such as Jane being met with laughter when she articulated feeling a similarity to other working-class women:

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[76]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[77]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 12, 2021, Victoria.
[78]Ibid.

> Here's a little story: when we were organizing getting women from different constituencies in the province there was a women's center in Coquitlam. It was very working class but they were women who were, you know, they had funding of some sort, and they were really trying to work on women's issues and Coquitlam was pretty working class back then. And I remember being in a meeting after meeting and people were saying, 'aren't they interesting? You know, these Coquitlam women, they're doing some pretty good work.' And I said, 'I relate more to them than I do to you.' And I wasn't really clear what I meant, but then it became clear to me that I was talking about class and everybody thought I'd made a joke and they laughed. And I thought, 'Oh, okay. They, they don't get it and clearly I'm passing.' I was quiet a lot too but if I didn't say anything, I passed as being like them.[79]

While Sand did not give any examples of middle-class women expressing disbelief at her background, she did find people were critical of her working-class partners. She remembered a friend who was "shocked at the dissonance" between how Sand "presented as articulate and as a writer" while she was with someone "who worked [at] the plant with men."[80] Sand felt that people's reactions insinuated that she was not "with [her] own kind."[81] Although Sand was hurt by such sentiments, she did not feel she had the language to push back:

> When I met [my friend] again in Vancouver, I was with [my partner] who was very working class, right? And she would put [my partner] down. And put me down for being with such a non-intellectual woman and 'what the hell are you doing?' And I realize now, Morgan, that I took it. Yeah, I took it. Like, I didn't have the language to… I just looked at her and kind of smiled and I think, oh my God it was awful.[82]

While Sand found that middle-class feminists were classist towards her partners, other interviewees were partners with middle-class feminists. In fact, Arbour felt that being in a relationship with a middle-class woman was part of what initiated her class awareness:

> And in fact, that's probably when I started learning about it. There were some assumptions [...] but that's probably when it kind of all came to the front for me is like, 'oh, what, whoa.' You know, like, 'what is this about?' So she made assumptions. She made assumptions about my parents, but I can't remember exactly what they were.[83]

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[79]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[80]Ibid.
[81]Ibid.
[82]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.
[83]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2022, Victoria.

Arbour suggests that this partner was actually attempting to be aware of class and how it impacted them both but her attempts to do so were unsuccessful:

> Well, and she really noticed class, you know, like it was important to her. But it was important to, in a way, it was important to her to not be, to not have it as a thing. I'm not saying that right. But it was important for her to be conscious of class, in a positive way. But how it came through… like hurtful, you know?[84]

Jane also felt like class difference showed up in her relationships with middle-class women, particularly when they tried to live together:

> When I was in a relationship and started talking about my background it was hard work, hard going to try and get through that. And also living together, you bring a really a different set of expectations to what your needs are or the way you want to live, etcetera.[85]

Sims' shared a similar reflection about relationships across differences and how sometimes discrepancies in values could emerge later:

> I use to often hear, you know, 'colour doesn't matter to me,' right? Which, I appreciate people like, love knows no colour, right, that's true. But I think sometimes in conversation and on issues, when you start talking about it, you kind of think, 'Oh, well our values aren't actually meshing very well.' Attractiveness is one thing. But then when you get into talking about things that make your relationship last it then goes to other things [...] Not like [when] dating, but, you know, as you started to [think] about moving in or did move in and then…[86]

While sharing space could bring class discrepancies forward in romantic relationships, this was also true in organizational settings. Working-class women were confronted with classed dynamics around divisions of labour:

> I worked in a place for a while. It was a women's organization, and it was really bad with hygiene. There were dirty coffee cups that sat there from one month to the next and one day we came in and there was a drowned mouse in one. [...] and a couple of us had a conversation, another working-class woman and myself, and she said, 'you know what, it'll be one of [us] that cleans this up, that our tolerance level will finally, you know, we'll

[84]Marsha Arbour, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 15, 2022, Victoria.
[85]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[86]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, October 28, 2021, Victoria.

