

# **Lesbian and Queer Generations in Vancouver: An Intergenerational Oral History Project**

by

**Nadine Boulay**

B.A. (Hons.), University of Manitoba, 2011

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

in the

Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**

**Summer 2014**

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**Name:** Nadine Boulay  
**Degree:** Master of Arts  
**Title:** *Lesbian Generations in Vancouver: An Intergenerational Oral History Project*  
**Examining Committee:** Chair: **Dr. Helen Leung**  
Associate Professor

**Dr. Elise Chenier**  
Senior Supervisor  
Associate Professor  
Department of History

---

**Dr. Lara Campbell**  
Supervisor  
Associate Professor

---

**Dr. Ann Travers**  
External Examiner  
Associate Professor  
Department of Sociology and  
Anthropology

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**Date Defended:** June 20th, 2014

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the possibilities of cross-generational oral history interviewing as a pedagogical tool for intergenerational conversation and broader historical understanding in queer communities. Through an analysis of the experiences of five younger queer women ages 19-30 who interviewed 15 older lesbians active in the lesbian feminist community in Vancouver during the 1970s and 80s, this research examines differences in identity formation and community building between these two 'generational cohorts'. While lesbians in the 1970s and 80s created a vibrant and unprecedented culture and historical presence, few younger queer women are familiar with this history. This thesis argues that linear historical and generational thinking coupled with dominant heteronormative notions of kinship impacts queer communities, which tend to be uni-generational. These factors prevent or serve as barriers to cross-generational queer community building; prevent youth from knowing their connections to a shared queer history; and leave important legacies- such as lesbian feminism- in the forgotten past. This project disrupts these barriers to intergenerational connection and historical understanding and argues for the importance of re-examining the lesbian-feminist past.

**Keywords:** Lesbian; Queer; Generations; Oral History; Vancouver; Community

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the fifteen women who shared their remarkable life histories for this project. Thank you for your courage.

*“That’s why I want to speak to you now.*

*To say: no person, trying to take responsibility for her or his identity, should have to be so alone. There must be those among whom we can sit down and weep, and still be counted as warriors. (I make up this strange, angry packet for you, threaded with love.)*

*I think you thought there was no such place for you, and perhaps there was none then, and perhaps there is none now; but we will have to make it, we who want an end to suffering, who want to change the laws of history, if we are not to give ourselves away.”*

*-Adrienne Rich*

## **Acknowledgements**

This project was a collaborative effort from start to finish and I owe many thanks to the expansive network of people who supported it. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Elise Chenier, whose expertise and passion for the topic of lesbian history brought me to SFU in the first place. Her generous support, valuable insights, and enthusiasm kept me motivated and reminded me of kind of scholar I want to be: one who is dedicated to social justice and transformation. I am grateful to the scholarly community at SFU that has been my home for the past two years: Lara Campbell, Jen Marchbank, Tiffany Muller Myrdahl, and Kathryn Hunter- thank you all for your guidance and support. Thank you to Erin Flegg, Aliza Bosa, Naomi Moses, and Candice Klein for generously volunteering your time to participate as interviewers. Your efforts, dedication, and insights were central to this project and I can't thank you enough for volunteering your time and energy. Thank you to the women whose stories inspired this work and who shared their oral histories: Sandra, Nancy, North, Christine and Robin, Ellen Woodsworth, Kaye Atkinson, Greta Hurst, Betsy Warland, Nym Hughes, Pat Hogan, Liz Whynot, and Micah Washkow. This thesis is dedicated to you.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for their support and love throughout these past two years. I would particularly like to thank my mother Sherry and step-father David, friend and colleague Leah Horlick, and finally, my partner Ryn for her unwavering encouragement, feedback, and loving support.

This research was funded thanks to a grant provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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## List of Acronyms

ALOT Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony

LGBTQ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirit, Queer

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

*“We all must recognize the significance of the past for each of us, for our communities [...] as a way to know who we are and where we are going” (Scobie, 30).*

As this opening quote proposes, the past is never really behind us; rather than being a “foreign country” as the oft-quoted axiom suggests, the past directly shapes and informs the present; it affects how we live and how we conceptualize ourselves and our identities in relation to others. Speaking more broadly, understanding our past histories offers a sense of place and community; of where ‘we,’ whoever we are, have come from, and perhaps hints to where we are going. For queer communities and individuals who have often been relegated to the margins of history, knowledge of the past offers a sense of a shared historical lineage beyond heterosexual reproductive norms and provides validation of queer experiences throughout different historical periods. In our increasingly connected world, a history lesson is often just a click or a Google search away, but community histories can also be explored through methods which bring us in conversation with something more personal than text or a computer screen. It can also bring us in conversation with people who have experienced the queer past themselves.

