

WOMEN IN CANADIAN PUBLISHING: GENDER EQUITY IN THE CANADIAN BOOK PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

BY

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UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, 2017**

PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PUBLISHING IN THE PUBLISHING PROGRAM,
FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION, ART AND TECHNOLOGY

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
SUMMER 2021**

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that women significantly outnumber men in the publishing industry, surveys and journalistic accounts reported from both the United States and the United Kingdom over the last 10 years tell us that women working in the industry are subjected to high rates of sexual harassment, a culture of circumscribed professional advancement, and a significant wage gap in favour of men. In this report, I explore how and why these features of gender inequity flourish in the publishing industry, and investigate to what extent the Canadian publishing industry is plagued by similar issues. Furthermore, I discuss the homogeneity of the publishing industry, and the ways in which women who aren't able-bodied, straight, white, and cis-gendered face unique obstacles in the industry. The report closes with a discussion of recent shifts in the publishing industry which impact women and people from marginalized communities. In addition to highlighting a fundamental lack of robust data, I point to vital gaps in our understanding of intersectional gender inequity in the Canadian publishing industry, and make recommendations for further study.

KEY WORDS Women in publishing; gender equity; pink collar; sexual harassment; glass ceiling; wage gap

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LAND This project was completed over two years and in three apartments; during this time I have lived and worked on the traditional, occupied, and unceded territories of the Qayqayt, Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam, Stó:lō, Skwxwú7mesh, W̱SÁNEĆ, and ləkʷəŋən First Nations. This is a long and likely not exhaustive list, and there is a stark and unsettling contrast between the relative ease with which I've moved through this land and the violence with which it was dispossessed from the First Nations who lived on, cared for, and had sacred relationships with it for millennia.

Historically, publishing in Canada has been a tool for colonization. While I have carried out the work supporting this report in good faith and with the intention of repairing harm and critically examining inequitable and destructive industry practices, I am also conscious of the fact that the space in which this information moves is one that has been used to disenfranchise, dehumanize, and otherwise enact violence upon Indigenous Peoples. The history of Canadian book publishing set us on a path to inequity, and if we are to correct that path, we must first acknowledge it.

PERSONAL Thank you to my committee for their time and attention to my work. I'm especially grateful to have had the chance to work so closely with my supervisor, Hannah McGregor, without whose guidance this report would not have been possible. I feel truly lucky to have had a supervisor who was as empathetic as she was rigorous.

Thank you to my partner, Mark and my family for their endless support and encouragement—for keeping me fed, listening to me talk through sticky issues, and cheering me on.

I was first moved to undertake this work because the thought of the women in my Master of Publishing cohort facing sexism in the industry outraged me. The 2018/19 Master of Publishing cohort is a group of extremely intelligent, dedicated, and talented women. It was an honour to learn alongside you all, and I hope that for each of us the conditions described in this report are the exception, not the rule.

TECHNICAL This report is typeset using PT Serif Pro, designed by Alexandra Korolkova, Olga Umpeleva, and Vladimir Yefimov; and Circe, designed by Alexandra Korolkova and Marya Kharlamova (Selezeneva).

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1.0 CONTEXT

In 2018 the Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP) released a report of the Anglophone book publishing industry in Canada that examined many features of our industry including its size, shape, geographic distribution, and economic impact. The report findings reflected many well-established facts about publishing in Canada: that the majority of book publishing activity in Canada takes place in Ontario, correlating with higher numbers of publishing jobs,¹ that most Canadian publishing companies are relatively small² and, significantly, that the workforce is overwhelmingly comprised of women.³

At 70% female, the gender composition of Canadian publishing is roughly on par with other English-speaking publishing industries. In the United States, for instance, a *Publishers Weekly* survey found that in 2018 the American publishing workforce was 80% female.⁴ Furthermore, a 2017 Bookcareer survey of book publishing employees in the United Kingdom found that over 80% of respondents were female.⁵

1.1 TWICE AS MANY, HALF AS POWERFUL

In an industry where women are overrepresented to such an extent, how are we faring? In a nutshell, not well. In fact, women have been advocating for gender equity in the industry for decades. A 1989 report by London-based advocacy group Women in Publishing summed it up: “Twice as Many, Half as Powerful.” Their report confirmed what many women working in the industry already knew: that while the work force was primarily made up of women, it was men who were occupying executive positions and earning higher wages.⁶ While the progress towards gender equity that took place in the second half of the twentieth century had, in general, allowed women increased professional mobility, the glass ceiling seemed to be particularly thick in the publishing world. In fact, in the words of Women in Publishing cofounder Jane Gregory, the ceiling was concrete.⁷

More than thirty years after *Women in Publishing* released their report, the situation has not improved—a 2018 *Publishers Weekly* salary survey of the American publishing industry found that female employees outnumbered male employees 4:1, but an average \$27,000 wage gap in favour of male employees persisted.⁸ In addition to pervasive wage gaps, the publishing industry has also become notorious for its culture of sexual harassment, and female executives continue to be few and far between.

These indications of gender inequity—a gender wage gap, sexual harassment, and the circumscribed advancement of women in the publishing industry—have been well-documented in the United States as well as overseas in the United Kingdom; publications such as *Publishers Weekly*, the *Independent*, and *The Guardian* have all published articles on gender inequity in publishing in the last two years. At the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 2019, gender inequity was discussed in a Publishing Perspectives talk entitled “Women’s Leadership in Publishing.” Additionally, the *Women in Publishing* project continues to advocate for gender equity in the industry.

The last decade has also borne witness to the catalyzing effect of grassroots activism on a global scale. The social media movements #MeToo and #TimesUp have produced a groundswell of conversation in the global community around issues of gender equity in various industries. In publishing specifically, the #PublishingPaidMe corpus represents a similar challenge to the status quo in regards to diversity and inclusion, as does the group Book Worker Power.*

In the midst of the gender equity dialogue taking place globally, there is a dearth of conversation around the issue here in Canada. The data tells us that the issues that proliferate in the American and British industries are also common in our domestic trade; statistics gathered by various studies such as the ACP’s 2018 industry profile, their 2019 diversity baseline study, and *Quill and Quire*’s 2019 survey on sexual harassment prove that gender inequity is a problem in Canadian publishing. As an industry, however, we have yet to move beyond this trickle of raw data to formulate any sort of response or strategy for balancing the scales.

Unfortunately, as publishing is a relatively young area of scholarship here in Canada, there are few places for critical analysis and discussion regarding the publishing industry to take place. Furthermore, as our publishing industry is relatively small, it often evades the focus of large-scale Canadian workforce

THE STATUS OF
WOMEN IN
CANADIAN
PUBLISHING

* Book Worker Power can be found on Twitter @bookworkerpower.

studies, which usually focus on more ubiquitous fields where women tend to over-index, such as education and health care. In view of the global conversation around gender equity both within and outside of the publishing industry, however, it's clear that a frank and intersectional conversation about the status of women in Canadian publishing is long overdue.

1.2 INTERSECTIONAL EQUITY

While gender is the main focus of this research, there are numerous other identity markers that impact a person's vulnerability to sexual abuse, access to fair and equal pay, and ability to advance in any given industry, including publishing. Some of these markers include race, sexual orientation, economic status, and ability status. In fact, the specific convergence of these identity markers makes a person vulnerable to unique forms of discrimination that are more complicated than simply sexism, racism, et cetera. A framework used to articulate these interdependent and multi-faceted systems of oppression is the theory of intersectionality, first proposed by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.

Over the course of researching and writing this report, my own understanding of Crenshaw's intersectionality framework has grown substantially, and I expect that it will continue to grow and mature after this report is completed. It's impossible for me to extricate this work from my own position as a white, straight, able-bodied, cis-gendered woman, as this identity intersection is the perspective from which I learn and work. Unfortunately, the publishing industry is, for many structural reasons, comprised of women like me—white, straight, able-bodied, and cis-gendered—and as a result, much of the equity work that has been done historically in publishing has centered this specific experience.

DATA GAPS

I would like to have a nuanced conversation about gender equity in publishing from an intersectional perspective. I believe that the rising tide must lift all boats, and that there is no equity—of any type—where inequity is allowed to endure. That being said, this report is limited in essential ways by the work that has come before it. There are significant gaps in the data that preclude the type of robust, data-driven conversations I would like to have about intersectional equity in publishing. To counter this, I have drawn upon an array of journalistic sources to help fill in the gaps—to include the experiences of women of colour, disabled women, and women from the working class. There is undoubtedly more that could be said than I am able to include in this report, but I have strived for an inclusive foundation upon which our industry can continue this conversation.

CISNORMATIVE
BINARIES

In addition to the available data failing to account for other various modes of disenfranchisement that intersect with and complicate gender inequity, the male vs. female dichotomy employed in this discussion assumes a gender binary. This binary reflects a cisnormative conceptualization of gender, and is inherited from data and discourse that often excludes people who are non-binary and gender nonconforming. There is a lot of work to be done in dismantling patriarchal conceptions of gender, but unfortunately that work is beyond the scope of this report.

To encourage conversation about the publishing industry's deep-seated inequities, I have strived for inclusive and intersectional analysis, but this work has been limited in fundamental ways by both the data available and by the scope of this report. With that in mind, this report is intended to be the beginning, not the entirety of a conversation that is long overdue in Canadian publishing. There is a lot of work to be done if we are to imagine a more equitable publishing industry in Canada, and this report is offered in support of these efforts.

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This report, submitted as a final project in the Master of Publishing program at Simon Fraser University, gathers information on the status of women in Canadian Anglophone book publishing and situates it in a global context. To accomplish this, I have examined data from sources such as the ACP and *Quill and Quire*, and have collated these with comparable studies conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom. I have also integrated a wealth of anecdotal and journalistic evidence from various industry publications to round out the data, and to allow for a more inclusive analysis. This combination of quantitative and qualitative information forms a comprehensive snapshot of the publishing industry and provides a foundation for an inclusive discussion of gender equity in the publishing industry. Where a lack of data precludes productive and nuanced conversation, I have identified those gaps and made recommendations for study and discussion in that area.

DOMAINS OF
GENDER INEQUITY

The report is divided into three significant domains of gender inequity in the publishing industry: sexual harassment, circumscribed advancement, and the wage gap. I begin each of these sections by exploring the issue from a global publishing perspective using the abundance of information available from the United States and the United Kingdom before examining the issue from a Canadian perspective. My intention with this approach is twofold: first, to establish a clear argument that these issues continue to proliferate

INTERSECTING
INEQUITIES

in the industry, and second to situate the issue in Canada as part of a global picture of gender inequity in publishing.

Following the discussion of the obstacles that women face in publishing, I discuss the colonial and racist legacy of Canadian publishing, and how this history has produced a modern industry that is predisposed to inequity in many forms. This chapter takes a closer look at how gender inequity intersects with other race-, class-, and ability-based equity issues in the publishing industry, and how these inequities produce a strikingly homogenous publishing workforce. In truth, each of these domains of inequity in publishing deserves its own separate discussion, however due to the scope of this report and the data available, I have collapsed these issues into a single chapter. My hope is that this report will encourage deeper conversations around the racism, classism, ableism, cissexism, and heterosexism that exist in our industry.

The final chapter of this report discusses structural changes in the industry that impact women specifically, the power and importance of good data, and the ways in which women are pushing back against the patriarchal structures of traditional publishing. This chapter casts a hopeful eye to the future of our industry, suggesting that a more equitable tide might be rising—one that would result in not only a more inclusive industry, but a stronger one as well.

1.4 LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD, GETTING TO WORK

This conversation in Canada is long overdue; it has been over thirty years since the UK's Women in Publishing project published "Twice as Many, Half as Powerful," and in Canada we are only just beginning to come to terms with the extent to which our industry is plagued by the same inequities. This report is intended to encourage conversation and, hopefully, to begin to inform the work necessary to bring about transformative change in Canadian publishing.