> come in one day and we'll just be so intolerant of the mess that we'll clean up the kitchen we'll wash the cup, etcetera. They won't.' And she was right.[87]

While the above quote demonstrates classism experienced by women who belonged to a feminist group, the following two quotes show classism directed at working-class or poor women who were external to feminist groups. The upcoming quotes demonstrate how classism may have deterred or barred women from spaces or organizations on the basis of class. For example, Chris said:

> I remember I had made some sort of suggestion at a meeting and I can't remember what the suggestion was anymore, but I remember the response cause I was so horrified, but one of the women said, 'well, we don't want to attract a lot of like welfare women.' And you know, one of the women I had just been having an affair with was a welfare woman. Anyway, I was just so offended that somebody would say that.[88]

Sand recalled a good example which occurred later in the 1980s:

> there was this really great working-class woman in Vancouver from Ireland. [...], I was the one encouraging people, women formed this working-class writing group and I wanted all of them, of course, to write right for the issue. And Dory wrote this wonderful piece. So, I would look at it, then I would send it off to Toronto and they, um, they sensitive, they know her, her writing, you know, has grammar and spelling, mistakes, all that sort of stuff. And they didn't like her style. So, when I talked to Dory, it was very sensitive that she, and I said, uh, I said, could we just alter a little bit? And she was furious. Yeah, she just walked away from the project and said, 'I don't want those middle-class white women in Toronto saying how I should write.' And that was really powerful.[89]

Here, Sand is reflecting on gathering writing for a working-class edition of the feminist journal *Fireweed* which was published in 1987. While it falls outside the timeframe for this thesis, it is a strong example of the kinds of classism that arose, and is representative of the types of dynamics that working-class lesbians found themselves in.

<u>Conclusion:</u>

[87]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[88]Chris Fox, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 12, 2021, Victoria.
[89]Cy-Thea Sand, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 13, 2021, Victoria.

As feminist organizing started to break down around class and race lines in the 1980s, Jane helped form an informal working-class group of about eight women. They "met once or twice a month to talk about what our issues were and what was understood or not understood in the larger feminist, lesbian-feminist community."[90] Jane reflected on common themes:

> We felt silenced about our own experience. We felt, I think a lot of us felt really, um, I don't wanna use the word duped, but you know, you would start out for feeling like you're all, you've got a lot of really important similarities and then discover that you actually don't. That, you know, it's one thing to live communally and do all this stuff, if it's a choice so that word [choice] came up a lot.[91]

These trends identified by Jane are central to my analyses in this chapter. The white and middle-class contingents of the lesbian-feminist community frequently prioritized gender over other intersections, and centred their frameworks around particular (white and middle-class) manifestations of gendered oppression. In doing so, they uncritically embedded their own cultural norms and ideas about gender into their politics which were exclusionary to women from marginalized class, race, and ethnic groups. Interviewees' reflections on the lesbian-feminist politics pertaining to downward mobility and sexuality served as entry points into examining how classism, and, in Sims' case, also racism, surfaced in lesbian-feminist community. All from working-class backgrounds, but each with unique memories and conceptualizations of their experiences, the interviewees were able to speak to a variety of ways that classism appeared in their feminist community. Together, their testimonies offer a constellation of evidence that in many ways aligns with fragments of other primary sources and scholarship that focus on class, race, and culture in feminist politics in the 1970s and 1980s.

However, as previous chapters demonstrated, the interviewees are complex in their class location. Political and formal education, upward mobility and strong involvement with the

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[90]Jane, interviewed by Morgan Watson, November 19, 2021, Victoria.
[91]Ibid.

feminist community meant that interviewees did not outright reject all classist elements of feminist sexuality politics. Chapter One's discussion on butch/fem is an excellent example of such a contradiction. Further, many of the women understood their lesbianism as deeply connected to their feminism or even experienced their feminist and lesbian awakenings simultaneously.

Jane recalls that in her working-class feminist group, "we all admitted that our lives had been really enriched, despite the fact that we weren't seen in some really important ways, we were also really enriched by this experience."[92] When I asked her where she personally received strength and inspiration from during that period she responded "Interestingly enough, from the feminist community. Even if they didn't get class, they got something that was so fundamentally important to me. And they were bright women. They were really smart."[93] The strong sense of pride and identification with the lesbian-feminist community in Vancouver is part of what makes these interviewees' class and political locations convoluted; it is also what makes their experiences of classism in that context so poignant.

During interviews, the simultaneous frustrations and love for the lesbian-feminist community, and politics thereof, were striking. There is a strong sense that being from a working-class background was pivotal to these women's understanding of themselves and their relationship to their community, including the hurt and frustrations born of classism. There was an equally strong sense that these women were proud of their feminism and their political contributions to the movement. Sims offered a perfect synopsis:

> Vancouver was pretty, you know, I think when something is really new, like the whole liberation movement, there's a kind of energy that happens. And so that energy is just all about organizing, making things better, you know, doing things different and just getting on with it. And I feel very much that it was just, you know, about doing what needed to

[92]Ibid.
[93]Ibid.

be done. And there was really great energy amongst everybody, regardless of class, at least the folks that I worked with, the women and lesbians that I worked with. I can understand why some of the other interviewees that you spoke to talked about, you know, frustrations of organizing in that context. But, I would think that if they look that, that they would all say, 'yeah, we got some good things done at the same time.'[94]

[94]Mary-Woo Sims, interviewed by Morgan Watson, February 3, 2022, Victoria.

