

Intersectionality and the Second-Wave: An Analysis of the British Columbia Federation of Women in the 1980s

by

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Abstract

Second-wave feminist historiography generally analyzes the movement from the perspective of gender plus another system of difference such as class, race, or sexuality. This thesis uses intersectionality as a conceptual framework to investigate whether Canadian second-wave feminists understood that multiple factors, such as race, class, and sexuality, combined with gender to create inequalities. Exploring the British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) and issues for which the organization advocated in the 1980s—particularly, lesbian rights, pornography censorship, and abortion accessibility—this thesis argues that the BCFW did exhibit a proto-intersectional understanding of how multiple systems of difference impacted women's experiences of oppression.

Keywords: British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW); second-wave feminism; intersectionality; women's history; British Columbia

Dedication

To my grandmother, Marilyn Procyk. Her dedication to family genealogy and keeping our ancestor's memories alive inspired me to pursue historical research.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

In 1980, a male prison guard from the Oakalla Prison in British Columbia went on trial for assaulting a female inmate the previous year, an act that had provoked outrage from the British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW).¹ Even before this heinous crime, Oakalla's abhorrent prison conditions were on the radar of the BCFW. On Christmas Eve in 1976, members of the BCFW's Prisoner's Rights Group held a candlelight vigil outside Oakalla. Symbolically, these women were mourning the loss of holiday visiting hours for prisoners and the continuous use of solitary confinement as punishment, which the Supreme Court of Canada had ruled as a cruel and unusual punishment. In the late 1970s, it had become evident that women in Canadian prisons were being abused and mistreated. Part of the mistreatment stemmed from a lack of women-only prison facilities, a result of the relatively small female prison population.² Consequently, mixed-sex prisons were the norm, leaving female prisoners vulnerable to abuse from both male guards and male prisoners. BCFW members wanted British Columbia's prison system to be restructured so that the at-risk population of female prisoners would not be harmed further.

Prisoner rights activism is generally not associated with the more broadly-based campaigns of second-wave feminism in Canada; yet the BCFW's interest in prison reform suggests concern with social justice issues that directly affected marginalized

¹ "Male Guard Goes on Trial for Assault of Oakalla Woman Prisoner," *Kinesis*, September 1980.

² For example, there were approximately 1000 men in BC prisons and about 80 women in penitentiaries at this time. "Prisoner Rights," *Kinesis*, December 1976.

women. In the following three chapters, I assess how the BCFW addressed the inclusion of lesbian women in feminist organization, sexism and pornography, and reproductive rights and justice. This thesis draws on theories of intersectionality and literature on second-wave feminism to argue that the BCFW understood that women's status was shaped by power relations involving race, sexuality, and class as well as gender. BCFW members often over-generalized these identities and tried to place women into categories that homogenized the complexity of their lives. Nevertheless, the BCFW understood that women faced oppression in a multitude of ways, suggesting that the group embraced proto-intersectional feminism.

Structure and Origins

The BCFW was a province-wide umbrella organization of smaller, ideologically varied women's groups. Although it was a non-hierarchical organization, it did maintain loosely structured leadership roles while attempting to maintain equitable relations among members and member groups. The bedrock of the BCFW was its constitution and policy, which stated the organization's objectives. All member groups were able to propose new policy at yearly conventions, highlighting the BCFW's grassroots character. In addition, the BCFW sectioned the province into 12 regions in which member groups held regional monthly meetings and discussed feminist action. A standing committee of ten members enabled the BCFW to function on a routine basis; this committee discussed and implemented financial and administrative details that kept the organization active but was not empowered to determine policy, which was reserved for membership discussion at annual conventions. Women elected to the standing committee held one-year terms to prevent potential misuse of authority. Each region

elected a delegate to attend monthly standing committee gatherings to ensure proper representation.³ With local representation and a standing committee that rotated at yearly conventions, the BCFW functioned relatively smoothly as a provincial organization, but it also maintained its grassroots character.

The BCFW had its origins in a 1973 UBC Women's Action Group conference called "Women and Education," which resulted in a number of British Columbian women calling for a province-wide feminist organization. Several issues had left BC women determined to see more progress on feminist concerns. One factor was inaction by the newly elected NDP government. Although the NDP had won the 1972 provincial election with a strong majority and had incorporated feminist policy in their election platform, feminists were concerned that the party was not acting quickly to pass woman-focused legislation. Attendees of the 1973 Legislative Priorities for Women's Rights believed that the priorities and goals of women's groups across the province were relatively cohesive, making a large pressure group feasible. Furthermore, feminists were increasingly active in this period, and by early 1974, there were several well-attended conferences in the Lower Mainland at which women's groups expressed the desire to have actual change rather than lip service paid on women's issues. In sum, feminist women in British Columbia were displeased with government inaction, were in agreement on some key issues, and wanted to see political action.⁴ The NDP Women's Committee agreed and proactively sent out a general message to provincial feminist organizations to attend their Action for Women conference at Capilano College in May

³ Article from BCFW Newsletter Vol.1 No. 1 entitled "BCFW Herstory" written by Cynthia Flood, 1975, F-111-5-0-1, box 9483, file F-111-5-0-1, Women's Bookstore Collection, Simon Fraser University Archives, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby (hereafter cited as Article, Women's Bookstore Collection).

⁴ Article, Women's Bookstore Collection.

1974.⁵ Around 300 women participated, and attendees agreed to create a province-wide organization to press forward on women's issues.⁶

The implementation of this plan began in the summer of 1974, when 30 women from different regions of the province periodically met to discuss the potential policy, structure, and objectives for the fledgling group. These ideas would be further fleshed out at the BCFW's founding convention in Fall 1974.⁷ The 350 attendees agreed upon an over-arching structure, which would include a yearly-elected standing committee comprised of 10 provincial and 12 regional representatives. Workshops were held on four key policy issues: health, childcare, education, and employment. Participants agreed that most funding would be solicited through community support and individual fundraising to avoid competing with other women's organizations that had similar goals. Sub-committees would be formed to focus on specific issues, such as lesbian rights or prisoner rights.⁸ These functions and policies were articulated in a constitution that was created and presented for adoption at the 1975 convention.

At the convention, the new constitution was approved, with one amendment: membership was limited to feminist groups rather than individual women. New policy was introduced in the areas of childcare, rights of lesbians, women in prison, and education. Attendees defined the types of action that the BCFW would engage in, including letter writing, public statements, demonstrations, and civil disobedience.⁹ At

⁵ BCFW Annual Convention Information Sheet, 10-13 November 1978, 10-045-S4-F6, box 3-2, file F6, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds, Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario (hereafter cited as BCFW Annual Convention, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds).

⁶ Article, Women's Bookstore Collection.

⁷ BCFW Annual Convention, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

⁸ BCFW Annual Convention, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

⁹ BCFW Annual Convention, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

the 1976 convention, the standing committee was empowered to expand policy areas within the BCFW constitution. Additionally, despite reservations about government influence, the organization would apply for Secretary of State funding. To maintain a distance from government the organization agreed to use government funds for travel costs to the annual convention and standing committee meetings. Funds for carrying out work on feminist issues were to be derived from membership dues and fundraising efforts.¹⁰

The BCFW began to progress as a feminist organization at its 1977 convention. A second version of its policy handbook was amended and broadened the range of potential spheres of action for the organization, such as advocating for midwifery, articulating concerns about women's mental health, and ending sex-segregated education in public schools.¹¹ By now, the BCFW had been granted funding from the Secretary of State, which financed the 1977 Transition House Conference, the Health Committee's Abortion Handbook, and travel for the Rights of Lesbians Subcommittee to present their workshop across the province. By that year, the organization had over 80 district delegates, representing 47 smaller women's organizations and over 2000 women across British Columbia.¹² The BCFW exponentially grew from the initial several hundred women who had been interested in an umbrella organization.

After the 1978 BCFW convention, the third and final policy handbook was printed. Updated policy initiatives included a section that supported Quebec

¹⁰ BCFW Annual Convention, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

¹¹ BCFW 1976 Convention Minutes, 5-7 November 1976, F-111-5-0-4, box 9483, file F-111-5-0-4, Women's Bookstore Collection, Simon Fraser University Archives, Burnaby. Issues around women's mental health included how women were diagnosed as depressed because they did not adhere to feminine roles, and women were more likely than men to receive electroshock therapy, which is a painful treatment.

¹² "4th Annual BCFW Conference," *Kinesis*, November 1977.

sovereignty, stating that Francophones were “an oppressed nation within our country.”¹³ Members also crafted policy that opposed Anita Bryant’s crusade against homosexuality. The BCFW also criticized the Attorney General of BC for politically harassing prison activists Betsy Wood and Gay Hoon by using powers of direct indictment, even though the two had been excused after preliminary questioning from charges of attempted murder and complicity in an attempted escape of prisoners from the BC Penitentiary.¹⁴ By 1978, the BCFW had built the foundation for their feminist activities in the years to come.

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, the BCFW was attuned to global feminist discussions about feminist issues and changed some of its policy in response to these trends. For example, the group monitored connections between violence against women and pornography and articulated an anti-pornography stance, culminating in the creation of anti-pornography special interest groups such as an action committee to shut down Red Hot Video (1982) and an Anti-Porn Action Group (1984).¹⁵ In the meantime, issues like women’s reproductive health and lesbian rights remained consistent points of advocacy for the group. This thesis examines the BCFW’s interventions in these areas, particularly in the early 1980s, as a means to understand the extent to which members were able to address multiple subjects shaped by the complex interactions of gender, class, race, sexuality, and region.

¹³ Minutes of the Fifth Annual BCFW Convention, 10-13 November 1978, 10-045-S4-F6, box 3-2, file F6, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds, Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario (hereafter cited as Fifth Annual BCFW Convention, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds).

¹⁴ Fifth Annual BCFW Convention, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

¹⁵ Newsletter, Winter 1983, F-134-8-0-0-19, box 10244, file F-134-8-0-0-19, Press Gang Printer Fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby British Columbia. Coordinating Collective Minutes, February 1984, F-40-7-4-0-2, box 8027, file F-40-7-4-0-2 Simon Fraser University Women’s Centre Fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of intersectionality is key to my analysis. First introduced by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality has been expanded to argue that all people are positioned asymmetrically along systems of perceived difference – such as gender, race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and region – that relate to inequitable power relations in societies.¹⁶ The cumulative extent to which one experiences privilege or oppression in these multiple systems affects one's opportunities, experiences, and world view. There is little historical scholarly work on Canadian women's groups that embraces an intersectional analysis, although some studies have dealt with dual oppressions in studying particular marginalized groups. In relation to BC second-wave feminism, for example, M. Julia Creet (1990) has published a chapter on lesbian visibility in the BCFW, and Julia Smith (2015) has combined an analysis of gender and class in an article on working women in Vancouver's Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada.¹⁷ Neither, however, embraces the fullness of intersectional analysis that my study employs.

Literature Review

By analyzing the BCFW through the lens of intersectionality, I observe how power differentials impacted women's internal and external group activities. Before the

¹⁶ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour" in *Critical Race Theory*, eds. Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (New York: New York Press, 1995), 357-383.

¹⁷ Julia Smith, "An "Entirely Different" Kind of Union: The Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972–1986." *Labour* no. 73 (Spring 2014): 23-65, JSTOR and Julia M. Creet, "A Test of Unity: Lesbian Visibility in the British Columbia Federation of Women" in *Lesbians in Canada*, ed. Sharon Stone (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1990), 183-197.

term intersectionality was coined, the feminist scholar bell hooks advocated for similar considerations about linkages of power dynamics and different political identities, with a focus on race and gender. hooks demonstrates how historical and current societal experiences of black women have differed significantly from those of black men (on the basis of gender) and white women (on the basis of race).¹⁸ Consequently, political movements that aim to eradicate societal oppressions based on race or sex separately do not represent the interests of black women, as their oppression is exponentially different. hooks states that the hierarchal power structure in American society places white men at the top, followed by white women, then black men, and then black women. Even though hooks theorizes about racial and sexual societal power structures, however, she does not discuss other systems of difference such as class and sexuality; she also does not discuss other racialized groups. Nevertheless, her book is an early example of intersectional analysis: the relationship between different social, political, and economic identities that affects one's power position and life experiences.¹⁹ My research about the BCFW is informed by hooks' intervention but expands the scope of an intersectional analysis to include multiple spheres of difference that have impacted women's lives.

As my research project primarily uses an intersectional analysis, it is crucial to consider how and why this framework developed. Intersectionality as a term is derived from critical race theory. Between the mid-1970s until the mid-1980s, African American

¹⁸ I refer to people of colour as "black" here because bell hooks in her book refers to people of colour as "black" in *Ain't I a Woman?* But in *Critical Race Theory*, the authors refer to themselves as African American. Due to the complex decisions involved in choosing how to identify yourself, I refer to the authors with what terms they refer to themselves as.

¹⁹ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman : Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

legal scholars shaped the contours of critical race theory as a response to racial prejudice in the American legal system. Critical race theory emerged as an ideological framework that was a “critique of law, racism, and social power.”²⁰ Integral to critical race theory were early writings by legal scholars who discussed how white racial hegemony within the job market continued after the Civil Rights Movement, despite legal and social correctives such as affirmative action and “colour blindness” initiatives.²¹ Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw noted one glaring generalization within critical race theory: the theory was based on how societal power structures affected African American males and ignored the experiences of African American females.²² As African American women generally held less power than African American men, Crenshaw’s differentiation between hierarchal structures undergirded not only by race—but also by gender—was the fledgling moment for contemporary understandings of intersectionality. In another critical intervention in 1990, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins extended the reach of Crenshaw’s framework of intersectionality to include multiple sites of oppression within a “matrix” of systems of power, including race, class, gender, and sexuality.²³

Through the 1990s and into the 2000s, conceptualizations of intersectionality expanded to embrace greater complexity in power relations. In trying to identify “interconnected criteria” for shaping intersectional approaches in her own field, Collins has scrutinized the role of academia in socially constructing, legitimizing, and

²⁰ Cornel West, “Introduction” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed a Movement*, eds. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (New York: New York Press, 1995), xix.

²¹ West, “Introduction,” xxv.

²² West, “Introduction,” xxi.

²³ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

reproducing knowledge. Scholars, she argues, have been complicit in creating and maintaining a hierarchical structure of knowledge (and hence power), even as they have tried to dismantle it.²⁴

Some current scholarship has tried to draw together the various threads of intersectional analysis—a task that can be quite daunting. Political scientists Wendy G. Smooth and Ange-Marie Hancock both reinforce the significance of analyzing multiple categories of difference in terms of oppression and dominance. They warn, however, that intersectionality is more than simply the sum of its parts. These categories of experience are mutually constitutive, and scholars must find a way to integrate multiple lines of inquiry throughout their work, rather than treating these systems in isolation (often in separate articles or chapters of monographs). They remind us that there is diversity within each category and that it is likely that individuals will experience marginalization and privilege across categories. And they both argue that the categories are often contested, opening the door for social justice action.²⁵

Intersectionality has more readily been adopted in the United States, where it has been particularly shaped and championed by scholars (often women) of colour, than in Canada. While multiple systems of difference have been widely acknowledged in Canadian academia, there has been a reluctance to develop a cohesive analysis of all these strands of experience in a holistic way. The discipline of history has lagged in both Canada and the United States, perhaps because our available sources have not

²⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, “Intersectionality’s Definitional Dilemmas.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1, (Summer 2015): 3, Annual Reviews Complete Collection.