2.0 SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Following the public awareness raised by the #MeToo movement, which drew attention to the workplace harassment endemic in Hollywood, the publishing industry has become notorious for its own widespread cultures of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Just as stories of some of Hollywood's most rampant abusers became part of the public consciousness, so too has the publishing world been beset by its own grisly tales of sexual misconduct. While there have only been a small number of high-profile dismissals and resignations, there has been an outpouring of anecdotal accounts from women who work in the industry, and an abundance of surveys published by trade news organizations that prove the prevalence of this issue.

While sexual harassment is not unique to cultural industries such as publishing, it does seem that this form of sexual discrimination is inordinately common in the publishing trade. According to a survey conducted by Insights on Canadian Society in 2018, roughly 4% of women reported being sexually harassed at work.^{1*} As this chapter will discuss, rates of sexual harassment in the publishing industry are between five and ten times higher, which suggests that there is a serious lack of gender equity in the book business.

2.1 SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN PUBLISHING

AMERICAN
PUBLISHING

A 2017 *Publishers Weekly* article titled “The Women of Publishing Say #MeToo” explored this topic at some length. What they found was that a number of women working in the American book publishing industry regularly encountered a broad spectrum of sexual harassment in the workplace.²

* Seven categories of occupation, derived from the 2016 National Occupational Code were included in the data sample: management occupations; business, finance and administrative occupations; natural and applied sciences occupations; health occupations; education, law, social and related occupations; sales and service occupations; and trades and related occupations.

This behaviour ranged from inappropriate jokes and suggestive comments to physical assaults such as groping and attempted rape. One woman remarked that the amount of assault and harassment that she was subjected to at her job working in the publishing industry was far worse than anything she had experienced working in Hollywood.³

Publishers Weekly again looked at this issue via an industry survey in 2018; 22% of women who responded to the survey had been sexually harassed while working, despite sexual harassment policies being in place at the companies where they worked.⁴

BRITISH
PUBLISHING

Examinations of the issue overseas returned even more staggering rates of sexual harassment: *The Bookseller's* 2017 industry survey found that 54% of women had experienced some form of sexual harassment from their male colleagues while working in the book publishing industry.⁵ It's significant to note that, whereas the *Publishers Weekly* 2018 survey looked at the issue as part of their annual jobs and salary survey, *The Bookseller* survey focused exclusively on sexual harassment, introducing the possibility of self-selected respondents. *The Bookseller's* sample size was also much smaller (388 respondents in total vs. 664 total respondents in *Publishers Weekly*.) The take-home message, however, is clear: sexual harassment is a very real problem for women in the publishing industry.

The Bookseller's 2017 article, "Sexual Harassment Reported by Over Half in Trade Survey" included personal accounts from a number of women working in the book publishing industry—women who had been groped, propositioned, kissed, or raped while working or at work-related events, by colleagues or superiors.⁶ A number of women also commented that, while they had not experienced such extreme physical assault, they were exhausted by a culture of sexism in the office. This "white noise of daily harassment," as it was articulated by one respondent, was a contributing factor for some women who did not report what had happened to them to HR or their superiors.

CANADIAN
PUBLISHING

In Canada, the situation seems much the same. A 2019 *Quill & Quire* survey on sexual harassment found that 53.5% of respondents had been sexually harassed in the workplace; 86% of these respondents were women, and 2% of these respondents were trans, nonbinary, or gender fluid.^{7*}

The results of these surveys, together with numerous firsthand accounts in trade publications, comment sections, and personal blogs indicate that

* The gender options available to respondents were male, female, or trans/non-binary/gender fluid, which were grouped together.

the publishing industry is indeed rife with sexual harassment—but why is this? Recall that roughly 4% of Canadian women reported being sexually harassed at work, meaning that women working in publishing are five to ten times more likely to experience sexual harassment. What could account for this exponentially larger risk?

2.2 THEORIZING THE CAUSES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN PUBLISHING

There are a number of theories to explain the prevalence of sexually predatory behaviour in publishing: some of the more compelling are the social nature of the industry, the exploitative nature of creative sector work, and, perhaps most significantly, the generally patriarchal structure of the publishing industry.

PUBLISHING AS A
SOCIAL INDUSTRY

Publishing is a notoriously social industry—in addition to the gatherings that often accompany book launches, there are readings, festivals, trade shows, and conferences. Participating in these social events is considered by many to be an essential part of advancing professionally in the industry. According to a *Publishers Weekly* article, “success is really tied to who you know. Those looking to get ahead need to make connections outside of their nine-to-five jobs.”⁸

That publishing is such a community-based industry is a unique, often celebrated aspect of the trade. The other side of this coin, however, is that these social-professional spaces can blur the lines of what is acceptable professional conduct. Furthermore, there is little accountability and even less HR oversight in these public spaces where work is often being done. According to surveys conducted by both *Publishers Weekly* and *The Bookseller*, a majority of women felt that the social aspect of the industry put them in particularly vulnerable situations.⁹ In fact, according to *Publishers Weekly*, social spaces in the industry such as conventions, book fairs, and after-hours events accounted for 66% of sexual harassment experienced by women.¹⁰ In the *Quill & Quire* survey, this number was closer to 38%,¹¹ although due to inconsistencies in the data that was collected and reported, these surveys do not allow for direct comparison.*

While publishing’s social spaces are especially problematic, publishing

* These surveys differed in the options available to respondents concerning where they were when they were sexually harassed. *Publishers Weekly* survey response options were: office, convention or book fair, party or other after-hour industry event, out-of-office meeting, sales conference, book tour, or other. Options in the *Quill & Quire* survey included office; book launch or other after-hours event; and conference, trade show, or offsite meeting. Furthermore, *Quill & Quire* did not report their full data set, and it is unknown what other locations were included in the survey.

offices do not appear to be much safer for women. According to *Publishers Weekly*, as much as 55% of sexual harassment occurred in the office;¹² the *Quill & Quire* survey put this number at 36.4%,¹³ which was almost as much as responses for “book launch or after-hours event” and “conference, trade show, and offsite meeting” combined.

One possible explanation for the amount of sexual harassment that takes place within publishing offices, where the expectations for professional conduct should be unambiguous, and where there should be clear HR oversight, is the effect that these integral social spaces have on work spaces. Indeed, it could be that, because the industry is “structured around social get-togethers,”¹⁴ the relaxed rules of social environments have permeated publishing workplaces, creating what some have called a generally permissive culture, one where “anything goes”.¹⁵

A CULTURE
OF SILENCE

Publishing scholars Claire Squires and Beth Driscoll suggest that a “culture of silence”¹⁶ is part of the problem. As they explain in “The Sleaze-O-Meter: Sexual Harassment in the Publishing Industry,” “jobs in publishing are scarce and attractive, a common feature of creative industries which correlates with exploitative work practices.” Essentially, the small size and general precarity of the publishing business results in limited growth, meaning limited job openings, which may put pressure on a person to tolerate a hostile work environment. In a “small and fairly closed industry,”¹⁷ it is easy to see how this complaisance could create the impression that such behaviour was acceptable. Indeed, one publicist, responding to a survey focusing on sexual harassment in the children’s book industry, said that she did not report the predatory behaviour of a coworker because it was “kind of an open secret.” She said that it made her “think twice about reporting things because [she found] his behaviour to be rather obvious,” so she didn’t understand why the behaviour hadn’t already been addressed.¹⁸

Furthermore, it seems that when women do come forward to report sexual harassment, the situation is rarely resolved satisfactorily. According to *Quill & Quire*’s 2019 survey, 82.5% of respondents who had reported being sexually harassed said that they were not satisfied with how their complaint was handled. This failure to respond appropriately to reports of sexual harassment contributes to a permissive environment by failing to correct predatory behaviour, but also, it stands to reason that women would be less likely to report harassment if they didn’t believe it would be properly addressed.

VERTICAL SEX
SEGREGATION

A third possible explanation for why sexual harassment is so prevalent in the publishing industry, in addition to the social nature of the business

and a reputed permissive culture, is the patriarchal structure of the industry. Multiple studies have shown that sexual harassment tends to be more common in male-dominated hierarchies, and, in particular, where there are extreme power differentials. *New America* refers to this as “vertical sex segregation”¹⁹— where, although a work force may be comprised predominantly of women, men are more likely to hold supervisory and executive roles that are associated with higher wages and higher status. Publishing is a prime example of one of these “pink collar” industries. In the words of *Women in Publishing*: women number twice as many, but are half as powerful.

2.3 THIS IS NOT ABOUT SEX

Masha Gessen, a journalist writing for *The New Yorker* in November 2017 (at the height of #MeToo media coverage), cautioned against what she called reactions of “misplaced scale.”²⁰ Essentially, Gessen argued that there have been outsized reactions to reports of sexual harassment because we as a society are misplacing our panic. Instead of addressing climate change, for instance, which is a complicated and unwieldy problem, Gessen argues that we have turned to policing sex, resulting in what she considers a sex panic. Writing about one instance of a senior *New York Times* reporter being suspended for sexually inappropriate behaviour toward junior journalists, Gessen writes, “It is hard to imagine a non-sexual example of non-work-related behavior that would get a reporter preemptively suspended in the absence of any crime or misdemeanor.” Gessen’s concern is that, in addition to causing overreactions to sexual harassment, this sex panic also infantilizes women and strips them of their sexual agency.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

What this position fails to recognize, however, is that the issue of workplace sexual harassment isn’t about sex—not really. Canadian law is clear that sexual harassment is a form of discrimination. In 1989, The Supreme Court of Canada defined workplace sexual harassment as:

*Unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that detrimentally affects the work environment or leads to adverse job-related consequences for the victims of the harassment ... sexual harassment in the workplace attacks the dignity and self-respect of the victim both as an employee and as a human being.*²¹

In light of this definition, it’s clear that sexual harassment is actually about the dehumanizing sexual objectification of a person. Sexual agency, in fact, has nothing to do with it—it’s about a woman’s right to exist as a whole

person, especially in a professional sphere, in a manner that is dictated by her performance, expertise, ambition, etc.—not her sexual identity.

As Rebecca Traister explains in an article for *The Cut*, this is about a woman’s right to exist in the world, and particularly in the workplace, as a professional human being instead of a sex object. As Traister articulates, the harm inflicted by sexual harassment is due to the “systemic disadvantaging of a gender in the public and professional sphere.”²² She goes on to explain how the trauma inflicted upon the sexually harassed, even in the absence of explicitly sexual or even physical abuse, is demeaning and dehumanizing; it sends the message that “their worth has been understood as fundamentally erotic, ornamental; ... they have not been taken seriously as equals.” In short, she says, it’s a “cruel reminder that these are still the terms on which we are valued.”²³ Clearly, sexual harassment should not be tolerated in our workplaces because it is a fundamental denial of gender equity; this is not a sex panic.

2.4 WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

When it comes to sexual harassment in Canadian publishing, we don’t know how race or ability status impacts a woman’s vulnerability. Furthermore, we don’t know how vulnerable LGBTQ+ folks in our industry are to sexual harassment. According to *Quill & Quire’s* 2019 survey, 2% of those who reported harassment identified as trans, non-binary, or gender-fluid²⁴—but grouping respondents in this way erases the experience of trans men and women, who may be experiencing sexual harassment at different rates from their non-binary and gender fluid colleagues. Additionally, until we have accurate data capturing how many Canadian publishing professionals identify as trans, non-binary, and gender-fluid, we won’t be able to understand how their gender identity may impact their vulnerability to sexual harassment.

There is also work to be done exploring higher incidences of sexual harassment in different branches of the publishing industry. *Quill & Quire’s* survey on sexual harassment found that those working in sales and marketing, editorial, and publicity were most likely to be sexually harassed, while design and production were significantly less likely to be victimized.²⁵ It could be that, as Sue Carter suggests, the relationship management and social networking aspect of these jobs make women particularly vulnerable.²⁶ Power imbalances in caretaking roles may also partially explain why sexual harassment is more common in certain areas of the publishing industry. The “author as star” dynamic, for example, may make publicists particularly

vulnerable.²⁷ These are only a few possible explanations; understanding the nuances of how sexual harassment proliferates in different areas of the Canadian publishing industry is a topic that deserves in-depth study, which is beyond the scope of this report.