The project outlined in this thesis is a pilot study for exploring an iteration of the queer past for the purposes of prompting broader understandings of lesbian/queer histories in Vancouver through cross- generational oral history interviewing. Through this work I sought to explore how younger generations can learn about the past using cross-generational interviewing as a pedagogical tool. The impetus for testing this research question with other queer and lesbian women was prompted by my interest in lesbian history, my own queer identity, as well as my desire to explore the intergenerational divisions I have perceived in queer women’s communities. To explore

this research question this project brings together in cross-generational conversation women who lived in Vancouver, B.C. during the 1970s and 1980s and participated in lesbian community activism, with young women who identify as lesbian or queer. Spanning from January to September 2013 five women (ages 19-30) conducted a series of interviews with fifteen lesbians (ages 55- 80) and recorded their oral histories of living in Vancouver during the 1970s and 1980s.

Throughout the project, interviewers wrote reflections documenting their experiences of interviewing and listening to the oral histories of older lesbians. After the interviews were collected, both the interviewers and narrators completed assessment materials which examined the impact of cross-generational interviewing. Interviewers completed an exit questionnaire and recorded an exit interview, while narrators provided me with follow-up assessment questions. While this feedback provided valuable insights, this project draws from a small sample of women who volunteered to participate and does not claim to be representative of lesbian/queer women's history in Vancouver. Through the oral histories of lesbians who were self-selected and volunteered to participate younger interviewers were offered partial and subjective narratives of the lived experiences of these individual women during the 70s and 80s. The fifteen women who participated as narrators do not speak for all lesbians living in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s, nor do the five women who conducted interviews represent a comprehensive sample of contemporary queer community in the city. The oral histories collected examined how each individual woman experienced her own lesbian subjectivity over time and how she interacted in community spaces and with other lesbians in Vancouver, while the assessment data- which comprises the majority of my research focus- largely focuses on how younger interviewers responded to conducting these interviews.

In fall of 2013, each interviewer sat down with me for an exit interview to share their experiences of participating in the project. It is the content of these exit interviews, and the take-home questionnaire combined with the reflections interviewer's provided that forms the basis for my analysis of intergenerational oral history as a pedagogical tool. As interviewers remarked during these exit interviews the general impetus for initially volunteering was: 1) an interest in lesbian/queer women's community history in

Vancouver; 2) a general lack of knowledge about this time period and historical moment; 3) and a genuine desire to experience intergenerational conversation. The exit interviews were designed as semi-structured (see Chapter 2/Appendix E.), but borrowed from the narrative form of oral history interviewing methods to allow for flexibility of response, iterations of thought, and to be open for digressions which interviewers may not have considered or foreseen. As this work is informed by feminist qualitative research, I understand knowledge and experience to be subjective and mutable; therefore, a method for gathering and exploring intangibles such as the changes or growth of experiential or affective knowledge must also be flexible.

The oral history interviews were conducted by five women, Naomi Moses (29), Erin Flegg (27), Candice Klein (27), Aliza Bosa (19), and me, the principal researcher, Nadine Boulay (26). All five of us identified as queer women, but took up these terms in different ways (see chapter 3). In engaging with women of my age group and younger I use the term queer strategically as it is a quotidian marker in LGBTQ\* vocabulary. All of us were involved in what we understand to be a queer community or queer communities in Vancouver. Each interviewer expressed an interest in learning about queer and feminist community histories in Vancouver; all four women informed me that they were also relatively unaware of lesbian community and activism in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s, and prior to participating in the project had had little interaction with older lesbians. Each participant first reflected upon and described why they wanted to participate in the project and what they wanted to learn. Naomi Moses, a teacher and law student at UBC, described her motivation to participate influenced by both a general interest in storytelling and intergenerational contact, and motivated by personal experience:

Moses: Well I was interested in the project because I think oral history is a really interesting way of learning about people's lives. I find people's stories super interesting, so it appealed to me to get to listen to people's stories and I also know that people often really want their stories told and don't have a good forum in which to do that. [...] and then I also think that the intergenerational elements are really interesting. Part of my motivation was personal. I have a great aunt, or well, I had a great aunt, she recently died. But we were very, very close and she used to always tell me stories about her life. And she had dementia for the last 2-3 years of her life. And so she lost her ability to tell me her stories. And I really missed it. So I wanted to- I wanted to talk to people who were of an older

generation because the older generation in my family is gone for the most part (Moses, 1).