²⁵ Wendy G. Smooth, “Intersectionality from the Theoretical Framework to Policy Intervention,” in *Situation Intersectionality: Politics, Policy, and Power*, ed. Angela R. Wilson, 11-41, (New York: Palgrave, 2012); Ange-Marie Hancock, *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History*, (New York: NY Oxford University Press, 2016).

been archived and organized to facilitate analysis of such complexity. As a master's student, I have no illusions that I will solve such a complex dilemma, but intersectionality theory has been an aspirational framework in my research and writing.

Another body of historiography with which I engage in my research is literature on second-wave feminism, with special attention on Canada. To grasp fully the context within which the BCFW was operating, it is vital to understand the range of feminisms that proliferated in Western society in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Liberal, radical, socialist/Marxist, and materialist feminism were prominent variations of feminism within the second-wave.²⁶ A groundbreaking work that ignited second-wave liberal feminism was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Specifically, Friedan explored the question of why most suburban women were dissatisfied as housewives. She argued that these college-educated women were not being intellectually stimulated, and to remedy their frustrations, women needed careers outside the home.²⁷ Shulamith Firestone described the underlying assumptions of radical feminism: that the root of women's oppression lay in the family structure and sexism, stemming from a perception of woman's biological inferiority; and that to end sexism, all reproductive functions needed to be rendered obsolete with technological advancements.²⁸ By contrast, Marxist feminists such as Margaret Benston argued that the root of all sexual oppression was economic inequity.

²⁶ Other feminisms were also prevalent to Western society. For example, revolutionary, post-colonial, and black British feminism are different Western feminisms. See *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism* by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and "Many Voices, One Chant: Black Feminist Perspectives" 1984 edition of *Feminist Review*.

²⁷ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1963).

One criticism of liberal feminism is that it only benefits white, middle-class, heterosexual women. Within Friedan's book, her target audience is white, suburban, college-educated, middle-class women. So, the feminism that is espoused focuses on extremely privileged women within society.

²⁸ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution*, (New York: W. Marrow, 1970).

Benston critiqued Marxists' failure to note that women's work was devalued because it was not paid work.²⁹ Christine Delphy argued that while capitalism was significant in the oppression of women in industrial production, of greater consequence was the gender imbalance and patriarchal oppression that was rife in the domestic mode of production.³⁰ BCFW members used several of these feminist theories as the bedrock for understanding social issues like reproductive rights, pornography, and lesbian rights, all of which I investigate in my thesis.

In 1988, Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail described Canadian second-wave feminism and focused on the societal impact the movement had in Canada, including significant changes in legislation such as the legalization of abortion, the introduction of discourse about violence against women, and the raising of public awareness about women's issues.³¹ The authors highlighted issues within the movement itself—such as fragmentation and a sharp decline in general activism—that stalled the success of their project. This analysis of divisiveness has proved useful in my own work, as has their discussion of power dynamics between working-class and middle-class women. While the authors do not discuss other power dynamics in Canadian society, such as Franco-Anglo tensions and colonialism, it has provided important context for my own examination of class power relations within the BCFW membership.

²⁹ Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review* 21, no. 4 (1969): 13-27.

³⁰ Christine Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*, trans. and ed. Diana Leonard (London: Hutchinson in association with the Explorations in Feminism Collective, 1984).

³¹ Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press Canada, 1988), 4-5.

Class has continued to be an important lens for exploring Canadian second-wave feminism in the twenty-first century literature as historians have broadened their understanding of the composition of feminist movements. Meg Luxton disrupts the perceptions of a monolithic middle-class movement, arguing that a vein of Canadian second-wave feminism surfaced amongst working-class and poor women. In Luxton's analysis of the cross-country 1996 women's march against poverty, she traces the connections between the labor movement and the women's movement back to the 1960s and argues that the link between both groups led to a large section of Canada's women's movement being devoted to working-class feminism. Luxton observes that race also contributed to wealth inequality, although she does not explore this issue in her 2001 article.³² Still, Luxton's acknowledgement that race and class intertwine in power structures skirts with intersectional analysis, and her article has been helpful to my own research as I contemplate how race and class issues were reflected within and challenged by the BCFW.

Discourse analysis has also proved to be a fruitful avenue of investigation for twenty-first century scholars of the second-wave. Barbara Freeman has investigated how Anglo-Canadian newspapers and television broadcasts covered the Women's Liberation Movement in the wake of the 1966 Royal Commission on the Status of Women. While journalists claimed objectivity in their reports, Freeman argues that how English-speaking Canadian reporters discussed news stories in the mid-1960s relayed reporter's personal opinions about the feminist movement. Journalists garnered information through a top-down approach: one head investigator passed down

³² Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* vol. 48 (Fall 2001): 63-88, JSTOR Arts and Sciences V.

information to other reporters, which created the potential for layers of personal interpretation in the presentation of “facts.” Given the positionality of most senior journalists (as white, heterosexual, middle-class men), feminist activities were often reported on negatively.³³ As I investigated Canadian newspapers in my own work, Freeman’s deconstruction of media sources were critical in the development of my final argument.

While also exploring newspapers, Joan Sangster investigates feminist newspapers of the late 1960s to mid-1980s, attempting to discern the “historical consciousness” of journalists who engaged with feminist issues of the period, while seeking to embed their activism in political movements of the past. She challenges the perception that the Canadian feminist movement was identical to that in the United States, but also recognizes that the national movement was influenced by international trends. She also challenges the common historiographical view that Canadian second-wave feminism was solely a middle-class and white endeavor by presenting a broad range of evidence that feminist newspapers embraced issues concerning the working class, Indigenous women, and Third World feminism in Quebec.³⁴ Sangster’s investigation of how second-wave feminist journalists brought a proto-intersectional analysis to their activism has helped me to think about whether the BCFW brought similar lenses to the issues they confronted in their activism.

Historical literature about Canadian second-wave feminist organizations in British Columbia mostly focuses on one of two organizations: The Service Office and Retail

³³ Barbara M. Freeman, *The Satellite Sex: The Media and Women's Issues in English Canada, 1966-1971* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), desLibris.

³⁴ Joan Sangster, “Creating Popular Histories: Re-Interpreting “Second Wave” Canadian Feminism,” *Dialectical Anthropology* vol. 39, 4 (December 2015): 381–404, JSTOR Arts and Sciences IX.

Workers Union of Canada (SORWUC) or the Vancouver Women's Caucus (VWC). By analyzing SORWUC through the lens of class and gender, Julia Smith explores how SORWUC's grassroots unionism differed from other rigidly hierarchical unions at the time.³⁵ I have been mindful of SORWUC's structure and used it as a comparative when assessing the BCFW claims to having a grassroots organizational format.

As for literature about the VWC, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu's article discusses the VWC's 1971 Indochinese Conference and analyzes the noticeable factionalism within the second-wave feminist movement on the bases of race, sexuality, and nationality.³⁶ Similarly, Candace Klein's Master's thesis discusses how the conference's objective of unifying an international sisterhood failed because of American cultural imperialism, and racial, sexual, and class differences between women attending the conference.³⁷ As the local historical literature uses the 1971 Vancouver Indochinese Conference as a case study of divisions within the Canadian and international feminist movement, it has been useful to me as a baseline for issues that arose from different avenues of identity, just before the formation of the BCFW.

My research also engages with literature on reproductive justice. The term was first coined in the mid-1990s and soon found traction among pro-choice feminist

³⁵ Julia Smith, "An "Entirely Different" Kind of Union," 23-65.

See also Janet Mary Nicol, "'Unions Aren't Native': The Muckamuck Restaurant Labour Dispute, Vancouver, B.C. (1978-1983)," which discusses a specific protest where SORWUC represented a union of workers, the identities of race and class are mentioned in this article, but gender is not a key avenue of analysis.

³⁶ Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "Rethinking Global Sisterhood Peace: Activism and Women's Orientalism," in *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt (Rutger's University Press, 2010), 193-220, Project Muse.

³⁷ Candace Klein, "'Sisterhood is Powerful but Not Easy': Conflict, American Imperialism, and Splintering at the Vancouver Indochinese Women's Conference," *Summit-Institutional Repository* (etd10666), 2018, <http://summit.sfu.ca/item/17970>. See also Francis Early's chapter, "Canadian Women and the International Arena in the Sixties: The Voice of Women and the Opposition to the Vietnam War," in *The Sixties: Passion, Politics, and Style* which discusses Canadian feminism and anti-Vietnam war sentiment intertwining.

groups.³⁸ Loretta Ross, founding member of SisterSong: Women of Colour Reproductive Health Collective, described the concept of reproductive justice as a framework that encompasses not just the legality of abortion and accessibility for marginalized women, such as Indigenous women and women of colour, but also broader reproductive issues for these women, including the right to have or not have children, the right to parent the children they have, and the right to choose how they give birth to these children. Ross argues that reproductive justice highlights the blatant ways that “inequality of resources” negatively impacts Indigenous women and women of colour compared to their white counterparts.³⁹ Their intersectional lens in analyzing reproductive restrictions has helped my analysis of BCFW discourse and the extent to which the organization was attentive to various reproductive rights based on class, race, and sexuality.

Other literature that utilizes a reproductive justice framework includes a book by Barbara Gurr, in which she discusses relationships between Native women in North Dakota, with whom she had lived and worked, and the Indian Health Services (IHS).⁴⁰ Gurr focuses on how intersecting dynamics of identity such as race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality affected the sexual health care provided to Native women, how the state’s colonial agenda affected the health care provided by the IHS, and how the reproductive health needs and wants of Native women did not coincide with the care they received.⁴¹

³⁸ Shannon Stettner, Kristin Burnett, and Lori Chambers, “Realizing Reproductive Justice in Canadian History” in *Reading Canadian Women’s History and Gender History* eds. Nancy Janovicek and Carmen Nielson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 299.

³⁹ Loretta Ross, “Understanding Reproductive Justice: Transforming the Pro-Choice Movement,” *Off Our Backs* 36, no. 4 (2006): 14-19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20838711>.

⁴⁰ While Canadian historical work typically refers to Indigenous people as such, American historical literature, such as the book I am referring to, uses the term “Native,” which is why I use that term here.

⁴¹ Barbara, Gurr, *Reproductive Justice: The Politics of Health Care for Native American Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.

These understandings on reproductive justice informed my own work on Canadian feminism.

Shannon Stettner, Kristin Burnett, and Lori Chambers argue that reproductive justice is a largely unexplored area of Canadian second-wave feminist historiography.⁴² Canadian writings on reproductive rights often look at one component, such as pregnancy, childbirth, abortion, birth control, or sterilization, without using an intersectional lens.⁴³ Still, some of the literature acknowledges that women were differently impacted by these specific issues, incorporating some elements of a reproductive justice framework. For example, a book chapter by Erica Dyck discusses how the Canadian eugenics movement impacted women in mental health institutions in British Columbia and Alberta. Dyck argues that poor, immigrant, and Indigenous women were disproportionately sterilized against their will.⁴⁴ While Dyck's chapter focuses on eugenics, she also manages to note how different marginalized communities were particularly affected by these policies.

Some additional scholarship on contemporary reproductive rights utilizes a framework of reproductive justice. Scholars have focused on questions of accessibility. For example, Jessica Shaw argues that even though the 1988 Morgentaler case increased access to abortion in Canada, low-income women, women of colour, immigrant and refugee women, and women not fluent in either English or French still have difficulty accessing abortions. Regional disparities are also important, and

⁴² Stettner, Burnett, and Chambers, "Realizing," 298-320.

⁴³ Stettner, Burnett, and Chambers, "Realizing," 299.

⁴⁴ Erica Dyck, "Eugenics in Canada: Choice, Coercion, and Context," in *Eugenics at the Edges of Empire: New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and South Africa* eds. Diane B. Paul, John Stenhouse, Hamish G. Spencer (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 53, Springer Link Books.

Indigenous women who live on reserves, rural women, and women in certain provinces often cannot access abortion services. There are other barriers to access, which include financial constraints related to time and travel, and an insufficient number of abortion service providers.⁴⁵ Shaw argues that because marginalized people are negatively affected by lack of access to a legal procedure, abortion accessibility is a social justice issue.⁴⁶

Similarly, Sarah Marie Wiebe and Ern Marie Konsmo discuss a “missing boy” epidemic in Aamjiwnaang. Almost all babies born on that reserve are female due to toxic chemicals known as “endocrine-disruptors” that effect the hormones that determine the sex of a baby in utero.⁴⁷ These endocrine-disruptors also affect the health of the mother by potentially leading to hormonal imbalances amongst other serious health issues. Wiebe and Konsmo argue that a reproductive justice framework is needed for an analysis of this topic, as much of the media coverage of this issue ignores Indigenous perspectives and focuses on colonial narratives about reproduction.

My thesis will add to the literature in this area by using insights from the reproductive justice framework to analyze the second-wave Canadian feminist movement in British Columbia in the early 1980s.

Chapter Structure

My thesis is comprised of an introduction, conclusion, and three research chapters that use the lens of intersectionality to explore several issues and events that

⁴⁵ Jessica Shaw, “Abortion in Canada as A Social Justice Issue in Contemporary Canada,” *Critical Social Work* 14, no. 2 (2019): 4, <https://doi.org/10.22329/csw.v14i2.5878>.

⁴⁶ Shaw, “Abortion,” 3.

⁴⁷ Sarah Marie Wiebe and Ern Marie Konsmo, “Indigenous Body as Contaminated Site? Examining Struggles for Reproductive Justice in Aamjiwnaang,” in *Fertile Ground: Exploring Reproduction in Canada*, eds. Stephanie Paterson, Francesca Scala, and Marlene K. Sokolon (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014), 327.

engaged the BCFW in the early 1980s. Chapter Two examines the 1981 National Lesbian Conference. Even though the BCFW did not host this conference, the organization partially funded the conference and members helped plan the event and provided content for workshops.⁴⁸ Conference organizers attempted to make the convention inclusive so that more women would attend. However, efforts to include all women were marred by residual heteronormative perceptions among some heterosexual participants that created tensions with lesbian participants. While BCFW members were beginning to understand that women could have complex layers of identity, tensions caused by differences in race and sexuality that existed in the broader Canadian lesbian community were present at the conference and created conflict for some attendees.

The third chapter of my thesis will explore the BCFW's views about pornography, a primary issue for the organization in the early 1980s. Members argued that pornography was utilized by men to keep women oppressed and therefore male producers and consumers of pornography were sexist. They argued that female actresses and models were victims of abuse and coercion. While some sex workers agreed with this narrative, those who enjoyed their careers felt the organization's anti-pornography stance was condescending and harmful. BCFW members also argued that pornography was racist and homophobic, and noted that women who were not white or heterosexual were affected differently by pornography. However, these claims were not central to the BCFW's arguments against pornography, which made fetishization in

⁴⁸ Final Report of the Lesbian Conference, 1981, F-134-8-0-0-13, box 10244, file F-134-8-0-0-13, Press Gang Printer Fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia (hereafter cited as Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds).

representation a minor consideration for the organization. Moreover, the BCFW defined women of colour as “Third World,” which ignored the negative representation of other women of colour in pornography. Yet, the group did acknowledge that women marginalized by race and sexuality were oppressed differently by pornography.

The final chapter of my thesis will explore the 1981 province-wide Day of Action for Abortion Rights, a protest co-organized by the BCFW and Concerned Citizens for the Choice on Abortion (CCCA). Both groups organized the action in response to the Supreme Court of Canada’s agreeing to hear Joseph Borowski’s legal case for the right to life for fetuses. If the courts ruled in favour of Borowski, the consequences would be drastic: abortion and some forms of birth control would be illegal, and women who received abortions and the doctors who performed the procedures could be convicted of murder. Even though action against Borowski’s case was urgent, the BCFW saw a need to advocate for other reproductive rights as they protested Borowski’s case. This broader understanding and emphasis on reproductive rights issues aligns with a reproductive justice framework. The BCFW acknowledged that women’s reproductive health varied based on what political and social identity a woman held. While the group had limited success in attracting women of colour to their Provincial Day of Action, there were still earnest attempts to advocate for marginalized women who were adversely affected by restrictions on their reproductive functions.