2.5 THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Unsurprisingly, respondents to surveys conducted by *Publishers Weekly*, *The Bookseller*, and *Quill & Quire* all spoke about the negative toll that being sexually harassed took on their health, well-being, and performance at work. One woman, speaking to *The Bookseller* said that her experience was “deeply upsetting and humiliating.”²⁸ Another, speaking to *Quill & Quire*, remarked that “After 40 years in this business, I can only imagine what my career would have been without harassment.”²⁹ Indeed, according to Insights on Canadian Society, there is a high correlation between sexual harassment and low job satisfaction, low motivation, increased stress levels, decreased mental health, and decreased general health.³⁰ This correlation suggests that sexual harassment may also be a contributing factor to other facets of gender inequity present in the publishing industry—specifically, the connection between sexual harassment and a decline in professional performance strongly suggests that publishing’s pervasive culture of sexual harassment may complicate professional advancement for women working in the industry.

3.0 CIRCUMSCRIBED ADVANCEMENT

Barriers to advancement that disproportionately affect women are another major facet of gender inequity present in the publishing industry. Indeed, it was these barriers that Jane Gregory, founding member of London-based advocacy group Women in Publishing, had in mind when she used the phrase “concrete ceiling” to describe the challenges that she and her fellow female coworkers faced trying to ascend the ranks of the publishing industry.¹

3.1 WOMEN AT THE EXECUTIVE LEVEL IN PUBLISHING

NORTH AMERICA

While the situation in contemporary publishing seems to have improved somewhat from the concrete ceiling Gregory described in 1989—it is no longer assumed that a woman’s career prospects in publishing will be limited to the reception desk—it is clear that men continue to wield an outsized amount of power in the industry. The first Lee & Low Diversity Baseline Survey (DBS), conducted in 2015, found that while women comprised almost 80% of the North American publishing workforce, at the executive level only 59% of positions were held by women.² The findings of the 2019 follow-up, DBS 2.0, were similar: the industry’s workforce was 75% female, but at the executive level, female representation dropped to 60%.³ The discrepancy between the gender make-up of the workforce at large compared to the gender make-up of the executive level suggests that women are being promoted at dramatically lower rates than their male colleagues.

CANADA

Looking at Canadian publishing, the numbers seem much the same: The 2018 Canadian Book Publishing Diversity Survey, commissioned by the Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP), found that the workforce comprised 74% women, but that women held only 62% of executive positions. The complement of these findings is perhaps even more telling: the industry was found to be only 18% male, but at the executive level 30% of positions were held by men.⁴ In other words, men are almost twice as likely

as women to be promoted to the executive level, despite the fact that there are more than three times as many women as there are men working in the industry.

While it is common for men to rise through the ranks with greater ease than women, it does seem that, in an industry where women over-index to such an extent, women should also hold a proportionally larger amount of power. As the data shows, however, men in publishing benefit from an institutionalized privilege that confers on them an outsized amount of power. But why is this the case? Why does the title of Women in Publishing’s 1989 report, “Twice as Many, Half as Powerful” still ring true today, more than 30 years later?

3.2 VERTICAL SEX SEGREGATION IN PUBLISHING

The phenomenon of men being promoted at higher rates than women can be explained by a confluence of historical factors and contemporary economic trends. Indeed, the “old boys network,” which, in the industry’s early days explicitly excluded women, continues to benefit men as a result of the social nature of the industry. Furthermore, the conservative mindset at the heart of the publishing industry perpetuates the male advantage. This advantage is concentrated by the continued consolidation of publishing houses, which leaves fewer executive positions and thus increases competition. Altogether, these factors create a hostile environment for women working in the industry, which may drive them from the industry prematurely. As a result, younger women in the industry are left without mentors or advocates.

A (WHITE)
GENTLEMAN’S
PROFESSION

Historically, publishing has been referred to as “the gentleman’s profession.” According to Charlotte Gascoigne, speaking to the Women in Publishing oral history project, “gentleman” in this sense referred to a “gentleman of leisure,”⁵ someone with independent means who, instead of having to pursue a trade, could spend his time engaging in leisurely activities. Specifically, gentleman of leisure meant a wealthy *white* man, as white men were the primary group capable at that time of accruing substantial wealth.

The gentlemen’s profession was made manifest in the “old boys’ network” that came to be associated with publishing—a blurring of social and professional spheres that saw important deals, promotions, and acquisitions often taking place over lunch or drinks, which were often imbibed at mens-only social clubs with exclusive memberships.⁶ The exclusivity of these spaces meant that they were inaccessible to anyone who was not a white, cis, straight, able-bodied man—effectively barring anyone who didn’t belong to

this specific subset of upper class men from participating meaningfully in the book publishing industry.

While the above scenario mostly describes the publishing industry prior to the 1980s,⁷ remnants of this old world are visible in the trade today. In a sense, this should come as no surprise—the *Publishers Weekly* 2019 Salary Survey found that the median number of years that male respondents had spent in the industry was 17.5,⁸ which suggests that the industry is barely two generations removed from the old boys' network of the mid-20th century.

MALE SOCIAL
ADVANTAGE

Furthermore, it seems likely that this historic male advantage may be further exacerbated by the social nature of the industry, which was discussed in the previous chapter of this report. A working paper published in 2020 by the National Bureau of Economic Research in conjunction with Harvard Business School supports this theory.⁹ The study found that, in the absence of any performance or effort differential, men working under male managers were more likely to be promoted than men who reported to female managers. Furthermore, the study found that the circumstances that contributed to men being promoted at higher rates were mediated by social interaction.

In the study, men who took breaks with their managers tended to be promoted more quickly, and men who smoked, and who took smoking breaks with their male managers, were promoted at the highest rates. The study concluded that male-to-male relationship building (as opposed to straightforward favouritism) accounted for certain men being promoted at higher rates. It stands to reason, then, that in an industry such as publishing, where social functions are an integral part of how the trade functions, that this male advantage—the ability to be promoted more quickly as a result of forming social relationships with other high-ranking men—would only be magnified. Interestingly, the study found that the gender of a woman's superior had no effect on her rate of promotion.

While lunchtime meetings and after-hours events may no longer explicitly bar women from participating, it does seem that the highly social nature of the industry, a last vestige of publishing as a “gentleman's profession” may disproportionately benefit men. Furthermore, the character of these social work spaces—working environments where the white noise of sexual harassment is quotidian—also disproportionately hinders women, as if they are punished for participating. In such a hostile environment, it stands to reason that women would be less likely to participate, and certainly less likely to perform professionally at their full capacity. Thus, men face less competition and their advantage is compounded.

ECONOMIC
FACTORS

This social advantage may partially explain the phenomenon of male executives hiring or promoting in their own (male) image, an issue that has been discussed at length in articles published by *The Bookseller*, the *Independent*, and *The Guardian*. According to one industry professional speaking to *The Guardian*, there is an abundance of “white, middle- and upper- class, privately educated men selecting other white, middle-class, privately educated men [for jobs and promotions] ... It has a chilling effect.”¹⁰ In other words, the old boys’ network continues to propagate.

In addition to the historical legacy of social circles that excluded women and the disproportionate advantages that men enjoyed—and continue to enjoy—as a product of these social associations, it also seems that economic instability, conservative logic, and corporate consolidation further complicate professional advancement for women in publishing.

As Baroness Gail Rebeck reflected in the Women in Publishing oral history project, following the economic downturn of 2008 there was a resurgence in conservative hiring practices that favoured men, “the safe option,” over women.¹¹ Writing in *The Bookseller*, she explains, “it was as if boards or management committees fell back into familiar, ‘male-suited’ patterns.”¹² While the market crash of 2008 was undoubtedly monumental, it bears considering that publishing is a notoriously precarious industry with legendarily tight profit margins. If it is, in fact, true that economic instability encourages conservative hiring and promotion practices, it would seem to follow that women looking to ascend the ranks in the publishing industry are continuously swimming against the current.

In addition to the ways in which the industry reacts to economic hardship, there is an inborn conservatism inherent to publishing that negatively affects women and minority groups even in the best, most prosperous of times. As John Maxwell explains in his article, “Thinking about the Legacies of Colonialism in Publishing,” the economies of scale at the heart of publishing mean that the industry is predisposed to act according to what Maxwell calls the “economic logic of the best-sellers”. In essence, because the logic of the bestseller is dictated by cultural norms, it reinforces a conservative mindset wherein anything that doesn’t conform to cultural norms is seen as a risk.¹³ While Maxwell was specifically talking about industry output, it’s hardly a leap to imagine how this deep-seated risk aversion at the heart of publishing could also have implications for hiring practices. In the context of publishing being a (white, middle-/upper-class, straight, cis) “gentleman’s profession,” anyone who does not fit this profile is seen as a risk, and therefore less likely to be valued as an employee, and certainly less likely to be promoted.

CORPORATE
CONSOLIDATION

Another reality of the publishing industry is the trend toward corporate consolidation, which has, since the early 20th century, seen the majority of English book publishing activity subsumed into what is commonly referred to as The Big Five:* Simon & Schuster, Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Macmillan, and Hachette. As Danuta Kean explained in *The Guardian*, these mergers mean that there are fewer executive positions to be filled, which often bodes poorly for women.¹⁴ Indeed, according to a report published by the International Labour Organisation, the larger a company is, the less likely it is to be run by a woman.¹⁵ As I write this report, not one of the Big Five has a woman in the CEO position.

Furthermore, it's not just women who are negatively affected by corporate consolidation in publishing. In addition to minority groups whose career prospects are exponentially diminished by the shrinking numbers of executive positions, corporate consolidation actually weakens the industry as a whole, and negatively impacts authors and readers as well.

Consolidation is harmful to the industry because it constitutes a narrowing of the market—this means fewer publishing opportunities for authors (leading to lower advances and a weakened ability to negotiate favourable contracts),¹⁶ less title diversity, and fewer options for readers. By concentrating the means of distribution, corporate consolidation also imperils booksellers because it gives a single entity power over a disproportionate number of titles.

3.3 WHERE HAVE ALL THE WOMEN GONE?

A final factor that may explain why fewer women hold executive positions in publishing is the simple fact that women don't seem to stay in the publishing industry for as long as men. The *Publishers Weekly* 2019 Salary survey found that 38% of men had been working in the industry for over 20 years, compared to only 10% of women.¹⁷ Significantly, women in this survey outnumbered men in the three-to-seven-year's experience bracket (29% women compared to 17% men), as well as the less-than-three-year's experience bracket (12% women compared to 5% men).¹⁸ Unfortunately, there isn't data available for Canadian publishing that measures time spent working in the industry as a function of gender, but given the demonstrated similarities between English language publishing elsewhere and in Canada, the Canadian industry might be similar.

*While I was writing this report, Bertelsmann (the multinational media conglomerate parent company of Penguin Random House) announced plans to purchase Simon & Schuster, effectively reducing the Big Five to the Big Four.

3.4 WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

While the data suggests that women are leaving the publishing workforce prematurely, it does not shed light on *why* this is happening. The deeply entrenched culture of sexual harassment combined with the systemic obstacles enumerated in this chapter may be partially to blame, but so too might be caretaking responsibilities, inflexible workplace policies, and low pay. The publishing industry (even at the senior level) is also significantly structured around freelance and contract-based work,¹⁹ which is flexible, but lacks the comprehensive benefit packages that are more likely to come with salaried employment. As such, women with higher healthcare expenses, such as those who have children or are chronically ill, may choose to leave the publishing industry in favour of a job that offers more support.

Until we have data that captures why women are leaving publishing in such high numbers, it will be difficult to formulate a strategy for keeping women in the industry for the full duration of their careers, which is an important factor in professional advancement.