Conclusion

Historical scholarship that centres on working-class lesbians and bar culture focus on the decades leading up to 1970. In the 1970s, there is a shift to focusing on political movements and the communities that developed around them, which were more middle-class. The result is that there is minimal temporal or thematic overlap between two bodies of scholarship on lesbians in Canada. I offered two interventions into this issue, focusing my work on the 1970s and early 1980s. First, my arguments worked to connect pre- and post-1969 lesbian history in Canada demonstrating some continuity, which has been largely (dis)missed in prior scholarship. Second, my work drew primarily from oral history interviews I conducted with lesbians from working-class backgrounds, thereby centring their experiences and resisting the predominant middle-class focus of previous work.

Chapter One was primarily devoted to the first intervention: creating bridges between scholarship before and after 1970. To do this, I outlined significant trends in working-class lesbian scholarship from prior to 1970, and collected evidence that those trends were ongoing in some capacity well into the 1970s. However, a complexity quicky emerged in this chapter as the women I interviewed often found community in mixed and middle-class spaces and not necessarily in quintessential working-class spaces. This also revealed that most interviewees were not interested in, or even took issue with, some elements of working-class lesbian culture such as butch/fem roles. Ultimately, Chapter One revealed that, while there were trends in working-class lesbian life in the 1970s that reflected scholarship on decades prior, the interviewees were not necessarily a part of them. The reason they cited for this was their involvement in feminist community and politics. Through discussing these differences, a complicated interplay between politics and class emerged.

Chapter Two contributed to both interventions, as it was focused on the experiences of the interviewees after 1970 but still worked to make connections with pre-1970 scholarship. As was clear from the previous chapter, politics were of central importance to these women's lives and were connected to their understanding of themselves as lesbians. As the cultural trends from working-class lesbian scholarship explored in Chapter One were not very useful in contextualizing the interviewees, Chapter Two explores what was important to them. This resulted in exploring how interviewees navigated politics within the New Left before emerging into feminist community in Vancouver, where some broad dynamics around class and sexuality were also explored. In addition to outlining their political journeys, Chapter Two also outlines their relationship to education to examine the upward mobility which all the interviewees experienced to varying degrees.

I found that upward mobility, in addition to feminist politics, may have contributed to the interviewees' partial removal from working-class culture. Further, I argue that their politics, education, and upward mobility are not separate but are, in fact, interrelated. I connect the interviewees liminal relationships to class to discussions about upward mobility in other scholarship on working-class lesbians, though I complicate the phenomenon more. I found this complication necessary as the scholar who wrote the most on upwardly mobility, Cameron Duder, did not consider how a working-class background might influence lesbians' lives even if they experience a shift in class. Throughout the chapter, interviewees remarked on still feeling the impact of their working-class backgrounds. I returned to this point at the conclusion of the chapter, drawing on interviewees' reflections of how internalized classism or class difference showed up for them as they entered more middle-class spaces.

Chapter Three, building on the concluding thoughts of Chapter Two, is devoted entirely to examining how the interviewees experienced class difference and classism in the lesbian-feminist community in Vancouver. I examined several trends in lesbian-feminist politics that were identified by interviewees as classist, including the idea that women were a class, the politics of downward mobility, and politics around sex and sexuality. There were many examples given by the interviewees of middle-class cultural norms dictating feminist politics, and these anecdotes could be linked to critiques made by other working-class and/or women of colour and/or Jewish feminists in Canada and America. However, the interviewees did share some ideological overlap with their middle-class counterparts, even in political arenas deemed class-based. I cited some interviewees' distance from butch/fem, and their understandings of lesbianism and feminism being intertwined, as examples of such overlap.

Chapter Three also examines how classism was experienced in more interpersonal and overt ways. I argued the importance of recognizing that classism not only occurred through internalized classism or the unwitting classism that middle-class feminists culturally imbedded in their politics. Classism was also felt in friendships, relationships, and community, and could be rooted in negative stereotypes about working-class people. At the close of Chapter Three, I return to a point that was integral to all the interviewees, which is that lesbian-feminist politics and community were very important to them. Interviewees were proud of their contributions to the movement and felt deeply connected to feminism. While centering their working-classness in the context of lesbian-feminism meant focusing on classism in that context, it was readily apparent that interviewees also loved this community and that it was also a source of pride, connection, and strength.