Conclusion

By using different methodological approaches not commonly employed in the current scholarship, my thesis aims to carve out a new section of analysis of second-wave feminism in Canadian historiography. Existing literature generally analyzes

second-wave feminist organizations through one or two systems of difference. My research project differs from this approach through the use of intersectional analysis to investigate how a multitude of identities and relating power dynamics affected the BCFW and whether members understood the subtle interactions of these differing power dynamics.

Chapter 2.

The 1981 National Lesbian Conference

The 1981 National Lesbian Conference was held in Vancouver, British Columbia, from May 16 through May 18 at Vancouver Community College. To publicly demonstrate their pride in being lesbian, conference attendees held a “dyke march” on Saturday night.¹ Hundreds of women flooded into the streets, sang songs such as “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody,” and assured spectators that the protestors were not going to allow anyone to “turn us around” from their objectives. Ultimately, they shouted, “We’re gonna fight, we’re gonna win a victory” for both women’s and lesbian rights.² The National Lesbian Conference and the follow-up Lesbian March were significant for many women across the country.³ One conference attendee commented that “we discovered that we need no longer be invisible, that indeed being invisible denies our identity, our very existence. We have no choice but to come out—politically, socially, spiritually—to whatever degree we can. Together we can make our presence felt.” And these women boldly claimed who they were to all of downtown Vancouver.⁴

¹ Bi-National Lesbian Conference brochure, 1981, 10-001-SS14-F10, box 139-16, file F10, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA), Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

² Lesbian Pride March Chant Sheet, 1981, 10-001-SS14-F10, box 139-16, file F10, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA), Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario (hereafter cited as Lesbian Pride March Chant Sheet, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA)).

³ It is important to note that while this conference is specifically dedicated to lesbians, some women at the time may not have identified as lesbian, or may have been bisexual, or may have disregarded the importance of explicitly stating one’s sexuality.

⁴ “Lesbian Conference was an exchange, rediscovery of bonds,” *Kinesis*, June 1981.

The National Lesbian Conference drew about 500 attendees from across Canada and parts of the United States.⁵ Thirty different workshops discussed a wide range of topics that fell under the categories of “life, work, and sex.”⁶ Social events, such as coffeehouses, concerts, and dances were facilitated so women could mingle with one another. The objectives of the conference were to unite lesbians across the country, strengthen lesbian activism, and celebrate lesbian pride.⁷ To achieve these objectives, organizers attempted to make the conference as accessible to as many Canadian women as possible.⁸ They hired French-language translators for Francophone lesbians, provided childcare for lesbian mothers, offered scaled pricing for lower-income women, and met in a venue that was wheelchair accessible. These actions suggest that conference organizers, which included BCFW members, endeavored to create an inclusive event that intentionally addressed the diverse needs of oppressed groups of people, demonstrating that conference organizers had started to see how power relations could impact women differently. However, these efforts still left some groups of women feeling marginalized because of negative experiences at the conference itself. While BCFW members seemed to embrace a proto-intersectional analysis in theory, there was still a tendency at the conference to over-generalize the lived experiences of women in those marginalized groups.

⁵ Even though a small number of American women attended the 1981 Nation Conference, the objectives were directed towards strengthening Canadian lesbian unity, not an international bond.

⁶ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

⁷ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

⁸ I intentionally use the word “women” in this sentence as women with different sexual orientations (which included bisexual and celibate women) attended the conference. However, the 1981 Bi-National Lesbian Conference was primarily focused on the experiences of lesbian women in Canada.

The conference was not created by the BCFW. Rather, a group of lesbian activists from British Columbia conceived the idea and asked the BCFW's Rights of Lesbians Subcommittee to help plan and sponsor the event, and the subcommittee obliged. This request for organizational assistance from conference coordinators suggests that the subcommittee had an established reputation for lesbian advocacy.⁹ This is important to note about the BCFW as many members of older, established feminist organizations in Canada separated feminist issues and lesbian issues.¹⁰ Moreover, other feminist groups were openly discriminatory towards lesbians. This included the head of the American feminist network NOW (National Organization of Women), who referred to lesbians as a "lavender menace" and claimed that lesbianism was the reason why the women's liberation movement was not being taken seriously.¹¹ In the early days of the BCFW, some members refused to advocate for lesbian issues and avoided associating with openly lesbian women at regional meetings.¹² In 1975, the standing committee of the BCFW held a vote about whether special interest groups, such as the Lesbian Caucus, should have representatives on the standing committee. Four women refused to vote and left the committee altogether in response to including lesbian representation in powerful positions in the organization.¹³ One woman, worried by the thought that a garbage collector might see a BCFW flyer with the word "lesbian" on it, burned the paper for self protection.¹⁴ Regardless of the pushback the

⁹ Creet, "A Test in Unity," 183-195.

¹⁰ It seems that many feminist issues in the early 1960s through the mid-1970s within Canada were separated from lesbian issues, and if lesbianism was discussed in connection with feminist issues, there were tensions between lesbian activists and feminist activists. Candice Klein notes these tensions in "'Sisterhood is Powerful, but Not Easy': Conflict, American Imperialism, and Splintering and the Vancouver Indochinese Women's Conference."

¹¹ Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "Rethinking Global Sisterhood Peace Activism and Women's Orientalism," 205-206.

¹² Creet, "A Test," 192.

¹³ Creet, "A Test," 193.

¹⁴ Creet, "A Test," 189.

organization faced, the BCFW passed policy that included advocacy for lesbian rights at their second annual convention and included lesbian rights in the official policy handbook.¹⁵ The remaining members were diligent advocates for lesbian rights and wanted to assist in planning the conference.

This chapter on the participation of the BCFW in the 1981 National Lesbian Conference aids in further understanding how lesbian communities formed and functioned in a homophobic culture. Lesbian community formation had been inhibited by political, financial, and social measures and cultural understandings that often dictated that lower-class and middle-class women be dependent on men in heteronormative relationships. Additionally, middle-class women were often socially isolated from other women in public as they usually travelled with their husbands, which made mingling with other women very difficult.¹⁶ However, as more women attended college and became familiar with group organizing and conferences, these venues worked as spaces where lesbians could organize as a community.¹⁷ The BCFW's work on the National Lesbian Conference is also highly significant in other ways. Although they and some other conference organizers attempted to include marginalized groups in a meaningful way, these efforts ultimately exposed existing tensions within lesbian communities across Canada due to power differentials undergirded by race, class, and sexuality.

¹⁵ Creet, "A Test," 194.

¹⁶ Cameron Duder, *Awfully Devoted Women: Lesbian Lives in Canada 1900-1965* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 62-63.

¹⁷ Liz Millward, *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-1984*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 172.

Lesbians in Canada

While Canadian women in the mid-to-late 1970s endured sexist policies from the government and employers, Canadian lesbians faced additional social and legal discrimination due to their sexuality. How ordinary Canadians understood lesbianism was contextualized by the rise in public awareness of Freudian psychotherapy in the 1950s. Articles in popular magazines, based on scientific arguments of the day, claimed lesbianism to be a sign of psychological immaturity and argued that same-sex attraction was a sign of immoral character.¹⁸ Moreover, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1953 codified being gay, lesbian, or transgender as a mental illness.¹⁹ Consequently, many Canadians believed that lesbianism was a psychological problem and that women who identified as lesbian were mentally ill.²⁰ Moreover, female sexuality and pleasure were not commonly discussed in the mid-twentieth century, so the concept of a woman seeking sexual pleasure was misunderstood by many, with most experts still claiming that female orgasm could only occur through vaginal intercourse.²¹ Outside of social expectations surrounding women's sexuality, the Canadian legal system discriminated against lesbians and gay men. Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau's Bill C-150 legalized same-sex acts between adults over the age of 21 in 1969.²² But the age of consent for heterosexual intercourse was 18, thereby infantilizing and discriminating against many lesbian women and gay men on the basis of age.²³

¹⁸ Millward, *Making*, 18-20.

¹⁹ Kyle Morgan and Meg Rodriguez *American LGBTQ Rights Movement: An Introduction* (Arcata: California Humboldt State University Press, 2020), 8.

²⁰ Millward, *Making*, 19.

²¹ Millward, *Making*, 19.

²² Miriam Smith, *Political Institutions and Lesbian and Gay Rights in the United States and Canada* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2015), 31.

²³ Smith, *Political*, 31.

Within the province of British Columbia, discrimination on the basis of sexual preference was not legally prohibited; employers could deny promotions to an employee due to their sexuality and landlords could refuse to rent to gay and lesbian tenants.²⁴ Aside from federal and provincial legal discrimination, lesbians also faced bias in custody cases; women who left their husbands rarely gained custody of their children if they were openly lesbian. By 1974, not a single custody case in Canada had been won by a lesbian mother.²⁵ Additionally, lesbian bars were raided, and the patrons were harassed by the police, which is notable as bar culture was an important part of Canadian and American lesbian culture in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁶ While all women faced significant discrimination due to gender, lesbian women had to endure additional forms of social and political marginalization because of their sexuality.

North American lesbian and gay activism started to percolate after World War Two. In the 1950s, associations that were part of the emerging homophile movement in America, such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, formed to advocate for the acceptance of homosexual people in society.²⁷ These two groups published and distributed their newspapers—*One* and *The Ladder*, respectively—across the United States and throughout other English-speaking countries in the world. These publications had a significant impact in early discussions about gay and lesbian organizing in Canada, Britain, and Australia.²⁸ The influence of these publications was

²⁴ BCFW Policy Handbook Volume 1, 1976, F-111-5-0-7, box 9483, file F-111-5-0-7, Women's Bookstore Collection, Simon Fraser University Archives, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia (hereafter cited as BCFW Policy Handbook, Women's Bookstore Collection).

²⁵ BCFW Policy Handbook, Women's Bookstore Collection.

²⁶ Millward, *Making*, 19 and see El Chenier, "Rethinking Class in Lesbian Bar Culture Living 'The Gay Life' in Toronto, 1955-1965" where they demonstrate that harassment that Toronto lesbians faced from police varied due to how different police chiefs viewed lesbianism.

²⁷ Morgan and Rodriguez, *The American*, 25.

²⁸ Smith, *Political*, 33.

felt in Vancouver, British Columbia, as the organization Association of Social Knowledge (ASK) formed in 1964, fashioning itself on the Mattachine Society.²⁹

While homophile organizations continued to exist in the 1960s, coinciding social justice movements, such as the New Left, the Civil Rights movement, and anti-Vietnam War protests, established the bedrock for grassroots social organizing and developed anti-establishment analytical tools.³⁰ Their methods worked as a new playbook for gay and lesbian rights advocates to organize their activism. Later, the women's rights movement would assist lesbian activism as the movement provided a methodology to question patriarchal societal norms and gender roles, which lesbians used to create a theory about their oppression.³¹ While there is a connection between feminist theory and lesbian theory, it is vital to note that implying that lesbian thought is merely an applied stream of feminist thought, and not its own distinctive theory, is incorrect. Cheshire Calhoun suggests that while lesbian and feminist theorists analyze patriarchy, the theories diverge in that the former also emphasizes heterosexual dominance in its analysis and argues that patriarchy and heterosexism intersect with each other.³² This crucial distinction between lesbian and feminist theory holds true in terms of the founding of the BCFW. Even though many original BCFW members were lesbians themselves, no policy was created at the group's founding meeting to address lesbian rights issues directly. It would not be until a year later, in 1975, that the Rights of Lesbians subcommittee was established and BCFW members began to contemplate

²⁹ Millward, *Making*, 20.

³⁰ Smith, *Political*, 33-34.

³¹ Millward, *Making*, 20.

³² Cheshire Calhoun, "Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory," *Ethics* 104, no. 3 (1994): 562. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2381979>.

lesbian issues under a feminist framework, demonstrating that feminist and lesbian theory were two separate, albeit sometimes complementary, ideological tools.³³

By the mid-1970s, groups specifically advocating for lesbian rights began to form in large cities across Canada. In addition to its Rights of Lesbians Subcommittee, the BCFW included member groups dedicated to other lesbian initiatives, such as the Lesbian and Feminist Mother Political Action Group (LAFMPAG) and the Lesbian Radio Show.³⁴ Other lesbian organizations that existed in Canada at this time included the Lesbian Mother's Defense Fund, which provided funding for the legal fees of divorced lesbian mothers so they could fight to obtain child custody.³⁵ In Ontario, the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT) created a space where urban lesbians could meet.³⁶ While these formally established organizations existed in the larger cities, there were smaller, ad hoc community gatherings that happened in less densely populated provinces. Valerie Korinek's *Prairie Fairies* highlights the lesbian club and bar scenes that appeared in mid-sized towns in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba from after the Second World War to the 1990s.³⁷ However, while there were pockets of lesbian activity across Canada, there was no unifying event for these groups of women until 1979.

³³ Creet, "A Test," 189-192.

³⁴ The Lesbian Radio Show focused mostly on lesbian concerns and issues, but they also discussed feminist issues, news, reviews, announcements, herstory, drama or literature and included a main feature each week. BCFW Lower Mainland Regional Meeting Minutes, 24, February, 1982, F45-2-0-1, box 7493, file F45-2-0-1, Working Women Unite Fonds, Simon Fraser University Fonds, Burnaby. For a more detailed analysis of the impact of lesbian-focused media, see Stacey Copeland's recent communications PhD dissertation, "Lesbian Radio Radicals and the Queer Podcast Revolution: A Political Phenomenology of Soundwork", in which Copeland analyzes the Lesbian Radio Show as a case study for her argument about the importance of lesbian media.

³⁵ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

³⁶ Becki Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

³⁷ Valerie Korinek, *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

The 1979 Bi-National Lesbian Conference and the 1981 National Lesbian Conference

The first National Lesbian Conference was held in downtown Toronto in 1979. The meeting was organized by LOOT, which stated that as Canadian lesbian “communities” had “grown and developed in strength and diversity,” it was important for lesbians across the country to assemble and exchange knowledge about lesbianism in order to develop common objectives.³⁸ To emphasize the diversity of women present in lesbian communities, workshops encompassed topics like lesbian motherhood, ageism, and bisexuality.³⁹ Additionally, brochures for the conference were printed in both French and English, and organizers attempted to have translators at workshop sessions. Moreover, LOOT named the event a bi-national conference to highlight the differences that existed between Anglophone and Francophone Canadians. This was especially important as tensions between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians had flared two years earlier during the FLQ Crisis.⁴⁰ This crisis added extra urgency to LOOT’s efforts to fully accommodate Francophone lesbians.

After the success of the Toronto gathering, women’s groups discussed the possibility of an annual conference that rotated locations and suggested that the following year’s conference be held in Manitoba. However, these plans never

³⁸ Bi-National Lesbian Conference Package by LOOT, May 1979, Bi-National Lesbian Conference, RiseUp! Online Feminist Archive, <https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/organizations/lesbian-organization-of-toronto-loot/loot-1979-lesbianbinationalconferencepkge-toronto/>, (thereafter cited as Bi-National Lesbian Conference Package, RiseUp! Online Feminist Archive).

³⁹ Bi-National Lesbian Conference Package, RiseUp! Online Feminist Archive.