3.5 CONCLUSION

As this chapter has demonstrated, there are multiple obstacles that women looking to ascend the ranks in publishing are forced to contend with. These obstacles are both historical and contemporary. Publishing's legacy as a gentleman's profession, for instance, continues to have ramifications for women; the social nature of the industry, which benefits men while hindering women, as well as a deeply-embedded conservative logic together perpetuate the old boys' network. Furthermore, conservatism as a function of economic precarity and corporate consolidation, two perennial forces at work in the industry, also disproportionately benefit men, specifically white, middle- and upper-class men, who are seen as the "safe" option. Finally, women tend to leave the publishing industry much earlier in their careers than their male counterparts, which means that fewer women have the opportunity to reach the executive level. Altogether, these structural advantages support the professional advancement of men in the publishing industry and in turn create a significant gender wage gap in their favour, which the following chapter of this report will explore.

4.0 THE WAGE GAP

The barriers to advancement that the previous chapter explored are quantified in a persistent and significant wage gap that benefits men in publishing. While the data confirms that the wage gap is, indeed, a problem in publishing, a lack of complete and consistent data makes it difficult to determine the magnitude of the problem. Still, the data that we have suggests a troubling lack of pay equity, which may be exacerbated by the notoriously heavy work loads and long hours that are often associated with working in the publishing industry.

4.1 DATA: A PRIMER

Before discussing the data that measures the gender wage gap in publishing, I have to first acknowledge the ways in which this conversation is hindered by the data available. In order for data to be truly useful, it must be consistent—essentially, the data must allow for apples-to-apples comparison. This means that the *type* of data being gathered must be congruous: in this case, whether wages are measured based on hourly, weekly, or annual earnings. It also means that the *ways of analyzing* the data must remain the same, which in this case means whether wage is reported as a mean* or median† value.

HOURLY VS. WEEKLY
VS. ANNUAL WAGE

In addition to being consistent, data must also be a meaningful and relevant measurement. As argued by Hilary M. Lips in the paper, “The Gender Pay Gap: Concrete Indicator of Women’s Progress Toward Equality,” comparing hourly wages assumes an equal number of paid hours worked in a week between men and women, which, as women are often responsible for a greater share of domestic duties, is not always the case.¹ In the same way, comparing

* The mean value, also referred to as the average, is found by dividing the sum of values in a data set by the number of data points.

† The median value is the midpoint between the highest and lowest data points in a data set.

weekly wages assumes that men and women work the same number of weeks in a year, which is also not always the case.² Essentially, both hourly and weekly wages requires one to guess at the number of hours or weeks worked in order to understand the economic well-being associated with a given wage. Using Lips's example to illustrate, when a woman applies for a loan to buy a car, she is asked for her earnings in a year—not an hour (or week). It is for this reason that looking at annual earnings as opposed to hourly or weekly earnings “captures the full scope of the financial implications of gender.”³

MEAN VS.
MEDIAN VALUES

In the same way as hourly and weekly earnings paint a different picture than annual earnings, looking at mean versus median values also yield different results. Furthermore, reporting either the mean *or* median values on their own presents an incomplete picture. Together, the mean and median values of a data set illustrate the distribution of a given metric across a spectrum. Taken alone, the mean value flattens the data into a hypothetical middle value, while the median value is easily skewed by outliers at the high or low end of the data set.

As of 2020, there are no studies of the English-speaking book publishing industry that have published both mean and median annual salaries as a function of gender, which makes it difficult to properly assess the full picture of gender pay inequity in publishing.

NON-SALARIED
WAGES

Furthermore, there is a significant contingent of freelance and contract workers in the publishing industry who are often folded into industry data. Nordicity's Book Publishing Industry Profile, for example, reported that 23% of the book publishing workforce in Canada was comprised of freelance and contract workers, however, the profile reported all findings using an FTE (full-time equivalent) measurement, which does not differentiate between modes of employment. It's significant that freelancers and contractors are being lost in the data, because they represent a significant portion of the workforce, and also because they occupy an economically vulnerable position, as they are without employment benefits. As such, if the wage gap between publishing's male and female freelancers is in line with the rest of the industry, it may have outsized repercussions for women in caretaking roles. As it currently stands, we don't know the gender breakdown of publishing's freelance and contract workforce, or whether or not there are problems with pay equity in this subset of the industry.

4.2 THE GENDER WAGE GAP IN PUBLISHING

UNITED
STATES

The problems with data measuring the wage gap in publishing are numerous and ever-present. A 2018 *Publishers Weekly* salary survey of the American

book trade found a 31.1% average annual wage gap in favour of men.⁴ In that same year, the Institute for Women’s Policy Research reported the national annual wage gap in the United States using median values—they reported a 19.5% median wage gap between men and women.⁵ As it is impossible to compare average and median values meaningfully, this lack of congruent data makes it difficult to determine how the wage gap in publishing compares to the national wage gap.

The following year, *Publishers Weekly* published the median (instead of the average) annual compensation values for men and women, and reported a 25% wage gap in favour of men.⁶ While at first glance it may appear that the wage gap closed by almost 6% from 2018 to 2019, the fact that average values were reported one year and median values the next makes it impossible to accurately gauge whether there was any change. Furthermore, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the national median wage gap for that same year at only 19%,⁷ although that figure is based off of weekly earnings as opposed to annual earnings. With a lack of comparable data, and bearing in mind Hilary M. Lips’s thesis regarding annual salary as an indicator of economic well-being, it’s clearly difficult to assess the wage gap in American publishing as it relates to the wage gap in the United States at large.

UNITED
KINGDOM

In the UK, Bookcareers found an average annual wage gap of 15.8%⁸ within the industry, compared to a national average hourly wage gap of 17.9%.⁹ Here again, however, the national average wage gap was calculated using hourly earnings as opposed to annual earnings. It bears repeating that these figures do not allow for meaningful comparison, as they are not properly congruent.

CANADA

According to *Quill & Quire’s* 2018 salary survey, which is the only data we currently have that compares men’s and women’s salaries in Canadian publishing, there is a 25.6% average annual gender wage gap in our industry.¹⁰ This is actually slightly lower than the national average annual wage gap of 29.6%¹¹ between men and women as reported by Statistics Canada in 2018. The *Quill & Quire* data, however, is comparatively weak. The salary survey had only 345 respondents, and even from that small sample, not all respondents answered all questions. The Statistics Canada data, on the other hand, is extremely robust—their sample size was almost 15 million. As was discussed in the previous section of this chapter, this data does not allow for true apples-to-apples comparison. Even still, it is worth noting that the Statistics Canada data set had an equal distribution of women and men, while the *Quill & Quire* survey responses reflected 84.1% women and only 14.8% men. Even keeping in mind the comparative weakness of this data set, for

such a small subset of the workforce—less than one-fifth—to outearn the majority of the workforce to such a dramatic extent, suggests a lack of pay equity in the Canadian publishing industry.

In addition to these general statistical issues, looking at the wage gap in publishing is further complicated by the decision of some firms to include or exclude their distribution department from wage calculations. This exclusion is a significant issue in relation to the gender wage gap in publishing because distribution, where the pay tends to be very low, tends to employ significantly more men. As such, the decision whether or not to include this concentration of men working at low wages has the potential to significantly skew the data.

As a point of illustration, in 2018 Hachette released two different sets of wage gap data: one that excluded their distribution centres, and one that did not. When the distribution arm of Hachette was excluded from the data, their average wage gap was 30.4% in favour of men, while the data that included distribution showed an average wage gap of only 17.8%¹² in favour of men. This extremely significant discrepancy makes clear the necessity of transparent reporting and standard reporting parameters for publishing wages.

While there are clear gaps in the data, what we do know suggests that there is a significant lack of wage equity in publishing. Recall that in Canadian publishing, the data that we have suggests a 25.6% wage gap in favour of men. While this may actually be lower than the national wage gap of 29.6%,¹³ it is essential to bear in mind that the publishing workforce in Canada is as much as 84.1% female, while in the general population, women account for only 47.7% of the workforce.¹⁴ The fact that women over index and under earn to such a dramatic extent in publishing suggests an issue worth investigating.

4.3 WHY IS THE GENDER WAGE GAP IN PUBLISHING IS SO LARGE?

The factors contributing to the gender-based wage gap within organizations in a broad sense are well-documented and are discussed at length in a Statistics Canada study titled “Measuring and Analyzing the Gender Pay Gap” by Dr. Melissa Moyser. Briefly, these factors include expectations related to gender and personality,* the “high price” of temporal flexibility

* The fact that the temperament and characteristics expected of a woman are out of step with what is expected of leaders in corporate settings is often called a double-bind, and has been documented extensively by the renowned sociolinguist Judith Baxter, among others.

(the trade-off of a flexible work schedule for lower pay), and what Moyser calls “motherhood earnings penalties” which includes career interruptions due to childrearing* and a greater likelihood of working part-time in order to balance domestic responsibilities,¹⁵ which harkens back to the problem with comparing hourly or weekly wages between men and women. These are worth mentioning because they are likely as relevant in publishing as in any other industry, however these factors alone do not account for the markedly poor pay equity in publishing.

A CULTURE OF
OVERWORKING

There is, however, one factor that has been identified by various scholars that may have specific implications for publishing. According to studies published in the *American Economic Review* and the *American Sociological Review*, larger wage gaps are found in professions that place a high value on long work hours.¹⁶ According to one study, this effect could account for as much as 10% of the total wage gap in industries where “overworking” (defined as more than 50 hours per week) is prevalent.¹⁷ According to Cha and Weeden, industries “where long work hours are especially common and the norm of overwork is deeply embedded in organizational practices and occupational cultures”¹⁸ are especially susceptible to this effect.

Publishing is indeed such an industry. This is a well-documented feature of the trade, from the archetypal editor who reads manuscripts at home in the evenings after returning from a full day in the office, to the importance of after-hours events, which, according to Sue Carter writing for *Quill & Quire*, “has always been considered a requirement of working in the business.”¹⁹ The importance of events and social work spaces was discussed at length in the first chapter of this report.

According to a 2019 *Quill & Quire* survey, “heavy workload” was the top workplace stressor, affecting over 78% of respondents. 23% of respondents also cited “long hours” as a significant workplace stressor.²⁰ Taken together, these findings prove what many in the industry know to be true: working extended hours is part and parcel of working in the publishing industry, whether those extended hours take the form of completing work-related tasks at home, or participating in social engagements that are extracurricular but nonetheless expected, or in many cases, required.

As demonstrated by Cha, Weeden, and others, professional environments where overworking is the norm disproportionately benefit men, who

* Work interruptions related to childrearing, including maternity leave and reduced working hours both contribute to less time spent on the job over the course of a career, resulting in lower levels of expertise and thus a lower likelihood of career advancement.

tend to have fewer domestic responsibilities and thus more freedom and energy to consistently work extended hours.²¹ Due to the typically excessive workloads and the engrained culture of after-hours events, publishing perfectly fits the profile wherein overworking is embedded in the organizational practice and occupational culture—essentially, publishing is exactly the type of industry that is likely to have an outsized gender wage gap as a result of outsized work hours.

4.4 OTHER WAGE GAPS

This discussion of wage gaps is limited to gender, and is unable, because of a lack of data, to meaningfully address other wage gaps that are known to exist, and that affect many women. Conversations about the gender wage gap in publishing are often led by, and thus centered on, white, able-bodied, heterosexual, cis women. This type of advocacy fails to take into account the experience of women whose identities do not neatly map onto this assumed “norm.” As a result, data is not gathered with an intersectional approach, and it is nearly impossible to have informed conversations about other wage gaps that undoubtedly exist and impact many women in publishing. As such, women of colour, disabled women, and LGBTQ+ folks are excluded from wage equity advocacy. For a more in-depth discussion of intersecting forms of discrimination in the publishing world, please see the next chapter of this report.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Measuring the wage gap in publishing requires the use of quantitative methods. Quantitative data, however, is only useful if it can be compared with other data that is collected and reported in the same way, and if it is clear what the data is including and excluding. Both comparability and transparency are significant problems in terms of the data available for the wage gap in publishing. In order for data to be truly meaningful, firms must report consistently across the industry, and be transparent about what they are including and what they are omitting from their figures.