Moses also stressed that mentorship figures for women, and lesbians specifically, are either rare or generally inaccessible. Having experienced her own intergenerational connection through family- specifically her aunt - Moses stated that she wanted to explore the personal historical connections of the lesbian community; how women before her might have “paved the road” for her and other women her age.

Moses: I love hearing other people’s stories, enjoy meeting older people, and feel that it’s important for history to include narratives that often do not make it into the ‘official’ record [...] I was hoping to gain a new perspective of Vancouver and what it was like in the 1970s and 1980s. I also wanted to hear about what it was like to be a lesbian or queer identified before it was as socially and legally acceptable as it is today [...] I’ve always known, sort of in the abstract, that people have paved the road, feminists and queer activists and lesbian activists. And I know that all of these people have paved the way, but I don’t really have a personal understanding of it (Moses, Questionnaire 1-2).

Candice Klein desired to learn more about Canadian history and Vancouver history more specifically. Prior to participating, Klein- an undergraduate student in the psychology department at Simon Fraser University- worked for a number of years as a transcriptionist for the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony. Through her experiences of transcribing the stories of gay/lesbian/queer women from the 1940s through to the 1960s, Klein stated that she was familiar with some facets of lesbian history in Canada. However, she informed me that she was eager for the opportunity to learn about local lesbian history, or as she stated, how “gay women fit in the landscape of the city” (Klein, 3):

Klein: I’m incredibly interested in the women [and] lesbian movement[s], particularly in Vancouver. I thought this would be a great opportunity to document primary sources for a very often neglected part of history/herstory [...] I wanted to learn the political and social atmosphere within Vancouver during the 1970s and 80s, particularly about how lesbian women felt they existed within public spaces (Klein, Questionnaire, 1).

Erin Flegg, a free-lance journalist who has written for *Xtra!* and the *Vancouver Observer* and recent graduate from the MFA program in creative writing at UBC, also

expressed a long held interest in Canadian history. As a relative newcomer to Vancouver, Flegg shared with me details of her own personal queer journey. The welcome and support she felt coming out in the East Vancouver queer community prompted her desire to learn more about the history of the community itself from a multi-generational perspective. “I was interested in the history of feminism in the city and I also wanted to connect with a group of people I otherwise don’t get to interact with [...] I wanted to learn about the history of Vancouver through the eyes of people who were there, and whose voices were not featured in mainstream news and histories” (Flegg, Questionnaire, 1). Flegg indicated that she saw the project not only as an opportunity to learn about Vancouver’s queer history, but as a means to recognize and situate herself within this history:

Flegg: [...] the idea of getting to learn about the city and its history- and not only the history of the community that I've started to become a part of- was appealing to me. It sounded like something that I would find very grounding. Especially as I sort of came into my own identity and into this city and into this community, to know how it got here and where it came from (Flegg, Interview, 1).

As the youngest member of the interviewing cohort, Aliza Bosa- who came to the project in summer 2013- offered a unique perspective of queer youth culture in Vancouver. Bosa asserted that her initial interest in participating was directed towards the intergenerational aspect of the project, stating that she wanted to know more about “[...] what being a lesbian was like in the past” (1). She was particularly interested in how key milestones in queer lives, such as coming out, had changed overtime. Additionally, although she informed me that she knew little about the lesbian-feminist history of Vancouver, she was intrigued by what she knew to be a politically charged historical moment, or as she aptly stated: “activism was pretty juicy back then” (7). “I was excited to participate because I wanted to learn more about how it was like to be a lesbian in the 80s and I wanted to learn more about oral history” (Bosa, Questionnaire, 1). These comments all suggest that prior to the project these women had generally had little understanding of this older generation’s history in Vancouver and had not experienced any significant amount of cross-generational interactions. However, considering this is a small sample of self-selected participants, these insights are not meant to imply that all queer women of my generation necessarily share these

experiences. Nonetheless, interviewer's perspectives do suggest that these experiences are common and that cross-generational interactions are often lacking in queer communities, thus providing the basis for an in-depth analysis of some of the contributing factors which structure queer generations.