⁴⁰ During this crisis, a French separatist group, the Front de Liberation du Quebec, had engaged in guerrilla-style tactics to achieve their goals, which culminated in the kidnapping of high-ranking government officials and a federal government response of martial law. FLQ, Front de libération du Québec Manifesto, ed. Damien-Claude Bélanger, Marianopolis College website, 2, <http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/docs/october/documents/FLQManifesto.pdf>.

materialized, as the 1980 Winnipeg event was cancelled. Disappointed, two of those women, Anne Russell and Linda Ruedrich, approached the BCFW's Rights of Lesbians Subcommittee and requested support to plan, coordinate, and finance another national lesbian conference in Vancouver for the following year. The BCFW member group agreed to help, and they began planning for the 1981 convention.⁴¹

The planners agreed that the Vancouver conference would be similar to the previous Toronto meeting, but with improvements. Organizers looked at some of the feedback given about the Toronto conference and noted a recurring criticism that there was no clear theme or overlying issue that the gathering had discussed as a whole.⁴² Planners also reviewed responses from questionnaires that women interested in attending the Vancouver conference had filled out. From data gathered through surveys, they proposed three principal objectives for the 1981 meeting: begin building a national network of lesbian organizations, strengthen lesbian organizations in each region, and celebrate their lesbian sexual identity.⁴³ Most of these objectives could be achieved, they felt, by bringing together lesbians from across the country to discuss political and organizational theory. To fulfil the third objective, planners scheduled a media event with local news outlets and a pride parade at the end of the conference, along with a lesbian art show to help women celebrate, rather than hide, their sexuality.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

⁴² Meeting Minutes, 20 July 1980, 10-001-SS14-F10, box 139-16, file F10, Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA), Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

⁴³ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

⁴⁴ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

Aside from the stated conference objectives, there was an implied objective to include other categories of identity in conjunction with sexuality. As with the earlier Toronto conference, brochures and information pamphlets included French and English translations to ensure that Francophone lesbians could learn about the conference. Moreover, there were earnest attempts to find French translators for the English-speaking conference workshops, and a member on the planning committee who had networks in Quebec worked as a liaison to ensure that French women had input in the conference.⁴⁵ While the first conference had highlighted how different English-speaking Canada and French-speaking Canada were—calling the conference “Bi-National”—the 1981 conference organizers prioritized the significance of lesbian unity and referred to the meeting as the National Lesbian Conference. Two other major considerations about the venue demonstrated an inclusive effort by conference organizers: they insisted that the location be wheelchair accessible and that there be childcare facilities on site or nearby.⁴⁶ Organizers also tried to incorporate the voices of women of colour in conference sessions and aimed to plan workshops that would “meet the needs of Third World, immigrant, black, and native women.”⁴⁷ Additionally, they encouraged women of colour to be “involve[ed]... meaningfully in entertainment” at the conference.⁴⁸ There was also a sliding pay scale for participation based on whether the attendee was

⁴⁵ National Lesbian Conference Planning Meeting, 10 September 1980, 10-001-SS14-F10, box 139-16, file F10, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA), Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

⁴⁶ National Lesbian Conference Planning Meeting, 18 October 1980, 10-001-SS14-F10, box 139-16, file F10, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA), Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

⁴⁷ National Lesbian Conference Planning Meeting, 19 November 1980, 10-001-SS14-F10, box 139-16, file F10, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA), Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario (hereafter cited as November Planning Meeting, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA)).

⁴⁸ November Planning Meeting, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA).

employed, a student, or unemployed, to accommodate those who were of lower socio-economic status.⁴⁹ The planning committee for the National Lesbian Conference truly desired to have all interested lesbians—regardless of ethnicity, race, ability, parental status, or class—attend the conference and discuss their shared concerns.

The conference workshops encompassed a variety of topics that spoke to lesbian experiences. Workshops dedicated to lesbians and sex were well attended, as most women at the conference were either lesbian, bisexual, or curious about lesbianism. Other vocal groups at the conference included mothers, and at “The Mothering Workshop,” they discussed insufficient subsidies for daycare for single mothers, how difficult it was for their children to fit in with their peers due to heteronormative beliefs about women and sexuality, and the need for health curricula in schools to teach about more than just heterosexuality.⁵⁰ As many lesbians were working class or poor, the financial and social impacts of lower economic status were deliberated in the “Lesbians and Welfare” workshop.⁵¹ The “Rural Lesbians” workshop discussed some of the ramifications that women who were not a part of larger lesbian communities could face if they “came out,” and potential ways in which rural lesbian women could end the isolation they felt by conducting city-country exchanges to expand their limited networks.⁵² At the “Bisexuality Workshop,” around 30 women discussed their experiences of being marginalized from both straight feminists and lesbian

⁴⁹ National Lesbian Conference flyer, 1981, 10-001-SS14-F10, box 139-16, file F10, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA), Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario (hereafter cited as National Lesbian Conference flyer, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA)).

⁵⁰ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

⁵¹ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

⁵² Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

feminists due to their different sexual orientation.⁵³ Additionally, at the “Monogamy, Non-monogamy, and Celibacy Workshop,” women discussed the right for people to choose their partners as they pleased and the need to respect the choices of other people’s partners—or lack thereof.⁵⁴ The “Lesbians of Colour Workshop” and the “Disabled Lesbians Workshop” allowed for women who were muted within lesbian communities due to race and ability to have a space to discuss their unique perspectives. The workshops at the Bi-National Lesbian Conference were quite comprehensive, so lesbians who may have felt their obstacles were not acknowledged or discussed by other lesbian organizations had space to do so. The efforts to include and appeal to different women, from the initial planning stage to the conference itself, suggest that lesbian political organizing was inclusive of many women. While conference organizers may not have articulated the theory of intersectionality in their conference material, they understood the multiplicity of sources of women’s oppressions.

The BCFW was significantly involved in the planning, funding, and implementation of the National Lesbian Conference, signalling that they were sensitive to these myriad issues as well. Granted, the general policy of this umbrella organization stipulated that the organization itself did not organize action; rather, member groups were to use the clout of the BCFW name and membership to draw attention to feminist issues across the province, using official letterhead and banners to do so. That said, the BCFW helped plan some aspects of the conference. The group sponsored a brunch

⁵³ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

⁵⁴ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

where conference attendees discussed lesbian feminist politics in more detail.⁵⁵ As for funding, the Rural Lesbians member group of the BCFW donated their yearly allocated funds to the conference, and the BCFW itself donated an additional amount of \$500 towards the conference fees.⁵⁶ At the conference itself, many member groups like LAFMPAG, SORWUC, Women in Prisons Group, The Lesbian Show, and the Health Collective directed discussions and presented content at workshops.⁵⁷ Aside from planning, funding, and implementing activities for the conference, member groups who were involved used the BCFW banner at the lesbian pride march and also used official BCFW letterhead when promoting the conference.⁵⁸

Good Intentions and Bad Results?

Within the historical literature about Canadian lesbian communities and relationships during the mid-1970s into the early 1980s, there were limitations on how women could present themselves and who would be welcomed in these spaces. For example, Becki Ross argues that Toronto's lesbian bar culture was undergirded by working-class culture and masculine styles associated with working-class jobs. Women who dressed femininely or held pink collar jobs did not fit into this lifestyle; they were socially marginalized from that bar scene and "felt stymied by guilt for selling out."⁵⁹ El Chenier concludes that Toronto's lesbian bar scene was divided by city districts and

⁵⁵ BCFW Coordinating Collective Meeting Minutes, 2 May 1981, F-45-2-0-1, box 7493, file F-45-2-0-1, Working Women Unite Fonds, Simon Fraser University Archive, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia (hereafter cited as BCFW Coordinating Minutes May 1981, Working Women Unite Fonds).

⁵⁶ Coordinating Minutes May 1981, Working Women Unite Fonds.

⁵⁷ BCFW Lower Mainland Regional Report, May 1981, F-45-2-0-1, box 7493, file F-45-2-0-1, Working Women Unite Fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia (hereafter cited as Lower Mainland Regional Report, Working Women Unite Fonds).

⁵⁸ Lower Mainland Regional Report, Working Women Unite Fonds.

⁵⁹ Becki Ross, "How Lavender Jane loved women: Re-figuring identity-based life/stylism in 1970s lesbian feminism," *Canadian Journal of Studies* 30, no. 4 (1996): 114-116.

class; there was a separation between uptowners and downtowners. Additionally, whether someone worked and socialized at the bar affected if they were included in the bar scene.⁶⁰ Other tensions have been noted about women within lesbian spaces who did not adhere to expected styles, attitudes, race, or class and were perceived as outsiders. As Carol Ritchie-MacIntosh notes about Eastern Canadian lesbian spaces between the late 1960s and early 1970s, “There was a lot of prejudices at that time... they didn’t like women of colour...they didn’t like anyone who was different.”⁶¹ These types of frictions were still present at the 1981 conference and demonstrate tensions between BCFW goals to include more women at the National Lesbian Conference and a pattern of exclusivity in some Canadian lesbian communities.

While the National Lesbian Conference created space for people with different sexual identities and relationship expectations, both heterosexual and lesbian communities were not always receptive to alternative forms of sexual orientation. Women in the “Bisexuality Workshop” discussed how they were ostracized not only by straight women, but also by lesbian women.⁶² Reflecting on this phenomenon from her own work on lesbian communities of the late 1970s and early 1980s, Canadian lesbian scholar Sharon-Dale Stone observes that lesbian women only trusted other lesbians and deemed heterosexual men to be untrustworthy. By extension, bisexual women were deemed “untrustworthy” due to their supposed “fence-sitting”—being neither “fully” gay nor straight—and their willingness to have sexual relationships with heterosexual

⁶⁰ Elise Chenier, “Rethinking Class in Lesbian Bar Culture Living ‘The Gay Life’ in Toronto, 1955-1965.” *Left History* 9, no. 2 (2004): 85-86.

⁶¹ *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives*, directed by Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie (National Film Board of Canada, 1992), 51:59-52:09. https://www.nfb.ca/film/forbidden_love/.

⁶² Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

men.⁶³ As many lesbian women believed that men upheld patriarchal societal oppression, they often viewed bisexual women with suspicion and confusion.⁶⁴ This suggests that while the National Lesbian Conference did attempt to include women of different sexual orientations, there were likely participants who did not readily accept women who strayed from expectations within lesbian culture.⁶⁵ In fact, bisexual women at the National Lesbian Conference felt so ostracized by both feminists and lesbians that they formed their own support network after the conference workshop.⁶⁶

Some conference organizers' efforts to accommodate more socially disadvantaged women were insufficient. They acknowledged, for example, that class and gender were mutually constitutive in creating oppression and tailored their fee structure accordingly. To allow women to attend the conference, regardless of their socio-economic status, the fees for the conference were presented on a sliding scale: employed, marginal, unemployed. Conference fees that included attendance at the workshops, coffeehouses, and the dance were \$20, \$17, or \$14, respectively. Additional activities, such as Robin Tyler's performance and nutrition breaks/meals, were not included in the conference package total.⁶⁷ However, while the total cost of the conference was amended, this did not include travel costs, accommodations, or food, so whether the sliding fee scale was fully effective in including lower-income women is not entirely clear. It may have been more beneficial for women who lived close to

⁶³ Sharon Dale Stone, "Bisexual Women and the "Threat" to Lesbian Space: Or What If All the Lesbians Leave?," *Frontiers (Boulder)* 16, no. 1 (1996): 101-102. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3346927>.

⁶⁴ Stone, "Bisexual," 101-102.

⁶⁵ It is also interesting to note that in Stone's article, she discusses how many women who identified as lesbian still had sexual relationships with men and that discussing this amongst other women was a common experience for herself within Canadian lesbian communities in the 1970s and the 1980s.

⁶⁶ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

⁶⁷ National Lesbian Conference flyer, Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA).

Vancouver than for women from across the country, as airfare, bus, and other transportation costs might have been too much for some to bear.

While coordinators of the National Conference made genuine attempts to include women of colour at the conference in a meaningful way, criticism from women of colour in attendance suggest that there was racial hostility at the conference. As previously discussed, planners attempted to have input from Asian and Indigenous women's groups for the event. Organizers allocated space for artworks by women of colour at the lesbian art show and attempted to include performances by women of colour in the entertainment portion of the conference.⁶⁸ However, when attendees submitted feedback months after the conference, some women took issue with how the "Women of Colour Workshop" had been organized. One attendee criticized the decision to allow white women to attend the session, which meant that women of colour did not have a dedicated space to discuss issues that pertained specifically to non-white lesbians. Moreover, some white women who attended the workshop derogatorily referred to women of colour who participated in the discussion as "you people" and tended to dominate the discussion.⁶⁹ The lack of a separate space for lesbian women of colour to discuss racial tensions, while being blindsided by white lesbians who took control over the workshop, reflected broader racial tensions within and marginalization of "others" from Canadian lesbian communities. Additionally, even though women of different ethnicities were consulted for the conference, all women of colour were placed into one encompassing workshop.

⁶⁸ National Lesbian Conference flyer, Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA).

⁶⁹ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

However, attendees of the National Lesbian Conference were more tactical with their discussions about race when the racism came from outside of the lesbian community. The “Fight the Right Workshop” and subsequent political actions by lesbians against right-wing groups demonstrated an ability to unite to fight racism in the broader community, despite the lack of awareness by white attendees of their own racism. The “Fight the Right Workshop” was initially designed as a place where women could discuss how lesbian groups in Toronto had been targeted by right-wing extremist groups. In response to the harassment, women agreed to organize a “Fight the Right” rally for the following year.⁷⁰ Only a month after the conference ended, Sara Diamond, on behalf of the BCFW, sent out an urgent letter to feminist organizations across Canada about the pressing need for a “Fight the Right” rally, as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) had amplified its harassment of immigrants. In the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, for example, KKK members were accused of arson as they allegedly torched an Indian immigrant’s rental unit.⁷¹ *The Vancouver Sun* described the proliferation of the KKK in BC, and a photograph of a recent cross burning was the front-page image of that issue.⁷² The BCFW’s call to action after the conference suggests that blatant acts of racism drew the criticism of all Canadian lesbians; yet, unreflective racism and microaggressions towards women of colour who tried to be a part of the lesbian community were still unresolved issues.

The Klan’s conservative ideology embodied not just racism but also sexism. Some members of the BCFW were targeted by the Klan. The offices of the member

⁷⁰ Final Report, Press Gang Printer Fonds.

⁷¹ Dave Smith and Salim Jiwa, “Violence: the Victims and the Accused,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 12 March 1981, B-1.

⁷² Rick Ouston, “BC Klan stages a public cross-burning,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1981, A-11.

group Vancouver Rape Relief (RR) were broken into and vandalized, with confidential papers strewn about. The following morning, RR received two letters from the KKK in which they argued that the “rightful place for women in society was dependant and white.”⁷³ It is also reasonable to deduce that Vancouver Rape Relief had drawn unwanted attention from the KKK because of their participation in the anti-racist actions of the “Fight the Right” protests.

Conclusion

On the last day of the 1981 National Lesbian Conference in Vancouver, around 200 of the attendees marched through the streets to demonstrate how they were proud to be lesbian. The women chanted, “Look over here, look over there, lesbians are everywhere!” as the women trekked from Robson Square to the West End Community Centre.⁷⁴ Onlookers from apartments surrounding the route gazed at the women, drawn to the spectacle.⁷⁵ Aside from quick slogans, lesbians also sang a protest chant entitled “Somthin’, somthin’,” which included the words:

Lesbians getting stepped on

Lesbians getting drugged

Lesbians going to prison

Lesbians of colour kept down

Wimin’s spirits broken

Wimin trapped in silence

⁷³ Vancouver Rape Relief report to the BCFW, 16 June 1981, F-45-2-0-1, box 7493, file F-45-2-0-1, Working Women Unite Fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia. While there is not sufficient evidence to prove that the KKK broke into the offices of Rape Relief, based on how the group received letters critiquing their activism the following day, this does seem suspicious.