With those limitations in mind, however, the data that we do have suggests that there is an outsized wage gap between men and women in publishing. Well-known and well-documented contributors to the wage gap, such as “motherhood earning penalties” are generally industry-agnostic and do not explain the unexpectedly large wage gap in publishing. Rather, the wage gap in publishing may reasonably be attributed to the deeply-engrained culture of overwork, which is manifested in excessive workloads

that necessitate extended work hours and the frequency of after-hours events where attendance is expected or mandatory. In these types of work environments, men are more likely to excel due to their lack of domestic obligations compared to their female coworkers, resulting in increased professional returns.

5.0 WORKFORCE HOMOGENEITY

To say that publishing has a diversity problem is a gross understatement. According to the 2019 Lee & Low Diversity Baseline Study, which surveyed over 3,500 publishing professionals from across North America, the average person working in the industry is a non-disabled (89%), straight (81%), white (76%), cis woman (74%).¹ Similar numbers were reported by the ACP's 2018 Book Publishing Diversity Baseline Survey, which had 372 respondents from across Canada.² Furthermore, according to the 2020 report, "Getting in and Getting On," produced by the UK's Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, as many as 86% of publishing professionals are from middle- or upper-class backgrounds.³ Recall the second chapter of this report, which explored the legacy of publishing as a gentleman's profession. In many ways, these systems of exclusivity laid the groundwork for the industry as we know it today, which is why, while it may seem antithetical to the mandate of publishing—as a cultural, creative industry—to foster these sorts of homogenous environments,⁴ in truth the industry is rife with structural inequities that circumscribe the advancement of folks who belong to historically disenfranchised groups.

While it is impossible in a report of this length to properly and fully address publishing's lack of diversity, it warrants discussion nonetheless. Many of the same systems that this report has examined, those that oppress women in the industry, are replicated and magnified in ways that also make publishing a hostile environment for people belonging to other marginalized groups. Furthermore, women whose identity exists at the intersection of two or more of these marginalized groups are likely subject to particular forms of discrimination that they would otherwise not be vulnerable to.

5.1 INTERSECTIONALITY: A PRIMER

A theory for understanding the ways in which multiple kinds of discrimination form matrices of inequity was first proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in

1989 as a way of understanding how Black women at an automotive factory were discriminated against. Crenshaw, a lawyer, civil rights advocate, and critical race theorist, argued that the factory hired white women and Black men to satisfy affirmative action policies directed at women and Black people, while continuing to discriminate against Black women specifically. The identity of these Black women existed at the intersection of multiple streams of disenfranchisement, namely sexism and racism, which created a new, unique form of discrimination against Black women.* Appropriately, Crenshaw coined the term Intersectionality to theorize this effect, which has since become the standard theoretical framework for discussing oppression and discrimination in a nuanced and inclusive way. As such, this chapter will explore discrimination in the publishing industry with an intersectional lens, and will draw attention to the structural causes of systemic inequity present in the industry that are multiply oppressive.

5.2 A RACIST LEGACY

Any critical discussion of the publishing industry—especially as it relates to systems of oppression and disenfranchisement—must begin with an acknowledgement of the industry’s colonial and racist roots. Before we can talk about how the industry functions today, we must first acknowledge that publishing has been weaponized since its very inception to empower select groups by disempowering and enacting violence upon other groups.⁵ In this context, it becomes clear that the problems that we today conceive of as a lack of diversity are actually remnants of publishing’s deeply racist origins. In essence: this is not a temporary or passing imbalance in the industry, but actually a deeply endemic feature of publishing as a tool of the oppressor.

In Canada, book publishing as an organized practice began in earnest in the mid-late 19th century, and was formally institutionalized in the early 20th century with the establishment of Ryerson Press.⁶ Ryerson supplied textbooks to the newly established school system in pre-Confederation Canada, with the explicit goal of creating a unified populace in the newly settled British North America. In effect, this meant promoting a “common set of values, dominated by British interests, among English, Scottish, and Irish immigrants,”⁷ pushing back against American influence from the south, and assimilating Indigenous children into settler culture.⁸ Indeed, book

* In 2010, queer Black scholar Moya Bailey coined the term *misogynoir* to describe this unique type of discrimination. A portmanteau of misogyny (hatred of, or contempt for, women and girls) and noir (the French word for “black,”) it was originally used to name the misogyny directed at Black women in hip hop music.

publishing was an important implement in the colonizer’s toolbox. In fact it was Egerton Ryerson who, in his secondary career as Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada,⁹ laid the early groundwork for the residential school system in Canada,¹⁰ which has become notorious for its heinous abuse of Indigenous children.

The details vary, but a similar scenario has played out whenever a country has been colonized, which brings to light an essential aspect of book publishing throughout history: that it has often been a tool of the dominant culture, and a mouthpiece for the oppressor. As John Maxwell explains in his article “Thinking about the Legacies of Colonialism in Publishing,” in Canada, once the orienting logic behind the publishing industry moved on from nation-building, the industry centered itself around class distinction and social mobility. Because social mobility is inherently linked to cultural hierarchies and social norms, oppression is, in many ways, baked into the central logic of the publishing industry. In Maxwell’s words, “by its very nature, publishing is trading in distinction ... it always risks participating in and trading on the forms of oppression that are shot through the social order of the day.”¹¹ As was discussed earlier in this report, this dynamic forms the basis of, and indeed reinforces, the economies of scale and the logic of the bestseller that underlie the publishing trade. With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that modern publishing has a “diversity” problem—it was never intended to be inclusive or to meet the needs of the disenfranchised.

5.3 PUBLISHING TODAY: STRUCTURES OF INEQUITY

While a historical view may explain the deeply engrained monoculture at the heart of publishing, there are features of the modern industry that exacerbate the situation and perpetuate inequity, including low pay and unpaid internships, a lack of physical accessibility, and a scarcity of mentors and community. In addition to the ethical failing of these features of the industry, which continue to marginalize those who aren’t white, wealthy, able-bodied, cis, and straight, fostering such a homogenous workforce is also a vital structural weakness in the industry. Indeed, aside from the ethical imperative for equity, publishing’s lack of diversity is also a functional deficiency. If publishing were able to reimagine itself as an inclusive industry—to shift from viewing diversity as a liability to viewing it as an asset¹²—it would benefit not only the people working in the industry, but also readers and even society at large.

Perhaps one of the most significant systemic features of the publishing industry which contributes to institutionalized inequity is the culture of

unpaid internships and low wages. Unpaid internships were, for a long time, the unchecked standard avenue by which a person would enter the industry.¹³ Over the course of the last decade or so, however, the practice of employing unpaid interns has come under heavy criticism because, in addition to being unethical,¹⁴ it also presents an extremely high barrier to entry into the profession—effectively limiting a career in publishing to those who are able to survive without an income.¹⁵ While the public outcry against unpaid internships has been productive and many Big Five* publishers, including Penguin Random House and HarperCollins now offer paid internships, the editorial internship at Canada’s own *Quill & Quire* is still unpaid as of 2020,¹⁶ proof that the publishing industry is slow to change.

In addition to unpaid internships making a career in publishing inaccessible to many, the industry’s low wages also threaten the viability of a publishing career for those without accumulated or generational wealth. In 2019 Wendy Lu, writing for *Bustle*, spoke with ten women of colour working in book publishing about the effect that their race has had on their publishing career. All of the women cited the industry’s low wages as a significant barrier to entry. As one woman explained, the industry tends to be staffed “by people who can actually afford the low salaries.”¹⁷ Another respondent explained how communities of colour are significantly less likely to have accumulated the type of generational wealth that could subsidize a career in publishing. Yet another respondent took a \$20,000 pay cut to change careers from teaching to working as an editorial assistant. Even while acknowledging that this was an entry-level wage, she expressed concern for the long-term sustainability of such a significantly lower income.¹⁸

Low wage was also cited as a significant issue in a 2020 *New York Times* article titled, “‘A Conflicted Cultural Force’: What It’s Like to Be Black in Publishing.” Ebony LaDelle, Associate Director of Marketing for HarperCollins explained how she had to work two jobs until she became a manager to make ends meet, while many of her white colleagues were living in apartments purchased for them by their parents.¹⁹ To make matters worse, the English-language book publishing industry tends to cluster in urban cultural centers—New York in the U.S., London in the UK, and Toronto in Canada. Each of these cities are among the most expensive cities in their respective countries,²⁰ which further compounds the financial inaccessibility of a career in publishing.

*While I was writing this report, Bertelsmann (the multinational media conglomerate parent company of Penguin Random House) announced plans to purchase Simon & Schuster, effectively reducing the Big Five to the Big Four.

As this report explored in the previous chapter, there is a significant wage gap in favour of men in the publishing industry—roughly 25%, according to *Publisher's Weekly*.²¹ Furthermore, women of colour, disabled women, and LGBTQ+ folks are likely earning even less than their white, non-disabled, straight, cis counterparts. While we don't have data to quantify these wage gaps in the publishing industry specifically, it is a well-established fact of the working world in general that each of these groups experience magnified pay inequity. According to Statistics Canada, the wage gap for Indigenous women is 35%, and 33% for all racialized women (compared to white men),²² and the wage gap for disabled women is 46% (compared to non-disabled men).²³ It is also well-established that LGBTQ+ and gender nonconforming people experience significant socioeconomic hardship.²⁴ Altogether, these factors make a career in publishing not only financially inaccessible, but also likely unsustainable for women who belong to one or more of these economically disadvantaged communities.

PHYSICAL INACCESSIBILITY

In addition to financial inaccessibility, the publishing industry is also physically inaccessible for many people as a result of both the cities where the industry is based, and the structure of work within the industry. As Alaina Leary argues in *Publishers Weekly*, New York City, the hub of American publishing, is notoriously inaccessible—in fact, only one in five subway stations are wheelchair accessible.²⁵ Toronto (the center of Canadian publishing) appears to be slightly better for people using wheelchairs and other mobility aids, but as journalist Aaron Broverman reported in 2019, only about half of Toronto's subway stations are accessible by wheelchair or scooter.²⁶ In addition to inaccessible public transit, New York and Toronto also have brutal winters in common, which make travelling with a mobility aid cumbersome and dangerous for many months of the year.²⁷

The inaccessibility of publishing's hallowed cities, both financially and physically, would be less of a barrier if the industry was more willing to accommodate remote workers. In "Publishing Needs to Face Its Ableism Problem," Alaina Leary argues that even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw many industries rapidly evolving to accommodate remote work, only two of 166 recent job postings for positions in Big Five publishing houses were open to remote candidates.²⁸

To illustrate the impact that remote-friendly work has on disability representation, Leary highlights areas of the industry that are traditionally supported by freelance (i.e. remote) work. In book reviewing, for instance, the 2019 Lee & Low Diversity Baseline Survey 2.0 found that 19% of workers identified as having a disability, vs. other areas of the industry where roughly

10% of the workforce identified as disabled.²⁹ As Leary contends, more than 400,000 people with disabilities in the United States work from home—if publishing allowed for more remote work, the industry would have a much bigger talent pool to draw from.³⁰

According to *Quill & Quire's* 2020 Workplace Survey (172 respondents), almost 78% of respondents were able to work from home,³¹ however, according to the ACP's 2018 Diversity Baseline Report, only 34% of workplaces reported having accessibility policies in place (reported by 66 heads of firm).³² It's likely that the *Quill & Quire* survey captured freelance/contract workers as well as salaried employees, which may explain the discrepancy in the data. Regardless, given the inconsistency of the data and the relatively small sample sizes, it's difficult to quantify the extent to which Canadian publishers are willing to accommodate remote working arrangements. Nonetheless, physical accessibility remains a very real barrier for people with disabilities, and accommodating remote work is essential to fostering workplaces that are inclusive.