As principal researcher and fifth interviewer my personal reflections are also included throughout this thesis, as my initial motivation for conducting intergenerational queer and lesbian research was deeply personal. My interest in queer history is a direct result of my identity as a lesbian and my experience of finding myself both in and a part of queer communities. As a young feminist and scholar with a penchant for history, I sought to gain an understanding of kinship and connection beyond my immediate family. Who were the lesbians and feminists, the women who came before me, and whose actions and efforts shaped the world I currently live in? My exploration brought me to research the vibrant and politically charged texts associated with lesbian feminism in North America during the 1970s and 80s; I was fascinated by the proliferation of these nuanced and radical politics, of heated proclamations that lesbians embodied "the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion," and I couldn't help but wonder how these ideas influenced the queer worlds that I have inherited (Koedt, et. al. 1970). But this research stirred in me a series of nagging questions: If the lesbian-feminist generation was so outspoken and effusive in its political voice- as the body of available literature suggests it was- where are the women themselves? Why had I never met older lesbians in my community before? If evidence of their impact is there, why did I have to look for it? Why is this generational divide so pronounced in the queer community? While my initial assumptions lead me to presume that divisions primarily had to do with lack of evidence or breadth of literature which documented this history, this presumption was contradicted by the historical and scholarly evidence I encountered through further research.

The women who participated as narrators in this project were part of this lesbian-feminist generation; a generation of women who produced an unprecedented amount of evidence for their existence, evidence which has been widely written on, discussed, and critiqued. Why then does this not extend tangibly into the structuring of queer communities? Why are queer communities, networks, and other forms of kinships



largely uni-generational? Through taking up these queries, this research provided the opportunity for me and four other younger queer women interviewers to explore an important and largely inaccessible part of local Vancouver history. As this research will show, this inaccessibility to community history and lack of cross-generational community building is not due to a lack of historical evidence, but rather is perpetuated by the ways in which kinship is made intelligible; through overarching linear historical thinking; and through generational changes in identity politics. This project argues that these factors structure and contribute to the creation of queer communities which are primarily uni-generational, preventing different generational cohorts from cross-generational conversation.

Although this research primarily explores cross-generational oral history interviewing, the additional beneficial outcomes of the project include the collection of fifteen oral histories of older lesbian women who lived in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s. This collection was donated to the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony- an online digital archive housed at Simon Fraser University- thereby ensuring that these important oral histories are preserved and available to future generations of scholars, activists, and community members alike. Furthermore, this work provoked much larger historical and theoretical lines of questioning: does oral history encourage intergenerational dialogue and broader historical understanding? As a method, how is oral history unique, particularly for accessing marginalized histories? For queer people, what is the value of intergenerational exchange? What does engaging with the past, in the oral history exchange, feel like for younger interviews? This work engages with these research questions through analysis of the oral history encounters and exchanges between different generations of lesbian and queer women, exploring the possibilities of conducting intergenerational grassroots oral history for broader historical understanding.

One of the most obvious distinctions between women who came of age in the 1970s and 80s and my generation are the differing terms deployed to signify their non-heterosexual sexual identities. All fifteen narrators self-identified as lesbians and referred to participating in lesbian-feminist cultures, while the term queer is the most commonly used identity marker for women of my generation. Although it has a history of being a pejorative term, since the 90s the term 'queer' has become an oft-used moniker

for non-heterosexual identities; it is taken up in disparate ways: to refer to fluid forms of sexuality; non-binary gender identities and presentations; as a positionality rather than a fixed identity; as a verb rather than a noun, suggesting ways of non-normative being and doing; as a theoretical approach; and even as an umbrella term to encompass the ever-expanding LGBTTQQIA acronym (Sullivan 44, 50; Browne and Nash, 4; Bell and Valentine, 20). I use the terms 'lesbian' and 'queer' throughout when referring to some of these generational differences, or as participants used them to describe their own identities.