⁷⁴ Chris Bearchell, “Lesbian Pride March is a First for Canada,” *The Body Politic* 74, (June 1981): 10.

⁷⁵ Bearchell, “Lesbian,” 10.

Soul destroying labour

No choice on abortion

Wimin's pain forgotten⁷⁶

The chant “Somethin’, somthin’” features many of the issues that were discussed at the National Lesbian Conference, but some of the key conference objectives—to build a national network of lesbian organizations, strengthen lesbian organizations in each region, and celebrate their lesbianism—were specific to the 1981 conference. Aside from the uniting factor of sexuality, women at the conference discussed a multitude of ways in which they were different from one another at the workshops, including race, sexuality, class, motherhood, and age. This effort demonstrated some understanding of the intersectionality of power relations in these women’s lives. Yet, while there were keen attempts to include all lesbians regardless of various systems of difference, there were still some problematic issues about the lesbian community that were highlighted during the conference. Women of colour argued that the workshop that was supposed to have been for lesbians of colour was overrun by white women. This reflected the mostly white spaces and racially hostile environments that lesbian communities across Canada had fostered at the time. But there was also a workshop dedicated to fighting right-wing extremist groups, like the KKK that had targeted lesbians, feminists, and immigrants. The attacks were so frequent and violent that the BCFW sent out an emergency letter to feminist groups across Canada after the conference, urging women to protest these groups. This juxtaposition suggests that expressions of racism and injustice in broader society were easier for lesbian communities to target, as opposed to

⁷⁶ Lesbian Pride March Chant Sheet, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA).

the racism that had manifested itself at the conference. Outside of race, sexuality was also discussed in an abstract way. Workshops were held for women who did not follow expected forms of sexual and romantic relationships, including lesbianism, bisexuality, non-monogamous relationships, and celibacy. However, bisexual women agreed that they were not welcomed in either heterosexual or lesbian spaces, so they needed their own space, which they created after the conference. Aside from this, class was discussed in several workshops, and was also considered in the sliding scale of pricing for all events at the conference. The 1981 National Lesbian Conference demonstrated that the BCFW understood identity as a multi-faceted concept; factors like sex, sexuality, race, and class affected women's everyday life. How conference attendees experienced the event suggests that hostilities from some communities clouded this intersectional understanding of the experience. However, the BCFW made significant efforts to understand how women faced oppression differently due to their race, sexuality, and class, which demonstrates a proto-intersectional understanding of societal oppression. The BCFW revealed similar proto-intersectional considerations in their anti-pornography campaigns.

Chapter 3.

“God Bless the Working Woman!”¹: BCFW Policy on Pornography

On November 22, 1982, three Red Hot Video locations were bombed by a group called the Wimmin’s Fire Brigade (WFB). In a released statement, the group argued that the action was “another step towards the destruction of a business that promotes and profits from violence against wimmin and children.”² The WFB saw Red Hot Video as part of a multi-billion-dollar pornography industry that taught men to equate sex with violence.³ Members were frustrated because although these tapes violated the Criminal Code of Canada and the B.C. guidelines on pornography, the stores operated with impunity. The WFB believed that Canada’s justice system benefited property owners by protecting their possessions and argued that law enforcement used property rights to justify inaction towards crimes committed within pornography stores.⁴ The WFB bombed the pornography stores as a last resort, claiming that the action was a form of “self-defence against hate propaganda.”⁵

While the BCFW was officially not a direct participant in this action, it issued a press release to express its “agreement with the frustration and anger of the women” involved, demonstrating shared anger with the growing pornography industry within the province and dissatisfaction with the lack of government intervention.⁶ In a BCTV

¹ *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography*, directed by Bonnie Sherr Klein (National Film Board of Canada, 1981), 6:04.

² Ann Hansen, *Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerilla/Ann Hansen*. (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2001), 487, Canada Commons-books.

³ Hansen, *Direct*, 487.

⁴ Hansen, *Direct*, 487.

⁵ Hansen, *Direct*, 487.

⁶ BCFW News Release, 22 November 1982, 10-045-S9-SS2-F15, box 6-13, file F15, Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

televised interview, Lee Lakeman, the BCFW's media coordinator, initially dismissed the interviewer's efforts to clarify if Lakeman felt that the fire bombings were an effective action, given the violent nature of the act. After a brief pause, Lakeman said, "The point is that the media has paid attention to [the fire bombings] when they did not pay attention to serious, long-term, hard work by women's groups and by individual women."⁷ Even though the BCFW was not responsible for the Red Hot Video action, the organization publicly agreed with the WFB's claims about the dangerous social ramifications of pornography for women and children and concluded that the action had been an effective method of gaining media attention towards feminist anti-pornography work—especially as the WFB had taken pains to ensure that no personal injury had occurred during its protest.

How media presented sexuality had been a contentious issue for second-wave feminists for some time. Before the Porn Wars, there was already a strong tradition of feminists protesting film, television, radio, and other media that depicted women as sexual objects for male consumption. Within the BCFW, there were member groups, such as Women in Focus, that dedicated some of their energy to fighting sexist media and advertisements. In fact, the BCFW had a specific mandate under its media policy to target advertising that provoked a "male fantasy" by portraying women as either "homemakers or sexual objects."⁸ In response to these ads, the BCFW agreed to boycott, picket, and lobby for realistic portrayals of women in media.⁹ In March 1981,

⁷ BC Royal Museum, "Webster! Partial Episode 25 November 1982," 29 February 2016, 0:03:37 to 03:54, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgc8yuYyUOo&list=PLN9Hdj6yjKtVyAHeV0Qh6MfMvPHIZsMxK&index=171>.

⁸ BCFW Policy Handbook Vol. 2, 1977, F-82-2-0-0-3, box 82-1, file F-82-2-0-3, Ellen Frank Fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia (hereafter cited by Policy Handbook Vol. 2, Ellen Frank Fonds).

⁹ Policy Handbook Vol. 2, Ellen Frank Fonds.

BCFW members organized a protest against a sexist advertisement in an Eton's department store window display, which depicted a gagged woman tied in bondage to sell jeans.¹⁰ However, the protest lost some of its broader impact because the group warned the manager of its plans, and the manager circumvented possible criticism by taking down the display and making a public apology about the nature of the advertisement.¹¹ But the action was effective as the group got the display taken down, and the manager apologised. The BCFW protested films as well, including *Dressed to Kill*, a psychological thriller that depicted a rape fantasy scene.¹² These actions and discussions about negative portrayals of women in media encouraged feminists to be even more vocal against the egregiously sexualized depictions of women found in some pornography.

The pivot in the BCFW's policy from a focus on overtly sexual media to pornography was due in part to the growing audience for pornography and feminist perceptions that porn was becoming increasingly violent in nature. Opinions about sexuality changed during the 1960s, "a period of sexual transformation" when the introduction of new forms of contraception (oral birth control) and an increasing acceptance of sexual exploration led to more broadly-held progressive views towards sex.¹³ Intertwined with positive attitudes towards sex was the increased accessibility to

¹⁰ Letter to the Manager of Eaton's from Vancouver Rape Relief, 8 May 1981, 10-045-S7-F2, box 5-2, file F2, Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

¹¹ Lower Mainland Regional Report, 19 May 1981, F-45-2-0-1, box 7493, file F-45-2-0-1, Working Women Unite Fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia.

¹² Letter to Ridge Theatre written by Maureen Mills, 16 February 1981, 10-045-S7-F2, box 5-2, file F2, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds, Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

¹³ Eryk Martin, "Resisting Red Hot Video: Feminism, Pornography, and the Political Utility of Emotion" in *Feeling Feminism: Activism Effect and Canada's Second Wave*, eds. Lara Campbell, Michael Dawson, and Catherine Gidney (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2022), 186.

pornography. As Video Home Systems (VHS) became a common household item by 1977, more people accessed pornography within their homes.¹⁴ In addition to these technological advancements, pornographic magazines such as *Hustler*, *Playboy*, and *Penthouse* remained a common medium. Consequently, more people consumed pornography as it became acceptable and widely available. Simultaneously, pornography became more violent in its depictions of sexual intercourse between men and women.¹⁵ In 1978, *Hustler* magazine contributors introduced the character “Chester the Molester.” Tales about Chester included graphic descriptions of how he abused women, which included lying, kidnapping, assaulting, and raping his victims.¹⁶ North American feminists argued that pornography had become more available and violent and that the content was “less about sex, and more about sexism.”¹⁷

While some academic literature analyzes Canadian sex work, few publications focus specifically on second-wave feminist interpretations of sex work within British Columbia.¹⁸ This chapter fills a significant gap in the literature by looking at how the BCFW understood pornography and the women who worked in that industry. As scholar and former sex-worker Becki Ross states, many second-wave feminists viewed sex workers as “coerced, degraded victims of patriarchal control” who were negatively

¹⁴ Emma McKenna, “An Assumption of Shared Fear: Feminism, Sex Work, and the Sex Wars in 1980s *Kinesis*,” in *Feeling Feminism: Activism Effect and Canada’s Second Wave*, eds. Lara Campbell, Michael Dawson, and Catherine Gidney (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2022), 207.

¹⁵ It is important to note that just because pornography was becoming more common, this does not mean that pornography needed to become more violent.

¹⁶ Dany Lacombe, *Blue Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 26.

¹⁷ Lacombe, *Blue*, 26.

¹⁸ For more on feminist interpretations of sex work see Emma McKenna’s chapter “An Assumption of Shared Fear: Feminism, Sex Work, and the Sex Wars in 1980’s *Kinesis*,” Eryk Martian’s chapter “Resisting Red Hot Video: Feminism, Pornography, and the Political Utility of Emotion,” and Shannon Bell, Brenda Cossman, Lise Gotell, and Becki Ross *Bad Attitude(s) on Trial: Pornography, Feminism, and the Butler Decision*, Dany Lacombe’s *Blue Politics*, and *Good Girls/Bad Girls: Feminists and Sex Trade Workers Face to Face* edited by Laurie Bell.

impacted by their work.¹⁹ The BCFW viewed female pornography actresses as victims, and believed they were advocating for these women in their anti-pornography arguments and actions. Even though members strived to understand the complexity of sex work, they categorized sex workers as victims and over-generalized how women were affected by pornography.

The BCFW and the “Porn Wars”

In the early 1980s, the National Film Board of Canada released Bonnie Sherr Klein’s documentary *Not a Love Story*. Klein had researched different aspects of sex work by interviewing pornography directors, actors, photographers, live sex act workers, strippers, and anti-pornography feminists. The second interview conducted in the film was with Lindalee Tracey, a Montreal-based stripper, poet, and charity organizer.²⁰ At the beginning of the interview, Tracey discussed her interactions with feminists at a Women Against Pornography (WAP) rally in New York. Tracey mentioned how horrified feminists were to find out she was a stripper and how they were condescending because of her occupation.²¹ Switching to voice-over, the film showed footage of Tracey performing one of her stripping routines. Donning a frilly, childish dress with long lace trim socks, Tracey skipped around the stage, occasionally bending over to show her buttocks to the audience or making silly faces at the customers. Tracey said that she used comedy “as [her] way of communicating” to the audience, making a mockery of what society expected her to be—a sexy woman—by presenting herself instead as child-like and innocent.²² For the rest of the documentary, Tracey joined Klein in several

¹⁹ Becki L. Ross, "Bumping and Grinding on the Line: Making Nudity Pay," *Labour* no. 46 (Fall, 2000): 225.

²⁰ *Not a Love Story*, 3:27 to 4:08.

²¹ *Not a Love Story*, 3:27 to 4:08.

²² *Not a Love Story*, 4:15 to 5:00.

interviews. Throughout the film, Tracey critiqued aspects of sex work, including a live sex-act revue, where Tracey condemned men who entered and left the establishment as they were partaking in the dehumanization of the women in the live sex act.²³ Before the final scene of the documentary, Tracey agreed to pose partially nude for a *Playboy* photographer. In the penultimate scene of the film, Tracey explained the differences between erotica and pornography, claiming that her craft was erotic, but the photography session of the previous day was pornographic due to the objectification she felt at the shoot.²⁴ Tracey had been encouraged to contort her body in an awkward position, for example; the photographer had spoken to her like she was a doll and had used "pussy juice" and folded her labia to alter the appearance of her vagina.²⁵ The lack of autonomy Tracey had experienced at the photoshoot, compared to the sense of control she felt in her job as a stripper, made her feel that she was being objectified by *Playboy*.

After its release, *Not A Love Story* catalysed anti-pornography rhetoric within Canadian feminist circles. Key to this response was how audiences viewed Tracey in the film. With Tracey's insider status in sex work as a stripper and her disgust towards pornographic modelling, audiences regarded her as a "saved" sex worker and a poster child for the anti-pornography movement.²⁶ In her autobiography, Tracey discussed how she was asked to headline anti-pornography tours for feminist organizations and

²³ Rebecca Sullivan, *Bonnie Sherr Klein's Not a Love Story*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 12-13.

²⁴ *Not A Love Story*, 1:04:44 to 1:05:23.

²⁵ *Not A Love Story*, 1:02:32 to 1:03:44.

²⁶ Sullivan, *Bonnie*, 12-13.

attended viewing parties of the film.²⁷ However, even though film critics and feminists received *Not a Love Story* as a critique of sex work, the intentions of the interviewees were more complex. Rebecca Sullivan notes that there were scattered moments when interviewees expressed pro-sex work stances. Klein interviewed Patrice and Rick, a pro-sex work, heterosexual, interracial couple, who engaged in live sex acts. Patrice believed that she had more freedom as a sex worker than she had experienced as an office worker. When she worked as an office employee, her “bosses [had been] on her back all day...just like [she] was a child,” but she did not experience this treatment as a sex worker.²⁸ In the film, Tracey also talked fondly about her experiences as a stripper, noting the positive response from the audience and the artistic expression she could portray within her routine.²⁹ Yet even though the film showed a mix of interpretations of sex work, BCFW reactions to the film painted the documentary as wholly anti-pornography.

Many BCFW member groups held private viewing parties of *Not a Love Story*, where the main controversy was how to interpret the film. Meeting minutes from regional reports analyzed the positive and negative aspects of mixed-gender viewings of the film, as many male viewers were angered by and dismissive of the documentary.³⁰ Even with gender-segregated viewings of *Not a Love Story*, the film evoked such strong and conflicting opinions that discussions seemed unproductive and alienating. To ease the situation, the organization Vancouver Status of Women (VSW)

²⁷ Lindalee Tracey, *Growing Up Naked: My Life in the Bump-and-Grind*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997), 209-211. Tracey also discusses how her opinions about pornography were misrepresented in the film and that she was portrayed as a talking point for anti-pornography feminists and not an individual person.

²⁸ Sullivan, *Bonnie*, 62.

²⁹ *Not A Love Story*, 4:58 to 5:25.

³⁰ “Video aids porn discussion,” *Kinesis*, September 1982, 9.

published a booklet that organizers of viewing parties could use to guide discussion after watching the documentary.³¹ This booklet allowed organizers to attempt to have constructive discourse about pornography and its social impacts on women within and outside the industry. Whether these booklets resolved any issues is not clear.

Other media that informed the BCFW's anti-pornography rhetoric included publications from the VSW's monthly newspaper *Kinesis*. There were many articles published about feminist interpretations of pornography in *Kinesis* that reflected how the BCFW viewed pornography as a social issue. In a 1979 article: "Pornography: what do women really want?," Jillian Riddington and Barb Findlay outlined the central components of feminist arguments about pornography. A significant issue was the distinction between pornography and erotica. Feminists opposed pornography, they argued, as it was "lewd and aggressive" towards women and children, whereas erotica was "consensual, loving, and reciprocal."³² In her 1978 article "Pornography," Debra Lewis had already urged feminists to emphasize these distinctions to avoid being lumped into the same category as "traditionalists"—political and social conservatives who opposed pornography based on a desire to control sexuality and were thus starkly at odds with the political and social aims of a majority of feminists within the BCFW.³³

A 1980 *Kinesis* article elaborated on earlier arguments in *Kinesis* that pornography was harmful as the films normalized violence against women. The authors, Marion Barling, Mickey McCaffery, and Suzanne Perrault, members of Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), argued that pornography was created by men to

³¹ "Video," *Kinesis*, 9.