SCARCITY OF MENTORS

A third aspect of today's publishing industry that makes it difficult for people in marginalized communities to succeed is a scarcity of suitable mentors. In many ways, this can be understood as a consequence of financial and physical inaccessibility in addition to the ingrained institutional biases of the industry. In "The Major Built-In Bias of the Publishing World," Jennifer Baker illustrates how the incredibly scarce representation of minorities in the publishing world is a problem that comes full-circle: "The numbers reflected for Black people also substantiate the feeling of 'not being wanted' and illuminate the issues of retention for those who've left, and the potential limitations of mentorship for those who remain."³³

When *Publishers Weekly* profiled the "Next Black Publishing Generation" in 2018, the importance of mentors was a central theme. A number of people interviewed spoke about how important mentors have been to their careers—helping them to find and secure employment, stay motivated, and imagine their futures in the industry.³⁴ A similar article in *Bustle* also highlighted the importance of mentors, and more specifically, the importance of a mentor in whom the mentee can see themselves. As Wendy Lu writes, "being able to find a mentor with a similar background in the industry is essential to one's success, but especially for women of colour in entry level positions."³⁵ Denise Conejo, a publishing professional and woman of colour shared her experience in a mentorship program where nine out of ten mentors she spoke to were white women: "None of them said anything to me that was something I could relate to ... their stories were just,

‘Oh, I happened to fall into publishing.’ That wasn’t helpful to me because I felt like I was fighting to get into publishing.”³⁶ In this example especially, it is evident that a mentor’s value to their mentee (especially when that mentee comes from a community that faces extra barriers to advancement) is directly tied to similarity of experiences.

In addition to mentors who can advise and encourage, advocates who champion women in the early years of their careers are extremely beneficial, especially for women from marginalized communities. According to Cherise Fisher, a literary agent interviewed for the *New York Times*, much of the early success in her career was thanks to proactive sponsors who recognized something in her and propelled her forward.³⁷ Similarly, Kerri K. Greenidge says, “whatever breakthrough successes I have had have been due to Black women who have steered me in the right direction ... But until I plugged into that, it was very, very frustrating.”³⁸ Indeed, when young professionals from minority communities are unable to find suitable mentors or advocates who can help them navigate and overcome the deep-rooted biases of the publishing world, they are more likely to burn out. Black women who spoke to both Baker and Lu reported feelings of dejection and exhaustion after a relatively short amount of time, and chose to either leave publishing or take a break from the industry as a result.³⁹ This serves to illustrate how a lack of mentors and advocates is, in many ways, a self-perpetuating problem.

TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENTS

In a previous chapter this report talked about the cumulative effects of daily sexual harassment that many women face, and these effects were cited as being extremely detrimental to a person’s job satisfaction, work performance, and general well-being. Women who live at the intersections of multiple forms of oppression may also be subjected to deeply engrained biases, racial or otherwise. As Lu explains, workplaces that aren’t inclusive can be extremely hostile for women of colour, for instance.⁴⁰ A number of women that Lu spoke to talked about experiencing microaggressions* from both colleagues and superiors, resulting in a toxic work environment. As Lu explained, “the mental and emotional energy it requires women of colour to tackle sexism, racial stereotypes, and tokenism in workplaces can [take] a physical toll.”⁴¹ In these instances, it’s especially evident how valuable a mentor can be for a marginalized person. The problem, of course, is that for women of colour, like disabled women, non-binary people, and other communities that are

* Microaggressions are subtle, indirect, sometimes unintentionally offensive actions or comments that are based on and often reveal underlying biases or prejudices.

represented by relatively small constituents in the publishing industry, there are so few people to look to for that guidance, support, and advocacy.

5.4 A PRACTICAL CASE FOR DIVERSITY

According to Raphale Mokades, founder of Rare Recruitment, a UK-based recruitment agency specializing in diversity, “the most compelling argument for diversity within a workforce is that it means fishing in a bigger talent pool.”⁴² Indeed, if the publishing industry wants to attract the best editors, marketers, designers, and leaders, it is essential for the industry to reimagine itself as one that is inclusive. Furthermore, according to Chris Jackson, publisher at One World, hiring from a wide range of backgrounds is actually a mutually beneficial practice. As he explains, “every new hire is a chance for me to learn something new in teaching them—to question something I thought I knew.”⁴³ This is why, for Jackson, a unique strength of the publishing industry, one that could potentially be leveraged to create a genuinely diverse workforce, is that the profession naturally lends itself to on-the-job learning. Jackson continues, “[the opportunities to grow through teaching] are far more valuable than a premastery of technical knowledge that can easily be learned on the job. And yet a lack of credentials, connections, and certain forms of experience can sometimes bar people at the entry level.”⁴⁴

In addition to the workplace benefits of inclusive hiring practices, more diverse workplaces also mean more diverse books, which is something that journalist Danuta Kean argues should be a priority for publishers in the coming years. In *Writing the Future*, Kean explains that the homogeneity of publishing houses puts them at a serious disadvantage to respond to the growing appetite for diverse books.⁴⁵ As Kean explains, for publishing to meet this demand, it “will have to become less homogenised, with editors, publicists, and marketers at all levels who have an innate understanding of diverse communities.”⁴⁶

Perhaps the best argument for publishing to reinvent itself as an inclusive industry, however, is that the publishing industry wields a massive amount of cultural power and influence, and while this has historically been used to reinforce the dominant culture, the industry has an immense capacity to make our society more empathic and ultimately stronger. While it will be no simple task to overcome the status quo that has reigned supreme for so long in publishing, it is undoubtedly possible. Furthermore, it is in recognizing these deeply-engrained, constitutional⁴⁷ problems that we begin the important work of making a more equitable industry viable. As John Maxwell

explains, “we need to understand these legacies and how they shape us, and we need to tell ourselves new stories about what writing and publishing mean in today’s world, about who it’s for, and why.”⁴⁸ Only by doing this, Maxwell argues, can we “bust open these old assumptions and hide-bound ways of thinking about publishing, and markets, and culture.”⁴⁹

Only once we, as an industry, recognize the inherent value in a diverse publishing community, can we realize the true potential of publishing in our society. As Chris Jackson explains, “when we expand the range of the industry’s gatekeepers, we expand the range of our storytelling, which expands our ability to see each other, to talk and listen to each other, and to understand each other ... the empathic bridges this creates between us is one of the essential functions of literature in a democracy.”⁵⁰ It is the hope of this future that we must work towards.

5.5 WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, I have barely scratched the surface of diversity in the publishing industry. There are many conversations yet to be had, but I wanted to highlight one in particular that I was unable to address, because it is relevant to the context of this report and the primary space where it will exist. In this chapter I discussed the inequity of internships from a compensation perspective; internships and entry-level jobs can also be problematic when they are closely connected to post-secondary institutions—either in the form of requiring applicants to have completed certain certificates or degrees, or in the sense that the internship is a part of the certificate or degree itself.

By requiring the applicant to have completed a degree or certificate, the internship (regardless of compensation) is made inaccessible by extension to anyone for whom a post-secondary education is financially inaccessible. Furthermore, including internships as part of a degree or certificate encourages closed word-of-mouth networks such as job boards or listservs⁵¹ that, in theory, would magnify the advantage of those who can afford to pursue such degrees and certificates.

It would be valuable to have data quantifying to what extent the Canadian publishing industry is connected to post-secondary institutions. For instance: Of the public job postings in a given year, how many list completion of a publishing degree or certificate as a prerequisite? What is the ratio of privately-circulated employment opportunities vs. public postings? This second research question would of course be more difficult to answer, but rectifying the relationship between the publishing industry and higher education in

Canada could be an important step towards making the Canadian publishing industry more inclusive.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter was not to name every aspect of the modern publishing industry that is hostile towards people from marginalized communities. Indeed, as a result of its colonial and racist roots, book publishing is, at every level, built to respond to and reinforce the dominant culture. Instead, this chapter identified some of the structures within publishing that are multiply oppressive—such as a culture of low wages, limited physical accessibility, and a scarcity of mentors and advocates. Taken together, these features constitute a snapshot of the institutionalized inequity at the heart of the publishing industry, but are by no means exhaustive. Furthermore, publishing’s deeply-engrained inequity is not only an ethical problem, but a systemic weakness as well, as it circumscribes the talent pool, limits the industry’s ability to properly serve diverse communities, and ultimately forecloses on our capacity to bring people together through books.

6.0 THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY

While the publishing industry is still encumbered by its racist origins, it is also continually in flux. In the last decade, this continuous change has manifested both in ways that further complicate the status of women and other marginalized communities working in the industry, and in ways that attempt to remediate the systemic issues in the industry that contribute to inequity. This chapter will examine some of these recent shifts with an eye to the future, and will ultimately argue that the publishing industry of tomorrow can do better—that the industry is capable of reimagining itself as an inclusive profession with equitable working conditions for all women.

6.1 CONTINUED CORPORATE CONSOLIDATION

One feature of the industry that is as relevant to its history as it is to the contemporary structure of the industry is publishing's tendency toward consolidation. In *Ultra Libris*, Rowland Lorimer explains that this tendency for smaller firms to be subsumed into larger ones has been a feature of the trade since at least the late 19th century.¹ The reason that the industry continuously finds itself concentrating control into fewer and fewer corporate hands is usually a simple issue of economics: publishing is an industry where slim profit margins are often the norm,* and small firms tend to have a more difficult time weathering financial precarity than the corporate behemoths that often swallow them. While legislation has been enacted in Canada to financially and structurally support publishers so that they are less vulnerable to takeovers, the 2013 merger of the Penguin Group and Random House (which was preceded by Random House's acquisition of

* According to the Canada Book Fund profit margins for Canadian publishers in the years 2013–2018 were between 6.9% and -8.9%. “CBF as a % of total government funding and % total net revenues,” Government of Canada.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS
OF CORPORATE
CONSOLIDATION

McClelland & Stewart and followed by the 2020 acquisition of Simon & Schuster by Penguin Random House), prove that consolidation is an unstoppable force in publishing.

Corporate consolidation has been shown to negatively impact the career prospects of women and people from other marginalized communities. As Danuta Kean, writing for *The Guardian* in 2017 explained, the amalgamation of publishing houses means fewer “c-circle”* jobs in the industry.² The shrinking number of opportunities, coupled with the fact that these executive positions already tend to be held by men constitutes an extremely steep climb for any woman hoping to ascend the ranks. Furthermore, the phenomenon of promoting in one’s image, discussed in the third chapter of this report, makes matters even worse for women, especially women from marginalized communities that are rarely represented in the upper echelons of the publishing industry. In essence: corporate consolidation reduces the total number of executive positions, and makes it exponentially harder for folks from traditionally marginalized groups to be hired into those positions.

As Anisse Gross argued in a 2017 *Publishers Weekly* article, corporate consolidation may also essentially undermine inclusivity, as it tends to transform small, mission-driven publishing outfits into more commercially-oriented enterprises with an increased focus on the bottom line, leading to less inclusive recruitment strategies, and a less diverse industry overall.³

6.2 POSITIVE TRENDS IN THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

While the continued consolidation of the publishing industry is a major obstacle in creating an equitable and inclusive industry, there are many reasons to feel optimistic about the trade’s ability to redress the balance. These include an increase in studies assessing the industry’s equity and diversity, equity-based initiatives at a number of corporate publishing houses, a rise in independent publishers, and, in Canada, changes to national arts funding. Together, these recent shifts in the industry may be enough to push back against publishing’s problematic history and entrenched inequity.

EQUITY
+ DIVERSITY
DATA

In 2015, Lee & Low Books conducted their first diversity baseline study, dubbed Diversity Baseline Study (DBS) 1.0. Their goal was to measure diversity in North American publishing. The DBS 1.0 had a response rate of 25.8%

* C-circle jobs (sometimes collectively referred to as the c-suite) are executive-level positions, such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), and Chief Financial Officer (CFO).

and among the respondents were, some, but not all, of the Big Five publishers.⁴ Despite providing an incomplete snapshot of the industry, as all data does in one way or another, the results of the DBS 1.0 laid essential groundwork for tackling inequity in the book publishing industry.