This thesis put an under-studied intersection of experience into the historiography of Canadian lesbian history. At the same time, it was only the one intersection (working-class) that I was able to gather more extensive evidence for and make methodologically strong arguments about. However, in the process of research, I encountered glimpses of other worlds and experiences that are still under explored and a study of them is needed with urgency.

First and foremost, having a more diverse set of voices would not only have complicated my work, but would have offered a much greater challenge to the entire historiography of lesbian history. The women I interviewed were working-class, but they were largely involved in the lesbian and feminist scenes that have already been researched. Bisexual women, women of colour, women who remained working-class or low-income, lesbians who were not involved in feminism, and lesbian and bisexual women who were engaged in sex work, who occupied more traditional working-class spaces, and who were butch or fem are all voices that remain underrepresented. I believe women at these intersections would not only add layers of insight into the lesbian and feminist spaces that are already written about, but may also reveal entire constellations of communities and networks that are not yet in historical scholarship. Arbour identifying as butch and Sims being an Asian woman did enable me to analyze how lesbians who had different identities or existed at different intersections might experience elements of politics and community differently, but many more voices are needed to identify stronger patterns.

One trend that I would have liked to examine in a deeper way which is the relationship between racism and classism. I touch on this theme at times but was not able to offer a sustained analysis throughout. In the first chapter, scattered anecdotes and glimpses suggest that there were social circles where there may have been more working-class women and women of colour. In the final two chapters, Sims offered valuable insight into how white and/or middle-class lesbian-

feminists could not fully "see" her working-classness and her experiences as a woman of colour. She reflected specifically on how these differences might show up in community organizing and relationships. However, when examining the interplay between education, politics, class, and upward mobility, it was not evident how race may have shaped the experiences of the interviewees.

As I stated in the introduction, the fact that all the interviewees were upwardly mobile, and the majority of them were white certainly invites analysis. However, there was no way for me to make a strong analysis of how whiteness might have privileged white working-class women that was not highly speculative. I believe that the correct set of primary sources would reveal that whiteness benefitted the white interviewees, but this is an educated guess based on social theory and not on primary source material.[1]

As has been demonstrated in this thesis the women at the centre of the women's movement and lesbian feminism were largely white and middle-class. A conversation between Black lesbians and feminists, Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, reflected on "the pervasiveness of white middle class women in the feminist movement."[2] Barbara Smith critiqued downward mobility, arguing that "the arrogance some white women display about 'choosing' not to finish school," ignored the massive racial disparity in opportunities around education and occupation for Black women.[3] Further, she recalled that she knew "a lot of white women who never finished college, yet are functioning in ways that if they had been Black women would be completely

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[1]Much of the theorizing/scholarship on this topic is American-centric but is still useful in establishing broad dynamics. See Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins eds., *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology,* (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2004). A very succinct overview in this Anthology is provided in chapter 17: James Jennings and Kushnick, "Poverty as Race, Power, and Wealth," 154-157.
[2]Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister - to - Sister Dialogue," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Colour,* eds. Gloria E. Anzaldua and Cherrie L. Moraga, (Berkley: Third Woman Press, 1981), 123.
[3]Ibid., 123-124.

unavailable to them."[4] Barbara Smith later connects education to privilege and feminism arguing that, "to be involved in this women's movement, as it stands today, you have to be able to deal with 'middle-classness.' And the Black women who can take it are often the ones with educational privilege."[5] Many elements of Smith's reflections connect to trends explored throughout this thesis, though in her account race is more prominent.

The way that working-class white feminists from this thesis might fit into Smith's class/race formulation is not readily apparent. This is a murkiness that appears throughout this thesis, as many of the scholars, activists, and interviewees cited frequently place "white" and "middle-class" in tandem. Therefore, placing working-class white women into theoretical frameworks or historical trends is difficult when whiteness and middle-classness are frequently conjoined. To successfully excavate this issue would require a large and diverse source base paired with rigorous theoretical study of class/race intersections.

This history will not be robust until a larger and more diverse set of voices speak to their experiences of that era. This would not only provide a greater quantity of anecdotes, memories, and insights about individual people, but would allow researchers to map a more varied and complex social fabric, analyzing patterns of experiences and relationships between different groups of lesbian and bisexual women.