³² Jill Riddington and Barb Findlay, "Pornography: what do women really want?" *Kinesis*, April 1979, 19-21.

³³ Debra Lewis, "Pornography: developing feminist perspectives," *Kinesis*, October 1978, 11-13.

systematically oppress women and children; it acted as a tool of an “indoctrination process” for other men, they claimed, that “routinely portray[ed] women and children in violent and degrading situations for the purpose of [a man’s] pleasure and satisfaction,” thus leaving the impression on the viewer that women and children only exist for male pleasure.³⁴ Other cultural messages spread by pornography included depictions of men as dominant and women as submissive, as well as the misconception that women commonly experienced both pleasure and pain during sexual intercourse. The dangerous message of pornography, the article argued, was that women were expected to enjoy violence committed against them and that men had the right to control this pain-pleasure experience. Anti-porn activists drew connections between how portrayals of women’s sexual experiences were portrayed in porn with “real life consequences” such as rape, incest, physical assault, and sexual assault.³⁵

Many of the BCFW’s arguments against pornography were rooted in radical feminist thought. Radical feminists have argued that society has always been patriarchal; male violence against women, which includes domestic abuse, rape, incest, and pornography, is evidence of this continued patriarchal oppression. The power that men hold over women is due to biological differences in sexuality. Female sexuality, which is nurturing, loving, and caring, contrasts sharply with male sexuality, which is aggressive and violent.³⁶ How the BCFW understood positive sexual expression and the purpose of pornography aligned with the radical feminist view of female sexuality.

³⁴ Marion Barling, Mickey McCaffery, and Suzanne Perrault, “Reclaiming ourselves: a feminist perspective on pornography,” *Kinesis*, June 1980, 8.

³⁵ Barling, McCaffery, Perrault, “Reclaiming,” 8.

³⁶ Lacombe, *Blue*, 6-7.

Erotica was acceptable for BCFW members as it adhered to definitions of female sexuality; violent, non-consensual pornography was insupportable.³⁷

Radical feminist literature about male violence towards women added to the BCFW's anti-pornography rhetoric. In 1975, Susan Brownmiller explored connections between rape and power dynamics. She speculated that the common conception that rape was an act of lust or desire was incorrect. Brownmiller argued that rape was a tool used by men to oppress women by keeping them in a constant state of fear.³⁸ Building from this interpretation of the interconnectedness of power dynamics with male violence against women, anti-pornography feminists like Andrea Dworkin argued that pornography was a tool used by men to maintain power over women and that pornography was violence towards women.³⁹ These linkages between pornography and male violence towards women were evident in the BCFW's anti-pornography stance. At the 1979 BCFW convention, in a workshop entitled "Reclaiming Ourselves," members discussed how pornography was created by and for men. The workshop's objective was for members to "analyze pornography from the perspective of male power over women" and discuss how these images led towards the mistreatment of women in society.⁴⁰ Content from the "Reclaiming Ourselves" workshop aligned with Brownmiller's and Dworkin's arguments as the literature and the workshop material note connections between male violence against women and pornography.

³⁷ Riddington and Findlay, "Pornography," 19.

³⁸ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).

³⁹ Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, (New York: Perigee Books, 1981).

⁴⁰ Reclaiming Ourselves: A Feminist View on Pornography sheet, November 1979, F-45-2-0-5, box 7493, file F-45-2-0-5, Working Women Unite Fonds, Simon Fraser University Archives, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia.

Ambiguity in Sex Worker' Perspectives on Pornography

Some sex workers critiqued the anti-pornography stance that second-wave feminists adopted. One assessment observes that feminists neither interacted with sex workers nor listened to what sex workers said about their own experiences in creating pornography. Instead, feminists imposed their beliefs onto sex workers.⁴¹ With little to no insider knowledge about sex work, many second-wave feminist arguments about sex work were uninformed and judgemental. Anti-pornography activists had informed their positions with whistle-blower porn actors and actresses of the period. Marc Stevens, a former hardcore porn star who was interviewed in *Not a Love Story*, discussed the discomfort he felt when he acted in violent scenes in which he had to “smack around” women actors. He concluded that in his career as a porn actor, he had had to do “a lot of things that [he] found detrimental to women and that’s why [he] got out of it.”⁴² When asked if he found the work degrading for him, Stevens furrowed his brow and exclaimed “No, not to me. Are you kidding me? It’s a man’s world! I was very macho.”⁴³ Stevens’ interview revealed the ambiguity of his position on pornography: he disliked the physical abuse he was expected to perpetrate against women actors, but his acknowledgment of men’s societal power over women added credibility to feminist claims that the industry was misogynistic.

Another source of evidence for the BCFW’s anti-pornography activism was Linda Lovelace’s book *Ordeal*.⁴⁴ Lovelace revealed that she was forced into sex work as a

⁴¹ Laurie Bell, ed, *Good Girls/Bad Girls: Sex Trade Workers & Feminists Face to Face*, (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1987), 86.

⁴² *Not a Love Story*, 19:48 to 19:59.

⁴³ *Not a Love Story*, 20:03 to 20:08.

⁴⁴ “Let’s Close Red Hot Video” brochure, 1982, 10-045-S9-SS2-F15, box 6-13, file F15, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds, Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa,

hostage to her sadistic boyfriend and, later, husband. After her partner coerced Lovelace at gunpoint into a gang rape by five men she did not know, he pressured her into years of sex slavery, culminating in her forced participation in pornographic modeling and hardcore pornography. Lovelace's book is filled with horrifyingly detailed accounts of physical and psychological abuse, rape, bestiality, and sexual assault.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, this graphic and truly disturbing account of the abuse that Lovelace faced at the hands of her partner turned many against pornography, seeing the industry entirely through the lens of women's victimhood. On a circulated "Let's Close Red Hot Video" pamphlet, BCFW members cited Lovelace's autobiography as proof that all women were abused in the porn industry and claimed that some sex workers corroborated Lovelace's description of working conditions in pornography.⁴⁶

Even though Lovelace's experiences did not apply to all pornography actors, some feminists who read *Ordeal* argued that similar abuse and sexual assault were common for sex workers. Susan Cole, a Toronto-based journalist, believed that many sex workers were victims of childhood sexual abuse, which allowed them to be in sexually exploitative work.⁴⁷ BCFW members Jill Riddington and Barbara Findlay made similar arguments about sex workers and claimed that most sex workers had been victims of incest or child sexual abuse.⁴⁸ However, this suggestion did not encompass the complexities of the pornography industry and consider other, more positive attitudes toward sex work, such as those shown in later scenes of *Not a Love Story*. Moreover,

Ottawa, Ontario (hereafter cited as "Let's Close Red Hot Video," British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds).

⁴⁵ Linda Lovelace and Mike McGrady, *Ordeal: An Autobiography* (New York: Citadel Press, 1980).

⁴⁶ "Let's Close Red Hot Video," British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

⁴⁷ Lacombe, *Blue*, 30.

⁴⁸ Riddington and Findlay, "Prostitution," 15.

these arguments were based on past instances of abuse instead of abusive work situations in the present.

Some sex workers claimed that second-wave feminists infantilized sex workers in their anti-pornography arguments. Scholar and former sex worker Becki Ross argues that feminists viewed sex workers solely as “victims of patriarchal control” and not historical actors in their own right.⁴⁹ Earlier, Lindalee Tracey had expressed a similar critique; in a segment of *Not a Love Story*, she recounted how feminists at an anti-pornography protest negatively reacted to her work as a stripper, saying, “Oh poor you!” and blaming the male patrons at Tracey’s shows for her supposed oppression without acknowledging her agency in her own work.⁵⁰ Women from the BCFW held similar views about the mistreatment of female sex workers. Members stated that female porn stars were not at fault for pornography. Instead, the BCFW condemned male pornographers, sellers, and consumers for the violent nature of hardcore pornography.⁵¹ Members opposed content available at Red Hot Video stores, which supplied pornographic films in categories such as “bondage and discipline, sadism, first sex experience, incest, rape and gang bang, and young girls.”⁵² These categories, which depicted violent actions against women and young girls and conflated sexual pleasure with pain for women, led BCFW members to draw a connection between pornography and violence against women. They viewed pornography as a tool of indoctrination, giving credence to the anti-pornography slogan famously coined by Robin Morgan:

⁴⁹ Ross, “Bumping,” 225. It is also important to note that Becki Ross is a former sex worker who is pro sex work and has spent a significant amount of her academic career dedicated to discussing sex work.

⁵⁰ *Not A Love Story*, 3:42 to 3:48.

⁵¹ Riddington and Findlay, “Pornography,” 19.

⁵² “Let’s Close Red Hot Video,” British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

“Pornography is the theory—rape and femicide is the practice.”⁵³ Feminists blamed men only for violent pornography as the creators and consumers of the graphic material, and believed that female pornography actors were always victims.⁵⁴ BCFW members argued that women were victims either due to coercion, or to circumstances associated with prevailing structural issues in society. Because women earned less money than men in conventional workspaces, they reasoned it made sense for women to “chose” sex work as it was more profitable than working a conventional job but believed that once inside the sex industry, many women found it difficult to leave the industry for various reasons.⁵⁵ Second-wave feminists, therefore, did view female sex workers as victims of patriarchal control—even if they were in the industry of their own accord.

The BCFW and other anti-pornography second-wave feminists argued that female porn actors worked in the industry due to gendered economic disadvantages. These feminists believed that women could not earn enough money in conventional industries, so sex work was an economically preferable industry to work in. The arguments about economic inequality meshed with other BCFW arguments in relation to women in society more broadly.⁵⁶ Because the BCFW viewed all women as victims of patriarchal society, they logically viewed female sex workers also as victims. However, this larger concern does not mitigate the condescending attitudes that feminists held towards sex workers as BCFW members ignored what some sex workers said about their own industry.

⁵³ Barling, McCaffery, Perrault, “Reclaiming,” 7.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that even though men are blamed for pornography, the *Playboy* photographer in the film *Not a Love Story* is a woman. Additionally, anti-pornography feminist arguments did not factor in women who enjoyed pornographic material.

⁵⁵ “Let’s Close Red Hot Video,” British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

⁵⁶ Reddington and Findlay, “Pornography,” 20.

It is important to note that while some sex workers were proud of their craft, some women in the trade were ambivalent about or against sex work due to various factors. As one speaker at the 1987 conference “Challenging Our Images: The Politics of Pornography and Prostitution” challenged her audience:

“Do you know what it’s like when you have nothing to eat so you have to turn a trick when you are fifteen? Have you ever known what it’s like to be without a roof over your head, and you have to pretend to some dude that you like him for the night? Can you count how many tricks you have had?...isn’t it about having enough money to survive? That’s all I wanted to do—survive!...prostitution to me was degrading. I grew to hate it. If I had to fuck one more of them—boy, I would have killed him!”⁵⁷

As this participant argued, sex work for some women was a degrading experience and a means of survival. How sex workers experienced their work varied drastically: arguments that portray sex work as either positive or negative do not consider the vast range of experiences in sex work.

In addition to arguments against pornography from perceptions of violence against women and its reinforcement of the male dominance/female submissiveness binary, the BCFW also opposed pornography because of how the medium depicted lesbians and women of colour. While the concept of fetishization was not used in feminist circles during the 1980s, the arguments the BCFW made against the particular degradation of lesbians and women of colour in pornography were grounded in similar concepts. Members of the BCFW opposed lesbian pornography because they believed

⁵⁷ Bell, *Good Girls*, 50.

that the filming of lesbian scenes was to enhance sexual pleasure for male viewers. Camera angles maximized male desire while negating the pleasure experience for women. Often lesbian scenes preceded a threesome that a man joined or lesbian scenes included a male voyeur.⁵⁸ The emphasis on the male gaze during lesbian scenes allowed heterosexual men to find pleasure in lesbian sex by fetishizing lesbians.⁵⁹ The BCFW also argued that some pornography was racist that it caused “harm to Third-World people” and reinforced sexualized racial stereotypes, typecasting black women as “brown sugar.”⁶⁰ While the term “Third World,” was commonly used by women of colour at the time, the BCFW’s use of the phrase did not consider the fetishization of Indigenous women and other women of colour within the pornography industry. Additionally, the minimal attention to racial and lesbian fetishization made these complex issues merely tangential to the BCFW’s main anti-pornography stance—suggesting that their ability to bring intersectionality analysis to this campaign was somewhat limited.

Conclusion

Members of the BCFW were staunchly against pornography for an array of reasons that stemmed from connections made between male violence against women and porn. This anti-pornography viewpoint arose from radical feminist views about

⁵⁸ Barling, McCaffery, and Perrault, “Reclaiming,” 8.

⁵⁹ Barling, McCaffery, and Perrault, “Reclaiming,” 8. British film theorist Laura Mulvey theorized the male gaze in 1975. Mulvey argues that women in film act to satisfy male scopophilia and voyeurism—female characters in film exist only for male visual pleasure. See Laura Mulvey “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Fall 1975), 6-18.

⁶⁰ “Let’s Close Red Hot Video,” British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

society and later theories about power dynamics between men and women in conjunction with their sexualities.

Arguments by the BCFW concluded that men who produced, sold, or consumed pornography directly oppressed women. Additionally, all women involved in pornography were perceived as victims of patriarchal control due to their assumed unfortunate life circumstances or economic oppression. These claims suggest that the BCFW made attempts to understand sex work, even though the broader culture had deemed the industry to be immoral and demonized female sexuality in its critiques. Given our contemporary understanding of sex work, some of these arguments made by the BCFW and other feminists seem ill-advised: they over-generalized why these women worked in the industry, for example, and marginalized the participants with well-intentioned but condescending interventions. Nevertheless, there seems to have been an earnest attempt to understand sex workers and assist these women in sex industries. While their attempts to understand and help female pornography actors were often misguided, some elements of the BCFW's analysis highlighted aspects of sex work that were (and continue to be) problematic, like ongoing coercion within the pornography industry, desensitization of violence against women, and the fetishization of lesbians and women of colour within pornography. However, the BCFW anti-pornography campaign also limited understandings of the industry. Members cast all women's experiences with porn as wholly negative. And while the group began to see how women faced different obstacles within pornography due to race, sexuality, or career choice, these categories remained rigid in their analysis. Their campaign did not

fully allow for complex experiences with sex work or different interpretations of pornography.

Chapter 4.