In 2019, when Lee & Low conducted their Diversity Baseline Study 2.0, their response rate increased to 36.2%, and 153 publishing companies were represented in the data, including all of the Big Five.⁵ This increase in response rate indicates a greater awareness of diversity issues in the industry, and potentially a greater commitment to equity. In 2019, the Association of Canadian Publishers released the results of their own Book Publishing Diversity Baseline Survey, which reflects this same trend from a Canadian perspective.

THE POWER OF DATA:
A UK CASE STUDY

All in all, the drive towards collecting data that quantifies the inequity present in the publishing industry is an important first step towards fixing the problem. As I've argued, there is important data that has yet to be gathered, but what we know now is already bringing the size and shape of the problems into focus. Data encourages and enables conversation and problem solving, holds organizations accountable, and can also help guide legislation.

A case study of the catalyzing effect of data collection can be seen in the British publishing industry. In 2017, legislation was passed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the UK requiring all companies with 250 employees or more to report on their gender pay gap annually.⁶ In the years since, a number of Big Five publishers have implemented a variety of initiatives focused on increasing equity among their ranks. In 2019, for instance, the UK divisions of Hachette, HarperCollins, and Penguin Random House all announced that they were introducing an equalized parental* leave, in an effort to encourage an equal distribution of domestic responsibilities, and thus narrow the wage gap between men and women working in the industry.⁷ Previous to this policy, paternity leave (available to men) allowed for only 4 weeks total leave, while maternity leave (available to women) allowed for 52 weeks leave.⁸

In addition to parental leave policies, corporate publishers in the UK have put a number of other progressive initiatives in place in the last few years. Hachette pledged that by 2020, women would hold two-thirds of the highest-paid positions in the company, and that half of the Hachette UK board would be female.⁹ (As this report is being written, the Hachette board is comprised of

* Available to all parents, regardless of gender.

9 women and 8 men.)¹⁰ In 2017, Hachette UK also created the Gender Balance Network, which, alongside other Hachette initiatives in their Changing the Story programme, supports equity and inclusion within the company, and in the industry at large.¹¹ Some of these initiatives include Fresh Chapters (a year-long training program for BAME* candidates) and THRIVE Portfolio Review Sessions (for designers and illustrators from BAME backgrounds).

Penguin Random House (PRH) UK has also made strides to increase equity and inclusion in the industry. In early 2020, PRH UK introduced pay banding,¹² which encourages transparency in an effort to eliminate the gender wage gap. In 2016, PRH UK pledged that by 2025, both their staff and the authors that they published would faithfully reflect the diversity of British society.¹³ To achieve this, they have instituted The Scheme, a six-month paid editorial internship with a full benefits package specifically for BAME and economically disadvantaged candidates,¹⁴ in addition to their standard two-week long paid internships. They also removed the requirement of a university degree from all PRH UK job applications in an attempt to make the industry more accessible to people from diverse backgrounds.

The initiatives mentioned above are just a handful of strides taken by corporate publishers in the UK towards an equitable and inclusive industry. Of course, time will tell if these initiatives bear fruit, and time will test these companies' genuine commitment to equity and inclusion, but the annual obligation to publish their pay gap figures will hopefully serve as continual motivation to strive for equity among their ranks.

6.3 FEMINIST INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS

While a handful of corporate publishers are taking steps to remedy the inequity typically found in their hierarchies, a number of women in the industry, lacking faith in corporate publishing's ability to right these myriad wrongs, have chosen instead to break out on their own. Instead of trying to fix what they perceive as a broken system, these trailblazers have decided to build inclusive and equitable publishing houses from the ground up. In 2017, *Publishers Weekly* spoke to a number of women who had left the corporate publishing world in favour of independent publishing. According to C. Spike Trotman, publisher and founder of Chicago, Illinois-based Iron Circus Comics, "I don't trust the intentions and motivations of a lot of large publishers. I think a lot of people at the top especially are extremely resistant

* Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic.

to change.”¹⁵ Rhonda Hughes, who founded both Print Vision (a printing production company) and Hawthorne Books (a literary press) in Portland, Oregon echoes this sentiment: “I realized I wouldn’t get what I wanted unless I left and did it myself.”¹⁶

According to Amy King, one of the women behind VIDA, a feminist literary organization launched in 2010 to increase transparency around issues of gender parity and representation in literary periodicals, non-profits and independent publishers are often the vanguard of positive change. This is because non-profit and independent outfits are able to pursue equity without needing it incentivized, while incentives are often required for large companies to commit to policy change. An immediate return on investment, often a basic metric that large companies use in their decision-making process, is often not possible in matters of equity and inclusion. As she explains: “You don’t see an immediate turnaround on your investment because you’re investing in people.”¹⁷ For corporate publishers, this lack of financial incentive may partially explain why they tend to favour maintaining the status quo.

Of course, publishers of all shapes and sizes do still need to keep the bottom line in view if they want to keep the lights on. The traditional publishing model, in which the publisher is responsible for not only the editorial costs but also the cost of production, printing, warehousing, and distribution, requires a significant monetary investment up front with no guarantee of profit down the line. The result is a modestly profitable business at the best of times, and a financially perilous tightrope walk at the worst of times. In order for independent publishers to find secure financial footing, many have been inspired by funding models typically found in non-profit organizations or start-ups. These business models draw funding from sources outside the publishing house, thus freeing the publisher from having to cater to the often oppressive social norms that underlie economies of scale. This, in turn, allows independent publishers to pursue a mission-driven mandate. Iron Circus Comics, for instance, uses Kickstarter campaigns as an integral part of their business plan, and has, to date, raised almost two million dollars for various projects.¹⁸

In addition to crowdfunding, some publishers, such as the award-winning She Writes Press (founded in 2012 in Tempe, Arizona), as well as its parent company, SparkPoint, are choosing to employ a hybrid model in which authors share the cost of bringing a book to market.¹⁹ While this does allow the publisher to follow a mission-driven mandate internally (both SparkPoint and She Writes Press are women-led and staffed almost entirely by women), this pay-to-play model introduces a financial barrier to entry for prospective

authors that marginalizes those without generational or acquired wealth. Paradoxically, this business model replicates some of the same inequitable structures historically found in the publishing industry, such as the practice of unpaid internships.

Other independent publishers, such as the Albany, New York-based feminist press Shade Mountain (established in 2013), rely on institutional funding as well as an extensive list of donors to fund their books.²⁰ This business model supports Shade Mountain's publishing mandate of "publishing literature by women, especially women of colour, disabled women, women from working-class backgrounds, and LGBTQ women."²¹ In this way, Shade Mountain is able to highlight historically marginalized voices because the economics of the press do not rely on financial support from the authors themselves.

COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT

Shade Mountain's business model also points to another essential feature that underpins many independent feminist publishers, which is a mutually-supportive connection with their community. Speaking to *Electric Lit* in 2017, Laura Stanfill, who in 2012 founded Forest Avenue Press in Portland, Oregon, cited this reciprocal support network as essential for independent presses. As she advises, "Find allies and mentors with business models you want to emulate, and ask them for help. Once you're established in the industry, help the next group of publishers by sharing what you've learned."²² This same sentiment was echoed by Dominique Raccah, founder and publisher of Sourcebooks, which is based in Naperville, Illinois, and has been active since 1987. According to her, "We're in a moment when there's an opportunity for lots of different peoples to work together ... successful female entrepreneurs working together is going to be more and more of a trend as we go forward. We have to help each other succeed."²³ In this way, many independent publishers rely on more well-established independent presses to pave the way, or at least to help clear the brambles, and it is a spirit of collaboration over competition that buoys the efforts of independent feminist presses.

6.4 ECONOMICS OF CANADIAN PUBLISHING

The independent presses discussed in the previous section are indicative of an industry-wide trend wherein those fighting for equity, diversity, and inclusion in the trade are choosing to do so outside of corporate structures. It's significant to note, however, that the presses profiled above are based in the United States, and therefore have a different set of economic circumstances to contend with than publishers in Canada, necessitating the use of non-traditional business models. Canadian publishing, since the 1971 bail

out of McClelland & Stewart, and the subsequent final report of the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing, is supported by government funding as part of a larger programme of national identity articulation and cultural capital production. As such, Canadian independent publishers such as New Society Publishers (Gabriola Island, BC), Caitlin Press (Halfmoon Bay, BC), Theytus Books (Penticton, BC), Book*hug Press (Toronto, ON), Second Story Press (Toronto, ON), and Fernwood Publishing (Black Point, NS) which all pursue mission-based publishing mandates addressing various forms of inequity, are supported by provincial and national government funding.

For many publishers in Canada, government funding is an essential part of their long-term survival and success. While this funding undoubtedly plays an important role in Canadian publishing, eligibility criteria often require publishers to have a proven track record in the form of sales revenue, number of titles, and number of years active. As such, the funding available for publishers in Canada should be seen as a way of sustaining, rather than enabling, independent publishing activity. Therefore, those in Canada looking to establish independent presses in the pursuit of mission-driven publishing mandates will still have to engineer a business plan that will ensure financial viability in the initial years of the press. Given the economies of scale at the heart of the publishing industry, and the tendency of that model to adhere to cultural hierarchies and modes of oppression, these business plans will likely have to be non-traditional in nature, and employ some of the same strategies discussed in the previous section.

IMPORTANCE OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING

For those publishers in Canada who are eligible to receive government funding, this funding is indeed often the deciding factor between long-term viability and extinction. According to data gathered by the Canada Book Fund from 2013–2018, government funding accounts for between 7–30% of Canadian book publishers' total annual revenue.²⁴ Smaller publishers tend to be at the upper end of this range, relying more heavily on this support, while larger publishers appear to be more self-sustaining. Given that profit margins in that same data set were between -8.4% and 6.9%,²⁵ the importance of government funding to Canadian publishing can hardly be exaggerated.

CHANGES TO FUNDING POLICIES IN CANADA

With the reliance of the Canadian publishing industry on government funding in mind, new regulations set in place in 2018 may encourage publishers to create healthier and more equitable workplaces, even if they are not a feminist or otherwise mission-driven press. Changes to the Canada Council for the Arts granting process now require recipients to ensure that they provide a “workplace free from discrimination, harassment and sexual misconduct”.²⁶ As demonstrated above, the financial support in question is

the difference between solvency and bankruptcy for many Canadian publishers, so it is significant that this funding body has adopted a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment. That being said, the Canada Council for the Arts doesn't have any audit or inspection apparatuses to carry out this new zero-tolerance policy, which means that it is incumbent upon employees to self-report instances of harassment. Given that these reports may threaten the publisher's funding status, which in turn may endanger the company's survival—and by extension, the employee's job—it seems possible that this may have a silencing effect. Furthermore, the process for reporting complaints of sexual harassment to the Canada Council involves reporting the harassment directly to the executives of the publishing house “with the Council in cc.”²⁷ With no way to remain anonymous, this process could also discourage a person from reporting harassment, as they might fear the repercussions of speaking out.

In addition to denouncing sexual harassment, both the Canada Council for the Arts and the Department of Canadian Heritage (which disperses the Canada Book Fund) have sponsored the “Respectful Workplaces in the Arts” initiative, administered by the Cultural Human Resources Council. Respectful Workplaces in the Arts is centered around education and training, offering consultation services as well as resources for coordinating working groups. Similar to the zero-tolerance policy toward sexual harassment, however, the onus is still on the publisher to opt-in to this initiative and take advantage of the resources available. If the old boys' club mentality, which is inherently sexist, continues to run rampant in the upper ranks of corporate publishing houses, it's possible that these resources may only end up preaching to the choir, so to speak. While institutional recognition is a step in the right direction, until the Canada Council for the Arts and the Department of Canadian Heritage are able to independently enforce their respectful workplace policies, these regulations and initiatives will remain largely symbolic.