Another key term used throughout this thesis is 'intergenerational'- primarily in reference to both to the experience of belonging in a generational cohort, as well as the act of bringing members of these cohorts in conversation with one another. Although women from two generational cohorts participated in this project and an intergenerational 'encounter' successfully occurred, the assessment primarily focuses on the impact that this encounter had on the younger women. Participation in this project provided a conduit for younger women to glimpse into the lesbian past of their city; through that glimpse they gained more complex understanding of lesbian identity, understood some of the historical and political contributions this generation of lesbians made, and through this exchange were able to situate themselves historically in connection to these legacies. The next logical step for further research into the intergenerational potentials of oral history interviewing, and further examination of generational divisions between lesbian/queer women more broadly, would be to examine the impact that these intergenerational encounters may have on older women. While younger participants' responses illustrate that they gained knowledge and insight into local lesbian history this transformation occurred primarily at an individual level. The analysis of the assessment data, combined with the fact that contact between the interviewers and narrators did not extend beyond the purview of this project, suggests that the issue of queer generational division extends further than individual motivation; that being interested in the past is not enough to suspend these divisions; and that while oral history is a successful method for prompting these encounters, it is merely a first step.

## 1.1. Oral History

Oral history interviewing has been used by scholars, activists, and community members alike to explore the history of their communities. Interviewer Erin Flegg remarked that she considered oral history to be an effective method “particularly with groups who are often marginalized when it comes to dominant historical narratives [...] allowing women to tell their own stories” (Flegg, Questionnaire, 6). Furthermore, Flegg stated that she considered oral history to be a flexible and accessible method for different skill levels, providing an opportunity for people to “[...] jump in and participate, [and making] each party feel like they have a role to play” (Flegg, Questionnaire, 5). Candice Klein remarked that while oral history can be “intimidating at first, it’s easy to adapt and develop skills” quickly (Klein, Questionnaire, 5). Moreover, Klein added that the technological simplicity of this project added to its accessibility; “It’s a great way to learn [...] history without difficult methods of technology that may have ruined the experience [...] It’s a great meeting point between the worlds” (Klein, Questionnaire, 6). Although I had conducted interviews earlier in my academic career, I was relatively new to oral history. With the supportive, thorough, and accessible training I received, I felt comfortable taking up this method for my thesis project. While expensive technology and institutional support are helpful in coordinating oral history projects, as Klein and Flegg have pointed to, they are not necessary; hence, oral history interviewing can be a relatively flexible method for scholars and activists alike to conduct grassroots and community-based projects.

All four of the interviewers stated that in addition to experiencing a lack of exposure to lesbian-feminist history in Vancouver, prior to participation they had had limited interactions with older lesbians in the context of community spaces and generally knew little about lesbian history in the 1970s and 80s. Although I had researched lesbian histories in Canada and the United States, I had experienced very few interactions with older lesbians, particularly lesbians older than 50. Although all interviewers attested to seeing older lesbians in community spaces, they reported that actual conversations and interactions across generations were rare. Participation in this project provided an opportunity for facilitating an intergenerational encounter and for younger women to learn more about Vancouver’s history. As Naomi Moses remarked:

[Before participating] I knew very little book history. I certainly have not sat down with a volume of lesbian history in Vancouver and studied it. I know what I've been told by people that I know about what Vancouver was like and what the community was like you know, 30-40 years ago. And then I know like a little bit about the history of some of Vancouver's institutions, like Little Sisters and some of the bars and some of the, like the coffee shops and the centres. And some of the community spaces on Commercial Drive. And I'm always pressing people for information, "Tell me what it was like!" But really, I don't know all that much. I have to use my imagination. I certainly haven't seen photographs. A lot of what I learned I learned from the first initial event for the project where there were people writing on a timeline, that was the only time I've ever seen the history laid out like that. So I would say it's quite piecemeal understanding- there's been bits and pieces here and there (Moses, 4).

Although participation in the project was a temporally limited occasion, as Klein stated, "It was an incredible opportunity to talk with older lesbian women that [I] would not have otherwise had a chance to interact with" (Klein, Questionnaire, 3-4). Flegg concurred with this sentiment: "I found it really useful and interesting and really gave me a chance to meet people that I wouldn't have had to opportunity to [otherwise]" (10). Although a reciprocal conversation did not occur in every interview in this project, participants noted in their reflections that narrators would often ask them questions either prior to the interview or afterwards. I left this form of reciprocal sharing up to the discretion of the interviewer, but was pleased to discover that they welcomed these opportunities to share. In "Gender, Desire, and Feminism," Kelly Anderson argues that self-disclosure during the interview process can be beneficial, bolstering the dynamic between interviewer and narrator and creating rapport; "[R]evealing something private [...] creates connection and trust [between interviewer and interviewee]," and can facilitate creating shared understandings (Anderson,141). Providing the opportunity to recognize these shared understandings across generational divides is central to challenging perceptions or misunderstandings which may perpetuate intergenerational divisions.