The Provincial Day of Action

On May 8, 1982, about 800 people protested in the streets of Vancouver in support of maintaining the meagre legal protection for women's reproductive rights in Canada and broadening the scope of that legal protection. The protest was an organized response to a Supreme Court of Canada case in which the complainant attempted to extend personhood to fetuses and outlaw abortions. Activists marched several city blocks from Queen Elizabeth Plaza to the Hotel Vancouver Ballroom, where the public demonstration ended in a rally.¹ On the way to the rally, protesters enthusiastically chanted slogans such as "Make it legal, make it safe" and "Hey there Browoski, don't try and take my choice from me."² The protest, known as the Provincial Day of Action, was organized by both the BCFW's abortion rights action committee and its member group Concerned Citizens for the Choice on Abortion (CCCA).³ While the main protest took place in Vancouver, additional demonstrations took place across the province in cities such as Vernon, Prince George, Terrance, Chilliwack, Powell River, and Victoria. Official endorsements came from over 70 other organizations, which included unions, political parties, private citizens, and other feminist organizations.⁴

¹ Provincial Day of Action newspaper clipping from *Pacific Tribune*, 14 May 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 12, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

² List of chants for the Provincial Day of Action, May 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 12, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

³ Letter with no specific recipient for Provincial Day of Action, 4 January 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-01, file 8, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

⁴ Minutes of the Planning Committee 20 March 1982 and Evaluation Meeting Minutes for the Provincial Day of Action 28 May 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 8, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

A common perception of this historical moment is that second-wave feminists advocated for reproductive rights by prioritizing legal and accessible abortion while sidelining other women's health issues that particularly affected working-class women, women of colour, lesbians, and women in different regions. However, according to the CCCA and BCFW, reproductive rights and "pro-choice" rhetoric encompassed an extensive range of women's health concerns, including sexual education, equal access to abortion, readily available free birth control, access to sterilization, and a ban on compulsory sterilization. While the BCFW's interpretation of women's health issues broadened the scope of women who would benefit from the call to action, the emphasis on abortion accessibility suggests that the organizers realized that this issue that would garner more support from the public. Nevertheless, the BCFW included a more encompassing understanding of reproductive rights and health than a simple "rights" framework would suggest, even with the potentiality of losing public support. The BCFW thought about reproductive rights in a more holistic way that is evocative of the current calls for reproductive justice.

The Borowski Case and "Right to Life"

In 1979, Joseph Borowski sought a declaration from the Saskatchewan Provincial Court that s. 251 (4), (5), (6) of the Criminal Code of Canada, which legally permitted abortions and "procure[ment of] miscarriages," undermined the right to life that Canadian fetuses were guaranteed via the Canadian Bill of Rights.⁵ In response to Borowski's initial request, the Saskatchewan Supreme Court stated that Bill of Rights

⁵ "Minister of Justice (Can.) v. Borowski," Cases, Supreme Court of Canada, last modified 6 April 2023, <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/2531/index.do>.

complaints were not generally heard by provincial courts and that Borowski's legal standing in the case was questionable, as Bill of Rights complaints were usually filed by people directly impacted by the infringements.⁶ Borowski appealed the decision, and on December 1, 1981, the Supreme Court of Canada agreed to hear his case, even though Borowski did not have a "most direct interest" in the matter as a biological male who could not get pregnant and was not currently a father to any fetus.⁷ But the Supreme Court stated that the case was viable as "there is no reasonable way in which that issue can be brought into Court unless proceedings are launched by some interested citizen," as a fetus could not advocate for its own rights.⁸

While the CCCA had recently organized a pro-choice rally several months before this decision and had planned another one for 1982, the December 1981 announcement energized efforts for pro-choice action from feminist groups in British Columbia. Previous protests were about issues that originated from Section 256 of the Criminal Code, which had partially legalized abortion. The law restricted access to abortion through various legal requirements. If a woman wanted to acquire a legal abortion, she needed to find an accredited hospital with a Therapeutic Abortion Committee (TAC) comprised of three qualified medical practitioners. She would then submit an application to the TAC, which would approve the abortion if the "continuation of the pregnancy would endanger the life or health" of the woman.⁹ If the abortion was

⁶ Supreme Court of Canada, "Minister."

⁷ Supreme Court of Canada, "Minister."

⁸ Ann Thompson, "Borowski suit presents a grave threat to abortion rights," *Kinesis*, February 1982, 4.

⁹ "Repeal All Anti-Abortion Laws" Pamphlet by CCCA, 1981, 10-045-S9-SS2-F7, box 6-5, file F7, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds, Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario (hereafter cited as "Repeal All Anti-Abortion Laws," British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds).

approved, a fourth doctor outside of the TAC was required to perform the procedure.¹⁰ These rigid restrictions and fluid interpretations of abortion laws meant that access to legal abortion was uneven and unequal for Canadian women.¹¹ Moreover, these laws were deemed restrictive by the 1977 government-sponsored Badgeley Report, which showed that fewer than 24.6 percent of Canadian hospitals had the appropriate number of doctors to allow legal abortions.¹² Not only were very few hospitals able to meet the doctor quota to allow legal abortions, but the ambiguous wording of the law allowed local hospital boards to hold significant control over whether procedures would be permitted.¹³ Aside from these pre-existing issues with Canada's abortion laws, if Borowski were to win his case, Canadian women would not have been able to access legal abortion at all, and women who had abortions and abortion providers could have faced criminal charges. Additionally, since the case argued that life begins at conception, forms of birth control that prevent fertilization of the egg by sperm, like the IUD, would have been criminalized.¹⁴ One BCFW group member claimed that with a Borowski win, "the clock would turn back to the days of the wire coat hanger."¹⁵ The potential legal outcomes, would be detrimental to the preliminary and tenuous reproductive rights that Canadian women had so recently obtained.

¹⁰ "Repeal All Anti-Abortion Laws," British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

¹¹ "Repeal All Anti-Abortion Laws," British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

¹² Summary of Badgeley Report by Canadian Abortion Rights Action League (CARAL), 1977, 10-045-S9-SS2-F7, box 6-5, file F7, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds, Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

¹³ Reproductive Rights Information Sheet, 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 12, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

¹⁴ Letter by the CCCA about the Day of Action, 26 February 1982, F-45-2-0-1, box 7493, file F-45-2-0-1, Working Women Unite Fonds, Simon Fraser University Archive, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia (hereafter cited as Letter by the CCCA, Working Women Unite Fonds).

¹⁵ Letter by the CCCA, Working Women Unite Fonds.

The BCFW Structure, the CCCA, and Planned Objectives

It was unusual for the BCFW to be directly involved in planned action, because the BCFW *itself* generally did not organize events; rather, member groups, subcommittees, and ad hoc committees planned and engaged in protests.¹⁶ However, although member groups did the legwork of feminist action, the BCFW's role was hardly nominal. The BCFW's purpose was threefold: provide women's groups across the province with a direct network of like-minded individuals within their designated region, protect feminist activities in rural areas, and alert women across the province about what projects and events other British Columbian feminists were involved in. When member groups and associated groups planned action, the BCFW would support these actions either through direct funding or notification to other member groups about the action, or a combination of both.¹⁷

However, the BCFW's involvement in the Provincial Day of Action strayed from how the organization usually supported protests because they co-organized the action with the CCCA. The CCCA had been recently formed in 1978 with the objective of creating access to unrestricted legal abortion in Canada.¹⁸ BCFW members established an abortion action committee during the 1981 convention to directly assist the CCCA's

¹⁶ CCCA Meeting Minutes, 19 January 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 8, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

¹⁷ Policy Handbook Volume I, 1976, F-111-5-0-5, box 9483, file F111-5-0-5, Women's Bookstore Collection, Simon Fraser University Archive, Burnaby, British Columbia.

¹⁸ CCCA list of organizations that endorse abortion rights, 1981, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 12, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia. Apart from legalizing abortion, the CCCA was involved in other action to increase access to abortion. This included holding several other rallies in the years of 1979, 1980, and 1981. Rallies in 1980 and 1981 were well-attended, with around 800 and 500 people respectively. In addition to these rallies, the CCCA also held abortion information conferences with speakers, most notable with the well-known pro-choice doctor, Dr. Montergalier, in 1980. Additionally, the CCCA was involved in supporting pro-choice doctors who ran for hospital boards across the lower mainland. This information can be found in several flyers from box 576-F-02, file 8, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

planned action for 1982.¹⁹ The establishment of an action committee to funnel energy into the issue of abortion rights and to work so closely with the CCCA suggests that the BCFW and its members had a keen interest in sexual and reproductive health issues and were very concerned with how these issues impacted different women.

Pro-Choice and Its Discontents

Historians who research reproductive rights within Canadian second-wave feminism primarily investigate abortion and birth control accessibility, with a focus on the legality of the issue.²⁰ Historians Shannon Stettner, Kristin Burnett, and Lori Chambers point to the need for a cohesive historical analysis on these issues through a reproductive justice framework—that is, an intersectional approach that understands how different social locations affect a woman’s access to reproductive choices. While the BCFW did not fully embrace a reproductive justice framework in how they argued for reproductive rights, there is evidence that the group was beginning to see the interconnectedness of systems of difference such as race, region, sexuality, and class in affecting choices on reproductive issues.

The BCFW’s call for unfettered access to abortion demonstrated how the group knew that some Canadian women could not access legal abortions due to various constraints. They observed that working-class and impoverished women had less

¹⁹ Letter by the CCCA, Working Women Unite Fonds.

²⁰ Stettner, Burnett, and Chambers, “Realizing Reproductive Justice,” 302. For more on birth control access in Canadian historiography, see: Christabelle Sethna. “A Bitter Pill: Second Wave Feminist Critiques of Oral Contraception.” In *Canada: Confederation to the Present*, edited by Bob Hesketh and Chris Hackett. Edmonton: Chinook Multimedia, 2001. For information about abortion in Canadian historiography, see: Christabelle Sethna and Stephen Hewitt. “Clandestine Operations: The Vancouver Women’s Caucus, the Abortion Caravan, and the RCMP.” *Canadian Historical Review* 90, 3 (2009): 463–96. <https://doi.org/10.3138/chr.90.3.463>, Christabelle Sethna, Beth Palmer, Katrina Ackerman, and Nancy Janovicek. “Choice Interrupted: Travel and Inequality of Access to Abortion Services since the 1960s.” *Labour / Le Travail* 7 (2013): 29–48, and Shannon Stettner. “We Are Forced to Declare War: Linkages between the 1970 Abortion Caravan and Women’s Anti-Vietnam War Activism.” *Histoire sociale / Social History* 46, 92 (2013): 423–41.

access to abortion. In addition, the region where a woman lived was a significant factor in determining access to a legal abortion given that many rural hospitals did not have enough doctors for a legally required TAC.²¹ The group also critiqued Canada's abortion laws as *only* benefiting white middle-class urban women.²² The CCCA and BCFW understood how the complexities of abortion accessibility and class and region greatly affected whether women could receive the operation.

The CCCA and BCFW advocated for more than legal abortion and viewed abortion accessibility as a component of broader reproductive rights. The activists argued that women should have autonomy with their anatomy; to express this belief, the groups used the catchall phrase "pro-choice," which stemmed from how feminist groups were "pro [a] women's right to decide," acknowledging that women should be able to decide and make informed choices about their reproductive health.²³ As such, the umbrella term "pro-choice" included issues about women's health, sexuality, and economic concerns, such as access to free birth control, widely available "quality" childcare, paid maternity leave, lesbian and gay rights, and of course, equal access to abortion services.²⁴ In essence, some women's liberationists believed that women should be able to make well-informed decisions about when and under what conditions they should have children, as well as how many children they should have (if any). By supporting services that fell under this conception of pro-choice, women's advocacy groups believed that women *would* be able to make well-educated decisions about their

²¹ "Did You Know..." CCCA Information Sheet, 1981, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-01, file 8, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia (hereafter cited by CCCA Information Sheet, Pro-Choice Records).

²² CCCA Information Sheet, Pro-Choice Records.

²³ "Repeal All Anti-Abortion Laws," British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

²⁴ "Repeal All Anti-Abortion Laws," British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

own health considerations without financial cost as a concern. As the CCCA's 1981 pamphlet claimed, "Children are important, and every child needs to be loved and wanted"—a condition that would be met, pro-choice supporters believed, when women had access to services which would allow them to make informed decisions about their reproductive health.²⁵

As Borowski's case threatened the meager access women had to abortion services, the clear objective of the protest was to prioritize access to safe, and legal abortions. Nevertheless, the BCFW also endorsed other reproductive issues, like ending compulsory sterilization and supporting lesbian rights, albeit with slightly less attention. Even though Borowski's challenge could make abortion illegal, it was still important for members of the BCFW and CCCA to include information about other reproductive health issues within the pro-choice category. In an April 1982 meeting of the CCCA, the group discussed two separate pamphlets that were being distributed throughout British Columbia. One pamphlet exclusively discussed the importance of the Borowski case and how it could affect Canadian women, while the other pamphlet expanded the issues to include a comprehensive representation of reproductive rights.²⁶ That the organizations did not put all of their resources into their Borowski pamphlet, even in face of potentially losing the right to a legal abortion, indicates how crucial broad reproductive rights were for both groups.

Some Canadian women may have been reluctant to support the call for abortion rights due to the impact of Canadian eugenics policies on poor, immigrant, and

²⁵ "Repeal All Anti-Abortion Laws," British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds.

²⁶ Meeting Minutes for the CCCA, 13 April 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 8, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia (hereafter cited as CCCA Meeting Minutes, April 1982, Pro-Choice Records).

Indigenous women.²⁷ As Erica Dyck has argued, women from these communities were disproportionately affected by Canadian eugenic policies. They may well have been apprehensive about supporting second-wave feminist rhetoric around sexual health and abortion out of mistrust of the government, even though the second-wave movement had re-situated reproductive rights and had “shaken free from the more draconian language of eugenics.”²⁸ Dyck’s chapter about Canadian sterilization programs suggests that this sentiment may have held true for some Indigenous and immigrant Canadian women as well.²⁹ Angela Davis has also argued that racist eugenic sterilization policies have led women of colour to be skeptical of supporting pro-choice rhetoric from second-wave feminists.³⁰

Whether there was reluctance from poor, immigrant, or Indigenous women to support the Provincial Day of Action is unclear. The BCFW and the CCCA attempted to include non-white and non-English-speaking women in the action as they created a trilingual pamphlet that described the action and its aims in English, Punjabi, and Chinese.³¹ The pamphlet highlighted the four main objectives of the action, which were “access to safe and free abortions for all women, access to safe and effective birth control, an end to forced sterilization, and the right to chose whom we love.”³² To get the

²⁷ In Angela Davis’ chapter “Racism, Birth Control, and Reproductive Rights” from her book *Women, Race, and Class*, (New York: Random House, 1981), she discusses the American context for why some women of colour may be wary in supporting reproductive rights. Margaret Sanger, the woman who founded Planned Parenthood, advocated for birth control and sterilization for women of colour in impoverished areas to decrease these populations. For how marginalized women were affected by eugenic policies in Canada, see Erica Dyck’s chapter “Eugenics in Canada.”

²⁸ Dyck, “Eugenics in Canada,” 54.

²⁹ Dyck, “Eugenics in Canada,” 41-61.

³⁰ Davis, “Racism,” 169-185.

³¹ Coordinating Committee Meeting minutes, 31 March 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 8, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia (hereafter cited as Coordinating Minutes March 1982, Pro-Choice Records).

³² Coordinating Minutes March 1982, Pro-Choice Records.

pamphlet to women who spoke these languages, volunteers dropped off copies at local businesses for public distribution.³³ Whether these efforts encouraged more non-white and immigrant women attending the action is not clear, but the inclusion of languages other than English shows an honest attempt to incorporate non-white and non-Anglophone women in the protest.

We do have some information about Indigenous support, as at least one Indigenous organization, the Smither's Indian Friendship Centre, officially endorsed the action.³⁴ Aside from this endorsement and minutes from a coordinating committee meeting that discussed contacting Indigenous women's activist groups, archival records do not discuss whether Indigenous women participated in significant numbers in the Provincial Day of Action.³⁵ However, there was an established relationship between Indigenous women's activist groups and the BCFW. At the 1980 BCFW conference, Barbara Kurboski, the head of the Indian Homemaker's Association of BC (IHA), had encouraged BCFW member groups to engage with their local chapter of the IHA. Kurboski also discussed three main objectives of the IHA in relation to Indigenous women's lives: maintaining Indian status rights after marrying white men, obtaining access to legal aid, and ending the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families into white foster homes.³⁶ The BCFW supported and discussed Indigenous women's protests. In *Kinesis*, VSW, a member group of the BCFW, wrote articles supporting Sandra Lovelace's court challenge to enable Indigenous women to keep

³³ Coordinating Minutes March 1982, Pro-Choice Records.