[4]Ibid., 124.
[5]Ibid., 131-132.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

1. “Jane” (Anonymous)
2. Marsha Arbour
3. Chris Fox
4. Cy-Thea Sand
5. Mary-Woo Sims
6. Diana Smith

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Basic biographical information: When and where were you born? What is your sexuality, gender, class background? Are there any other parts of you that you want me to know about such as your race/ethnicity, religion etc.? Did/do you identify as butch or fem?
2. What years were you living in Vancouver (what was your class, gender, and sexuality during this time if they were different)?
3. What did you do day-to-day during this time in your life? Where did you spend your time?
4. Were you openly lesbian? Were you out in all contexts or selectively?
5. Were you involved in any organizations/groups related to your sexuality, gender, or class background? If yes, what organizations/groups? What was that experience like? Did you find people treated you differently because of your sexuality or class?
6. Can you describe your relationship to feminism during this time? When/how did you have a feminist awakening? Did this impact your understanding of class and sexuality?
7. What were the class backgrounds of most of the lesbians (and feminists) you knew? Did your class background matter to your lovers/partners?
8. Did you ever seek or receive financial support from the government or any organizations/groups? If yes, what was the organization/group that supported you and what kind of support did you get?
9. Did you have any difficult experiences with social workers, doctors, counsellors, psychologists, or police? Do you think your class background or sexuality impacted the interaction?
10. Where did you find sources of strength and inspiration?
11. Do you know any other people who may be able to participate in this project?

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Labour and Love: experiences of working-class lesbian women in Vancouver, 1970s and early 1980s.

Funded by: Social Science Humanities Research Council

Participant: _____

Researcher: Morgan Watson, Graduate Student, History, University of Victoria (250-415-1798 - mkwatson@uvic.ca)

Supervisor: Lynne Marks, Professor, History, University of Victoria, (250-721-7392 - lsmarks@uvic.ca)

Purposes and Objectives of the Research:

- To document the experiences of working-class and low-income lesbian women in 1970s and early 1980s Vancouver.
- To understand how class and sexuality impacted lesbian women's everyday lives.
- To explore how women's sexualities and class experiences were interrelated.

This Research is Important because:

- Lesbians, women and working-class and low-income histories are not well documented.
- The relationship between class and sexuality is under-studied.

Participation:

- You have been selected for this study because you lived in Vancouver during the 1970s during which time you identified as a lesbian and you are from a working-class or low-income background.
- Participation in this project is entirely voluntary.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your position (e.g. employment, class standing] or how you will be treated)

Procedures:

- Interviews will be conducted over the phone or Zoom. These interviews will be recorded, transcribed and then analyzed for significant themes.
    - Please note that Zoom servers are located outside of Canada, and Zoom stores users' names and usage data outside of Canada. No other information is stored

outside of Canada, and recordings of Zoom meetings are not stored on Zoom servers.

- **Duration:** 1.5-2 hours
- **Location:** to be chosen by the participant
- **Inconvenience:** this process will take a few hours of time and some light correspondence.

Benefits:

- Participants will have an opportunity to make important contributions in writing the histories of understudied communities. This participation will further serve future community members and researchers who wish to learn more about the importance of class and sexuality in Canadian history.

Risks:

- Although there are no likely risks, there is a potential that the nature of the interview questions could bring up unpleasant memories or emotions.
- **How risks will be addressed:** if any issues arise the subject of discussion can be changed or the interview can be paused or stopped. If the issue persists, contact information for free local counselling will be provided.

Withdrawal of Participation:

- You may withdraw at any time without explanation or consequence.
- Should you withdraw, your data will not be used and any recordings/transcripts will be destroyed. The data will then not be used in my research or shared in any form.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

- Anonymity in this project is optional. If participants wish to remain anonymous a pseudonym will be used in lieu of their name, and any identifying information will be altered. There is a small, though unlikely, chance that, even with the use of a pseudonym, a participant could be identified through their narratives especially if someone who knew the participant read the research.
- Data will be stored on the primary researcher's password-protected computer and backup copies will be kept on a password-protected USB drive. Only the researcher and project supervisor will have full access to the data.

Research Results will be Used in the Following Ways:

- The results of the research will be presented in the researcher's Master's thesis which may be stored publicly in the University of Victoria Library or published in whole or part(s) in academic journals.

- Elements of the thesis or research may also be shared at conferences, academic meetings, writing competitions or through popular publishing (such as magazines or blogs)
- If requested, participants may receive a copy of their transcript, a summary of the research findings and access to the thesis upon its completion.

Disposal of Data:

- Data from this study will be disposed of a year after the projected completion of the thesis at which point all of the digital copies held for this project will be erased unless explicit consent of the participants is acquired.

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact the researchers using the information at the top of page 1
- Contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria, (250) 472-4545 ethics@uvic.ca

Consent:

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 researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

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

Waiving Confidentiality:

I consent to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results. _____
(Participant to provide initials)

Future Use of Data:

I **do not** consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)
I consent to be contacted in the event my data is requested for future research: _____
(Participant to provide initials)

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