Considering that volunteers for this project were self-selected, each woman who interviewed came to the project with good listening skills and an interest in history. Bosa described her experience of interviewing in this project as "a more comfortable form of interviewing," where she drew on her listening skills to ensure that the narrator felt both heard and validated: "I think that it's really important to have listening skills [...] Eye

contact. Just listening, just making sure that the other person feels that you've heard them, [and] sometimes mirroring back. As well as also getting excited about things that they were excited about, showing excitement (Bosa, 11-12). Entering the oral history encounter with openness to listen and learn is imperative: "Without this openness, there cannot be a genuine human relationship. It takes courage and risk to listen: such listening opens us up to the possibility of changing our ideas and our lives" (Norkunas, 67).

In "Teaching to Listen" Martha Norkunas writes about the act of listening in an oral history interview as central to creating intimacy and openness, allowing the narrator space to share their stories as they want to tell them. Additionally, active listening serves as a pedagogical tool for interviewers to gain new insights and perspectives. This work requires that interviewers think critically about their role as co-creators of the interview narrative: "Rather than occupying an objective position, a listener should expect to modify her or his self-awareness and identity as a result of engaging with the narrator and hearing the stories [...] Establishing an atmosphere of respect and equality of self in an interview means that neither the logic of the narrator nor that of the interviewer is privileged (Norkunas, 64). Interviewer Erin Flegg acknowledged that her experience as a journalist has given her ample opportunity to reflect on power dynamics in the interviewing relationship, and how this knowledge shaped her interviewing practice:

[...] It is a question of power, because when you're talking about newspapers and magazines, your interviewee knows that it's going to be up to you how you write their words and with what kind of integrity you're going to write them and how it's going to fit in to that story. So I think approaching this I wanted to like- I wanted to make the interviewee feel like they were in the position of power [...] (Flegg, 6).

Preferring to see herself more as a "facilitator" in the oral history encounter, Flegg shared "[...] I really was open to hearing anything and wanted people to be able to pick and choose what they thought was the most important thing for me to know or for the project to know (Flegg, 3; 6).

Reflecting on her participation, Candice Klein remarked that although she was also nervous to conduct her first interview the narrator's candor and interest was

comforting and the “flow [of the conversation] was easy” (Klein, Reflection 1). Klein again stressed how prior experience helped her get a feel for interviewing, and she entered her second interview with an increased sense of confidence and a willingness to answer questions about herself as well (Klein, Reflection, 2). As journalist, Erin Flegg had significant interviewing experience, stating that she knew how to ask questions to facilitate and frame storytelling: “I’ve spent a lot of time doing interviews [...] and in terms of like growth of that you start out with really narrow questions and build on those questions, and in writing news stories you want to get as much background as possible” (6). Her breadth of experience gave her the confidence to “let the conversation run its course,” “create as open an atmosphere to start people off and make them feel comfortable,” giving direction “if they [the narrator’s] needed it” (Flegg, Reflection 1; 3). However, Flegg stated that oral history interviewing differed from her usual experiences insofar as she usually researches the subjects of her articles prior to interviewing, while in this project she “had little knowledge about the [time] period and the city” (3). In the oral history encounters she experienced as part of this project, Flegg shared “[...] I really was open to hearing anything, and wanted people to be able to pick and choose what they thought was the most important thing for me to know or for the project to know (Flegg, 3; 6).

As a research method, oral history refers to the collection of narrative accounts of past events as told by people who experienced them first-hand. Oral history can be used to challenge versions of history spoken from positions of authority or privilege, or to add more complexity to existing historical narratives. Oral history interviewing has been used by scholars, activists, and community members alike to reclaim and preserve the memories and histories of those who were otherwise invisible due to systemic forms of oppression such as sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia. Moreover, oral history interviewing can be useful for building interpersonal connection between interviewers and narrators, as it methodologically “[...] relies on intimate and personal processes of interaction, knowledge transfer, and trust,” providing a method for participant’s to explore oral history’s potential as a pedagogical tool for intergenerational historical conversation (Marshall, 177). As an interpersonal form of pedagogy, oral history interviewing involves not only active listening on the part of the interviewer; each interview forms through the combined interactions between both narrator and interviewer, essentially co-creating the

story as it unfolds. Oral history thus can function as a grassroots form of accessing and engaging with lived historical experience.