6.5 CONCLUSION

While the history of the publishing industry—in particular the book publishing industry—may be inextricably linked to patriarchal power structures and colonialism, and while vestiges of these legacies may continue to play out in the form of systemic marginalization of women and minority groups, there are nonetheless reasons to feel optimistic about the future.

Despite the industry's continual consolidation, there are various industry trends and initiatives that, over time, could be profoundly transformative

in bringing about equity and inclusion in the industry. There has been an increased interest in data that quantifies diversity and equity, for example, which is an important step in the right direction. This data, whether gathered voluntarily, such as by the Diversity Baseline Surveys conducted by Lee & Low Books, or through the obligatory reporting legislated in the UK, is a strong driver of change. Significantly, this data, once gathered, may even serve to encourage equity in traditionally hierarchical corporations. At the same time, a new generation of independent feminist publishers are able to pursue equity and inclusion as a central mandate thanks in part to their non-traditional business models. In Canada specifically, there have been policies in place since 2018 to discourage harassment and discrimination in the publishing industry. Time will tell how effective these policies are, but it is encouraging that the major cultural funding bodies in Canada have officially recognized the importance of a workplace free of harassment and discrimination.

GRASSROOTS
MOVEMENTS
FOR EQUITY

What is lost in the data, but is made unquestionably clear in industry publications and social media movements, is that the publishing industry is comprised of passionate professionals united by a common goal of connecting authors and readers through the written word. This chapter focused on systemic changes to the industry, which inherently assumes the loci of power to be the institution, but there has indeed been a groundswell of activism at the grassroots level of the industry, suggesting that the next generation of publishing executives may be more interested in pursuing equity, diversity, and inclusion as a central mandate. Initiatives such as the Twitter account Publishers Weakly,* the Book Worker Power collective,† and the Book Money Google sheet‡ are indicative of a growing awareness of, and desire to remedy, various inequities within the publishing industry. As such, even if the current c-suite generation is reluctant to change the status quo, there is still evidence of a changing tide. There is reason to believe that a more equitable publishing industry is not just possible but indeed likely.

As publishing continues to reckon with its inherent biases and systemic inequities, both within and outside of the institution, it gradually removes barriers that have traditionally been in place for women and minority groups working in the trade. Indeed, if publishing is able to focus less on the

* Account suspended as of December 2020.

† Book Worker Power can be found on Twitter @bookworkerpower.

‡ The Book Money Google document can be found at: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1p9y99EpFTDKZBi6FqPrFg9jvPcZObTTjY8LpkU2-1SI/edit#gid=579589600>.

gatekeeping aspect of cultural industries, and more on the unitive potential of books and literature, the industry can become not only more equitable, diverse, and inclusive, but also stronger. According to Chris Jackson, publisher at One World books, publishing that is centered around equity, diversity, and inclusion enables artistic output that is more reflective of the diverse range of stories and storytellers in our society. Expanding the range of storytelling in this way allows us to bridge gaps of understanding between different groups of people, allowing for a stronger and more united society. To fulfill this essential purpose, we must “build a publishing industry—at all levels of publishing—that honours the potential, the complexity, and the fullness of the world itself.”²⁸

7.0 SUMMING UP

The last decade has seen a number of industries brought to task on issues of sexual discrimination and systemic inequity, and publishing is no exception. Following the 2016 tidal wave of sexual harassment allegations levelled against a number of Hollywood heavyweights, the publishing industry was also forced to reckon with a deeply engrained culture of sexual harassment and discrimination. Then, following the murder of George Floyd in the spring of 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement encouraged calls for equity, diversity, and inclusion across many industries, including publishing. While much of this activism has originated on social media, using hashtags like #MeToo, #ImWithHer, and #PublishingPaidMe among others, these calls for equity in publishing have reverberated throughout the industry, drawing attention to the gender and racial inequity rife within the trade.

These are not new conversations in publishing. In fact, a London-based advocacy group formed in 1989 called Women in Publishing had the express purpose of lobbying for gender parity in the industry. Their first report, titled “Twice as Many, Half as Powerful” outlined their grievances—it drew attention to the glass ceiling that women in the industry faced, as well as a considerable pay gap, while also highlighting the fact that women significantly outnumbered men in the industry. As one member, Claire Baker put it, “there were so many women in publishing, why weren’t we running the industry?”¹

While historic initiatives such as Women in Publishing have done important work advocating for gender parity, many of these movements have largely been comprised of, and therefore focused on improving the status of, white, straight, able-bodied, cis women in the industry. Questioning the underrepresentation of women of colour, LGBTQ+ women, and women from other traditionally marginalized communities was not part of their mission statement, nor was finding ways to ensure that marginalized women in the industry were able to succeed. It would be unfair to say that this was the case

for *all* of the feminist activism that took place in the mid–late 20th century, however dominant feminist ideologies of the era were notoriously exclusive. As a result, mainstream feminist organizing lacked an intersectional perspective. In publishing specifically, it would be some time before the industry at large began to reckon with its profound lack of equity and diversity. The Lee & Low Diversity Baseline Surveys, launched in 2015, are the first to quantify this problem at scale, though the data gathered by these surveys speak only to North American publishing.

7.1 EQUITY IN CANADIAN PUBLISHING

The book publishing industry has been grappling with the issue of gender discrimination for decades, however, Canadian publishing has yet to evaluate our domestic industry comprehensively, or to formulate a collective action plan for righting these wrongs. Furthermore, publishing at large as well as here in Canada has failed to acknowledge that gender and racial discrimination, as well as ableism and other forms of discrimination in the industry are all essentially forms of systemic inequity in our workplaces. As such, the first and foremost goal of this report was to explore gender inequity in the industry from a Canadian perspective, situated in a global context. To accomplish this, the report took an in-depth look at gender-based inequity in the industry, before moving on to a discussion of broader issues of inclusivity in publishing. To the extent that it was possible, I approached this work with an intersectional orientation, though I was hindered in essential ways by both the data available, and my position as a white, cis, heterosexual, able-bodied woman.

This report examined three principal domains of gender inequity that are features of the Anglophone book publishing industry in Canada as well as globally: sexual harassment, circumscribed advancement, and the wage gap.

Sexual harassment is a significant problem in Canadian publishing. In fact, the data that we have suggests that rates of sexual harassment in Canadian publishing are more than 10 times higher than workplace sexual harassment elsewhere in Canadian society. These figures are in line with both the American and British book publishing industries. There are a number of theories to explain why sexual harassment is so prevalent in the publishing world, including the social nature of the industry, the competitive and exploitative nature of creative work, and the patriarchal structure of the industry. Together, these factors create a working environment where women are not only vulnerable to sexual harassment, but also where sexual harassment is likely to go unchecked.

SEXUAL
HARASSMENT

CIRCUMSCRIBED
ADVANCEMENT

In addition to dealing with the daily noise of sexual harassment, women also tend to over-index in the industry but are underrepresented at the executive level, in Canada and elsewhere globally. This can be understood as a consequence of both the industry's old boys' networks and the social nature of the industry, which according to recent studies may disproportionately benefit men. Women also may be underrepresented at the executive level because they tend to have shorter careers in publishing than their male counterparts, which points to the urgency of the work that this report has undertaken—if women are being driven from the industry prematurely, then we must take steps to understand why that is the case. Exploring factors that may contribute to a hostile or unrewarding work environment for women is, by all accounts, a reasonable place to start.

THE WAGE GAP

Wage inequity is another significant problem in the publishing world. In Canada, we don't currently have very robust data to quantify the wage gap between men and women in publishing, but the data that we do have—coupled with what we know from the American and British book publishing industries—is cause for concern. Beyond that, however, the lack of consistent, comparable, and transparent data both between countries, and also within countries between the publishing industry and the workforce in general makes it almost impossible to discern the magnitude of the wage gap or how it may be changing over time. Nevertheless, an entrenched culture of overwork may be a major contributing factor to the gender wage gap in publishing, as research has shown that men tend to consistently out-earn women in industries where overworking is the norm.

HOMOGENEITY IN
THE WORKFORCE

The issue of inequity in the book publishing industry extends far beyond a lack of parity between men and women. In order to capture the scope of inequity as it applies to *all* women, it's important to consider various intersections of discrimination that are at play in publishing. There are numerous, multiply oppressive structural aspects of the industry such as financial and physical inaccessibility, a lack of community, and a scarcity of suitable mentors and advocates. In Canada specifically, the industry was built to respond to and support the dominant culture, which has played out historically in aggressive assimilation campaigns. In the present day, this legacy manifests in the economies of scale at the heart of the industry, which marginalize those outside of the dominant culture. The resultant inequities are not only unethical, but they also fundamentally weaken the industry. In order for our industry to be as strong, as productive, and as resilient as possible, we must radically reimagine how our industry functions—it's imperative that we reframe diversity as an asset and find ways to make our industry more inclusive.

RECENT
CHANGES IN
THE PUBLISHING
INDUSTRY

While the publishing industry is notoriously slow to change, there have been some recent systemic shifts in the industry that have implications for the status of women and other marginalized communities in publishing. The industry's penchant for consolidation is a perennial force against pro-equity efforts in the industry—fewer executive positions often mean that women and people from other marginalized groups are less likely to be promoted. That being said, the effects of recently-instituted compulsory wage gap reporting in the UK suggest that corporate consolidation doesn't necessarily have to spell disaster in terms of equity and diversity. Outside of corporate publishing, a burgeoning movement of independent publishers are finding innovative ways to pursue mission-driven publishing mandates that are less encumbered by the economies of scale that typically circumscribe equity in publishing.

In Canada, funding bodies have taken an official stance against sexual harassment and have developed resources to promote safe and respectful workplaces. It remains to be seen what the material effects of these efforts will be, but it is a step in the right direction nonetheless.

While the institution of the publishing industry may be slow to change, there have been extensive grassroots movements calling for increased equity and diversity in publishing that have gained significant momentum in online spaces over the last few years. The proliferation of awareness and resulting calls to action point toward a hopeful future for the publishing industry.

7.2 A CALL FOR BETTER DATA

This report was limited in fundamental ways by the data available on the publishing industry globally and in Canada. In many cases, the data that I analyzed and discussed was gathered via surveys administered by trade publications such as *Publishers Weekly* and *Quill & Quire*. While these surveys provide an extremely valuable look into the industry, they do not form a complete picture. These surveys often had very small sample sizes and, concerning issues such as sexual harassment, there is a significant likelihood of a self-selected respondent base, which may have distorted the data. In order to properly address the systemic inequity within Canadian publishing, we need to have an accurate idea of what we are facing, which is only possible with robust data.

In addition to a general lack of data, there is also a grievous lack of intersectional data available in the publishing industry. We know that there is an entrenched culture of discrimination against women, and we know that women of colour, LGBTQ+ folks, and people living with disabilities are under-represented in the industry, but we don't really know how these intersecting

forms of inequity manifest in the publishing industry. Until we understand how multiple forms of oppression converge in the trade, it will be difficult to determine the best way forward. There is a lot of learning that still needs to be done, a lot of conversations that need to happen, and a lot of voices that need to be heard. I hope that my report will spur this work on.

7.3 CONCLUSION

In the background of this report coming together, the world has faced a calamity of previously unimaginable consequences. COVID-19 has forced many industries to quickly adapt and evolve, and the sheltering in place directives that people have had to adopt will likely change the way our society functions for years into the future. Given that our trade already typically functions in a state of relative economic precarity, it's likely that an economic downturn resulting from the pandemic will hit the publishing industry particularly hard. While there will be temptation for publishing houses to batten the hatches, so to speak, and revert to inequitable, conservative business practices, perhaps this crisis will also provide an opportunity for renewal and reinvigoration in the industry. If there is a silver lining, perhaps it is that this period of change may rid us of our rigid conceptions of how our industry functions. Given that we have already changed so many aspects of how we live our lives, perhaps we can also reimagine ways for our industry to be safer, more equitable, more inclusive, more diverse, and stronger.

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