³⁴ Action for Abortion Rights pamphlet, 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 12, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

³⁵ CCA Meeting Minutes, 12 January 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 8, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

³⁶ "Workshops, structure discussions dominate BCFW convention," *Kinesis*, December 1980/January 1981, 3.

their Indian status after marrying white men, endorsed a sit-in at the Vancouver Department of Indian Affairs Office, and provided highlights from the IHA Conference.³⁷ The BCFW also wrote a letter to the editor of the *Vancouver Sun*, stating that Indigenous women “live in fear of having their children removed if government workers deem their home conditions unsuitable. And yet the government itself is the irresponsible parent—its level of funding controls the quality of lives.”³⁸ While the reference to the government as an irresponsible parent might seem infantilizing, it was, in effect, acknowledging the wardship relationship between the federal government and Indigenous peoples that had been established by the 1876 *Indian Act*. The BCFW’s public support against the unfair circumstances Indigenous women faced due to government inaction and lack of funding demonstrated a respectful link between BCFW members and Indigenous women within the province.

Despite these connections, however, Indigenous women would not likely have attended the provincial Day of Action because of another pressing issue. A family law judge had recently argued in favour of government removal of Indigenous children from their homes as they supposedly lived “in dreadful conditions, proof of which is that they get lice and scabies. Clearly...they are better off in white foster homes.”³⁹ In May 1982, IHA members and other Indigenous women were planning and participating in various sit-ins that opposed these forcible removals.

³⁷ “Sandra Lovelace is going to the UN to plead for Indian Rights for Indian Women,” *Kinesis*, July 1980, 4. Jamieson, “Family Unit Concept,” *Kinesis*, July 1980, 6.

³⁸ Letter to the editor of the *Vancouver Sun* by Heather Conn, 10-045-S7, box 5-2, file F2, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds, Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

³⁹ Kathleen Jamieson, “Family Unit Concept was Indian Homemakers dominant theme,” *Kinesis*, July 1981, 6.

While some second-wave feminist groups may not have directly addressed the racist and classist implications of forced sexual sterilizations for marginalized groups, the BCFW and CCCA alerted the public to these issues. In an educational information sheet crafted by the BCFW abortion rights action committee about abortion access, the organization noted that “sterilization is being carried out on poor and particularly non-white women” without their consent or with the threat of social welfare being revoked without the completion of the operation.⁴⁰ The flyer also indicated that forced sterilization was a serious issue in the United States, with a disproportionate number of overall sterilizations occurring amongst black and Indigenous women.

BCFW records show that the reproductive rights of marginalized women were on the group’s radar. These issues were also prominent on the Day of Action itself, as evidenced by the BCFW abortion action committee’s pro-choice information sheet that was circulated at the protest, acknowledging recent injustices against marginalized women and advocating for these policies and practices to end. While the group may not have embraced the full scope of reproductive justice and intersectional analysis, there were clear attempts from the BCFW to address the reproductive issues that a myriad of women faced.

It is also important to note how supporters of the Provincial Day of Action reacted to other issues that fell under the category of pro-choice. Members of the CCCA critiqued the second Day of Action pamphlet, claiming that connections between abortion accessibility and lesbianism had not been “discussed by the CCCA and those formulations are not those agreed to”; rather, they claimed, the authors of the pamphlet

⁴⁰ Pro-Choice Information Sheet, 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 12, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

had "used a short discussion at the general meeting to expand their own views and have exceeded their mandate" by inferring the CCCA's position without a full conversation on the issue.⁴¹ The removal of the CCCA's name on the pamphlet may not directly reflect how the organization viewed reproductive rights issues, but it does suggest that coming into agreement with other BCFW members on certain issues may have been problematic.

A similar criticism came from non-feminist organizations who backed the action. Over twenty unions across the province supported the protest, including the BC Federation of Labour (BCFL). After the action occurred, the CCCA gathered to discuss positive and negative feedback about the protest. One issue brought to light was broadening the discussion of abortion to include attention to other issues of sexuality, including lesbianism. Unions were opposed to including the topic of lesbianism in pro-choice activism as they believed that sexual identity was a separate discussion from reproductive rights. And members of the CCCA agreed that while including lesbian rights was not necessarily wrong, they were concerned that including lesbian issues might alienate people who otherwise would have supported the pro-abortion narrative. The BCFL's and CCCA's concern about publicly supporting lesbian rights in this moment was articulated by other segments of the feminist movement, including Betty Friedan from NOW: speaking openly about lesbian sexuality would alienate more conservative people who would otherwise support the larger aims of the movement.⁴² Nevertheless, it would be unfair to assume that the BCFW itself was withdrawing their

⁴¹ CCCA Meeting Minutes April 1982, Pro-Choice Records.

⁴² CCCA Meeting Minutes, 11 May 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 8, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

support of lesbian rights, although their pragmatism as they tried to shore up support for accessible abortions may have left lesbian women feeling abandoned.

Another criticism emerged from the head of the Vancouver District and Labour Council, Art Kube, who “questioned the existence of ‘forced sterilization’” discussed in one of the pamphlets.⁴³ Clearly, many Canadians were not fully informed about the forced sterilization of Indigenous women, although assessing how much the average member of the public understood is a difficult task. A popular CBC investigative journalism programme called *The Weekend* on April 1, 1973, had aired a story about forced sterilizations. Journalist Charlotte Gobeil had interviewed two Indigenous women who claimed that they had been sterilized against their knowledge at the Charles Camsell Hospital. Gobeil spoke with other members of the community, who believed that the government had targeted Indigenous women and forcefully sterilized them. After the programme aired, sterilization was discussed in the House of Commons, and Health Minister Marc Lalonde sent the CBC president a letter that denied the accusations and demanded a full apology, accusing the program of “using ‘Indians’” to create a sensationalized story.⁴⁴ Indeed, provincial sexual sterilization legislation that had enabled forced sterilization had all just been repealed in 1972 and 1973, and this may have created a sense of complacency about the issue. Clearly, though, some of the BCFW’s allies on the Day of Action dismissed the idea that these practices ever targeted Indigenous women---a belief that has been shattered by ongoing evidence of

⁴³ Coalition General Meeting for the Provincial Day of Action for Choice, 24 April 1982, AM1486-S5--, box 576-F-02, file 8, Pro-Choice Records, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.

⁴⁴ Erica Dyck and Maureen Lux. “Population Control in the “Global North”?: Canada’s Response to Indigenous Reproductive Rights and Neo-Eugenics,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 97, no. 4 (2016): 481-482.

medical procedures performed on Indigenous women without their full, or sometimes any, consent.

While the BCFW and CCCA could not counter that resistance and their Day of Action primarily focused on abortion accessibility, other reproductive rights issues were at least raised and discussed. This expansion of topics that were tangentially related to abortion, including lesbian rights and forced sterilization, enabled the Provincial Day of Action to be inclusive of women of colour, non-heterosexual women, and working-class and impoverished women. However, even though the CCCA and the BCFW expanded the pro-choice discussion, there was backlash from some supporters of the Day of Action regarding the extent to which these issues were intertwined. This difficulty points to a predicament that many second-wave feminists had to consider: how to get people who supported a particular action to agree to further, interrelated challenges to societal standards.⁴⁵ Many Canadians thought that abortion was permissible in most circumstances, but linkages between abortion accessibility, lesbian rights, and forced sterilization under a broader umbrella of reproductive rights were not clear to many, and some groups thought, for pragmatic purposes, these were issues needed to be challenged individually. Nevertheless, the inclusion of these issues in pro-choice rhetoric demonstrates how critical women's reproductive rights were for the BCFW and how the group saw separating abortion rights from a more holistic approach to reproductive issues as misguided.

Conclusion

⁴⁵ Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing*, 4-5.

On Mother's Day weekend in 1982, the BCFW coordinated with the CCCA to host a Day of Action across British Columbia. In Vancouver alone, over 600 people marched downtown to advocate for reproductive rights. Even though organizers had planned the action before the Supreme Court of Canada agreed to hear the Borowski appeal, which sought to make abortion, along with different forms of birth control, illegal in Canada, the Supreme Court's decision to hear Borowski's case was itself a catalyst for the protest. This protest did not have the immediate impact its organizers had hoped for, as abortion was not fully legalized in Canada until 1988. However, aspects of the protest's origination and objectives demonstrated a flourishing inclusivity within the BCFW. The BCFW and its member group the CCCA argued that a lack of reproductive freedom particularly discriminated against Indigenous women, women of colour, and women of lower socioeconomic status via information sheets distributed before the action. But disapproval by a broader range of potential supporters about merging these issues under the category of "pro-choice" suggests that abortion rights were the main uniting issue for most participants in the day of action. Even so, the BCFW and the CCCA addressed a comprehensive understanding of reproductive rights and maintained support. Many changes that second-wave feminists sought had to be achieved through a balancing act between the principles of the movement and the principles of the status quo, including a heteronormative society in which women were still expected to bear children, regardless of circumstances.

It is unreasonable to impose modern ideological frameworks on an older organization and expect current standards for inclusivity. But the BCFW and the CCCA did plan their campaign on abortion quite broadly by including issues like abortion

access (or lack thereof), forced sterilizations, and sexual freedom, as well as how these issues impacted women differently because of race, class, and sexuality. This approach suggests the early stages of an intersectional understanding of reproductive rights. While the BCFW tried to make the day of action more inclusive by pre-circulating materials in Punjabi and Chinese, the languages of the two largest ethnic groups in BC at the time, the lack of information in other ethnic languages (whether because of oversight or, more likely, limited BCFW resources) may have discouraged some marginalized women from attending. Moreover, the BCFW claimed that the Canadian government was an irresponsible parent towards Indigenous groups, which demonstrates that the group was attempting to understand and support Indigenous women, even though they expressed these concerns in an infantilizing way. Essentially, BCFW members group understood that women were oppressed by a lack of reproductive freedoms and that some women faced more barriers due to their race, sexuality, and class.

Conclusion

In May 1983, the “Support the 5 Committee” organized a Rally for Unity, which sought to unite local activist groups to collectively fight against capitalism, racism, imperialism, and sexism.¹ Women representing six member groups of the BCFW spoke about how the federation would continue to fight the sexism that persisted in Canadian society. Speeches addressed the various forms of oppression that many women endured, such as male violence against women, as well as ongoing feminist goals, such as sexual freedom, reproductive rights, paternal childcare, and equality of pay and opportunity in the workplace. The speakers insisted that some women faced other forms of oppression as well and stated:

Among us as a group there are many differences in our experience. We are white, we are aboriginal, we are Third World, we are lesbian, we are heterosexual, we are mothers, we are single, we are young, we are old, we are middle-class, we are poor. Our liberation as [women] will not be achieved until all of us are free from any form of domination. Women’s liberation will not be a reality until there is an end to all forms of sexism, racism, and capitalism.²

¹ The group formed in response to the environmental and feminist anarchist group Direct Action being arrested in a controversial manner. Direct Action was responsible for several bombings in the early 1980s. Ann Hanson, a member of Direct Action, discussed the group’s politics in her autobiography *Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerilla/Ann Hansen*.

² Speech at the “Rally for Unity” by the Free 5 Committee, May 1983, 10-045-S9-SS2-F16, box 6-14, file F16, British Columbia Federation of Women (BCFW) Fonds, Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

This speech and the group's actions of the 1980s demonstrate that the BCFW understood that societal oppression was intricate and varied due to numerous strands of experience. While the organization did not fully embrace intersectional analysis, the BCFW's efforts to understand how women were affected due to their race, sexuality, and class show that the group held a rounded understanding of societal oppression that can be considered proto-intersectional.

My analysis of the BCFW adds to Canadian second-wave feminist historiography in a number of ways. I have explicitly used intersectional methodology in my research, attempting to examine the extent to which the BCFW itself employed an understanding of multiple systems of difference in planning and implementing its policies and actions. Another way that my research adds to Canadian historiography is through my use of a reproductive justice framework in the historical context of British Columbia in the 1980s. While historians have investigated reproductive rights in Canada, most analyses focus on legal frameworks or single issues and do not embrace a holistic concept of reproductive justice and the complexities of women's experiences within legal regimes.³

My analysis of the 1981 National Lesbian Conference demonstrates that BCFW members understood that lesbian experiences of oppression varied based not just on sexual orientation but also race, motherhood, ability, and class. Yet there were tensions at the conference itself. Bisexual women felt estranged from lesbian and feminist circles due to their sexuality, the sliding conference fee was minimally effective for women of lower socio-economic status, and women of colour felt that mixed-race discussions were ineffective and often hostile. White lesbians were willing to criticize racism within

³ Stettner, Burnett, and Chambers, "Realizing Reproductive Justice," 302.

the broader community, but they did not self-critique racism within their own communities. While there were some notable tensions within the Canadian-lesbian community, BCFW members understood that women could face oppression for various reasons outside of their gender and sexual identity, indicating that the group began to understand intersectionality.

My investigation of the BCFW's anti-pornography stance shows that the organization understood that sex workers faced greater marginalization than other working-class women because their work challenged ideals of properly constrained sexuality. Moreover, the BCFW argued that pornography oppressed lesbians and women of colour differently from other women. The group understood how factors like sexuality and race, combined with gender, could affect how society treated people. However, the BCFW formed their anti-pornography beliefs with minimal consultation with female sex workers, so their arguments were deemed condescending by some sex workers. Additionally, the BCFW's statements about lesbians and women of colour in pornography were not central to their anti-porn position. Arguments made by the organization about the victimization of sex workers, women of colour, and lesbians were overly generalized and did not allow for nuance. Some sex workers advocated for pornography. Many women of colour were not from the "Third World," as the BCFW described them. The BCFW's anti-pornography stance is controversial compared to contemporary arguments about sex work and intersectionality. However, the group tried to understand sex workers at a time when broader society marginalized their work. Moreover, the organization asserted that pornography fetishized some women due to their race and sexuality. These attempts to understand how pornography affected

women due to career choice, race, and sexuality suggests that the BCFW's feminist beliefs aligned with intersectional interpretations of unequal power relations..

My analysis of the BCFW and the CCCA Provincial Day of Action for the Right to Abortion shows that the organization understood reproductive rights as a complex issue that included various aspects of women's reproductive health. Also, the group noted how race, class, sexuality, and region impacted women's choices about their reproductive health. Previous scholarly work about Canadian second-wave feminism has suggested that feminist groups dealt with each reproductive rights issue on a case-by-case basis. But the BCFW's broad understanding of reproductive health shows that some women's liberation groups viewed these issues cohesively. Furthermore, the BCFW's emphasis on reproductive rights in light of Joseph Borowski's case and criticism from several sponsor groups establishes how crucial comprehensive reproductive rights were to the organization. Granted, attempts to include non-white women in the protest were limited. Nevertheless, with careful consideration of how race, sexuality, class, and region affected women's reproductive choices, the BCFW fought for holistic reproductive rights for all women.

As a second-wave feminist organization, the British Columbia Federation of Women began to grasp how different layers of identity added complexity to women's oppression. In working to end that oppression, they increasingly realized that in addition to gender, systems like class, race, sexuality, and region impacted the extent to which women could exercise or be oppressed by social, political, and economic power. Consequently, the BCFW's feminist analysis can be described as proto-intersectionality,

as they made genuine efforts to learn how multiple systems of power affected women's lives in myriad ways.

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