As a method, oral history has “radical implications” for the social message of history: it has the potential to challenge hegemonic narratives of history spoken from positions of authority or privilege (Thompson, 7). Although oral traditions have been used to record and transmit stories and histories for thousands of years, within the context of Western culture and historical documentation it has often been considered a less credible and verifiable mode of historical remembering. Paul Thompson’s influential text *Voice of the Past* (1978) is credited for insisting that oral history is indeed a valid methodology for historical inquiry through illustrating that oral history has the potential to challenge hegemonic models for constructing history. In “History and the Community,” Thompson argues that oral history can be used to access and “open up” community and social histories that have otherwise been relegated to the private sphere such as the life stories of the working class (8). In terms of its myriad uses as a historical method, Thompson states that oral history can be used as a kind of “reminiscence therapy” for a narrator, providing space for recognizing that every life holds intrinsic historical value (18); is ideal for group work, and can be used by communities to explore their own histories (10); can be used for reclaiming past histories that have been erased; and can produce stories that challenge the dominant narratives produced by those who have the power to define what constitutes history proper (17). Thompson argues that oral history interviewing and research produces a more nuanced history, shifting and challenging the power and authority imbued in the production of historical knowledge to open up space for alternative or counter-hegemonic narratives: “History should not merely comfort; it should provide a challenge and understanding which helps towards change” (20). This speaks to an understanding of the past as offering new contexts for understanding the present, which can be both comforting and challenging; to learn more about ourselves and where we come from, we can turn to the past; to expose the legacies of systems of oppression, such as homophobia, we can draw from history to perhaps recognize new ways to create change and conceptualize our present.

As a methodology, Thompson and others contend that oral history is not only useful for challenging dominant historical narratives, but that it also has the potential to

engage communities by reminding us that behind each story there is a living, breathing human being. “The spoken word,” he writes, “confronts the reader with the presence of people themselves” (87). In this interaction between the interviewer and narrator lies the potential for engaging with the past and drawing connections to the present (147). As Thompson reminds us, the oral history interview is an opportunity to explore history through centering human experience as a lens into the past; where listening to a narrator’s stories functions as a form of pedagogy, illustrating how subjectivity and personal experiences are “professionally useful” for the historian (162). Thompson attests that through oral history, “social groups at the margins of power,” such as sexual subcultures, can offer or insert their own counter-narratives vis-a-vis dominant historical discourses which have silenced or obscured their histories (97).

In his work as an oral historian, Alessandro Portelli argues that oral history can be used to explore and expose many of these obscured or silenced histories; he is one of many scholars that have taken up oral history for ‘researching down,’ exposing the authoritative traditionalist model of historical thinking. In his 1979 text, “On the Peculiarities of Oral History,” Portelli argues that unlike other historical methods, the subjective form of oral history is what makes it a unique historical practice. Portelli attests that oral histories tell historians a great deal about the social and personal meaning of a specific historical moment; experiences are subjective and understood differently by each person; and through oral histories we can access unknown events or unknown facets of known events (Portelli, 36). Rather than approaching memory as an abstract concept, Portelli understands memory to be historically situated and ripe with theoretical possibilities for understanding and nuancing history as it is experienced by different people: “Memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings” (38). Through active listening and attention, the oral historian can thus observe and preserve the “very changes wrought by memory,” revealing how the narrator makes sense of their past in a different historical period.

In “Oral History as Genre,” from *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, Portelli stresses that oral history evokes a narrative of the past which has an impact on the present; “the expression oral history,” Portelli writes, “[...] refers both to what the historians hear (the oral sources) and to what historians say or write [...] On a more cogent plane, it refers



both to what the source [the narrator] and the historian do together at the moment of their encounter in the interview” (3). In this ‘encounter’ between interviewer and narrator, where ideally both parties intend to be present to one another, listening functions as a pedagogical impetus for understanding why an experience in the past was and continues to be important for the narrator. In an encounter that is intergenerational this incentive is even more pronounced. “Indeed, there is a tacit mutual responsibility for elders to sit, reflect, and recall while younger generations commit to recoding, processing, and analysing the previous generations’ historical knowledge” (Boyd and Ramirez, 5) It is in this encounter that exists the capacity for cross-generational understanding to occur.

## 1.2. Queer Generations

In an interview exploring the history of the Australian Gay Teachers and Students Group (GTSG) in the late 70s, historian Daniel Marshall enquired of one of his narrators, “Did you have any mentors?” To which the narrator Gary Jaynes, co-founder of the GTSG replied:

No we didn’t...I think that’s the difference between then and now, too, because there wouldn’t have been too many middle-aged activists, hardly any experienced gay advocates [...] Whereas now you could imagine that there’s a whole generation of older gay men and lesbians who’ve had activist experience who might be able to play some sort of mentoring role in organizations. *But they weren’t there then* (170, emphasis mine).

If these valuable mentors are as the interview suggests here now, why do generational divisions still persist in queer communities? What are the potential benefits in developing cross-generational solidarities? How in charged milieus such as this can intergenerational dialogue be made more open, more accessible and indeed, more possible? Telling stories about the past across generations can serve as a conduit for communities to pass on collective memories of a shared past. As one interviewer noted, “It was wonderful to talk to someone about events that I find incredibly fascinating and important; not just through a textbook” (Klein, Reflection 1). For communities or individuals who share a specific identity or experience of marginalization and oppression passing on stories can provide models and tools for younger generations to resist and

challenge these systems. This is the function of role models, elders, and mentors- living archives or repositories of cultural memory. However, for sexual minority marginalized communities the opportunities for intergenerational connections are more limited. But what are the structural barriers to intergenerational connection? Why, with the breadth of history and knowledge available from older queer generations- and specifically from lesbian-feminists as I will illustrate- do intergenerational divisions persist in queer communities?

Historically, notions of family, kinship, and intergenerational connection have only been available and intelligible within a heteronormative paradigm. Within this paradigm, the 'family' as a social unit is created and sustained through reproduction, and as a microcosm of society predetermines the conditions for what constitutes community, for how knowledge is inherited, and passed down between generations. The 'family' of origin- the heterosexual and reproductive family- is frequently a site of oppression and alienation for queer people; Even when families are supportive or accepting their queer children or family members they cannot provide adequate mentorship relationships or convey subjective and affective understandings of queer experience. Historically, homophobic rhetoric- from Anita Bryant's 1977 "Save Our Children Campaign" to charges that the crux of the 'gay agenda' involves 'recruiting' children- has positioned and conceptualized queerness as the antithesis of the (heterosexual and reproductive) Western family model (Weiner and Young, 225).

Within the aforementioned context rests the drive and the necessity in queer cultures to create and uphold 'chosen family' and queer modalities of kinship as sources of community (Eng, 3). As Leo Bersani and others argue, queer forms of bonding, kinship, and community building- even under the most oppressive circumstances- offer clear examples of relational models and forms of collectivity which fall outside of heteronormative models of family (Weiner and Young, 224). Historically and up until quite recently, queer communities have formed against the rules of social order, and constitute a form of "symbolic disruption" to hegemonic conceptions of family and community. Queer communities and queer forms of kinship also delineate a "particular relational inventiveness;" As Weiner and Young argue in "Queer Bonds," "[...] if an askew relation to the normative terms of sexuality occasions a certain relation to the

social, this means it also precipitated a certain reinvention of the social” (Weiner and Young, 225-6). In addition to these affective and interpersonal chosen communities, Weiner and Young also posit queer bonds as being transmitted in the forms of inherited intellectual and affectual genealogies; queerness does not just constitute a range of identities, but constitutes a well of “lived knowledge[s],” stories, experiences, knowledges, traces, and recognition; it is a positionality which can stand as a “resistance to regimes of the normal” (227-228).

Queer forms of kinship, knowledge collection, and transmission take diverse forms; they may be spatially fixed in an archive or transitory and temporally limited, in fleeting moments of recognition between strangers, or in an oral history encounter where empathic exchanges of shared experience can arise (230). There are many possibilities for the passing and sharing of “homoknowledges”- collective queer memory and history- through diverse modes of relating to one another (Wiener and Young, 225). This project used cross-generational oral history interviewing as one such conduit for sharing these knowledges between women. Although belonging to a specific generation or sharing a generational experience shapes how each queer woman experiences the world, there are tangible experiences that different generations share. In 2014, queer Canadians enjoy a level of personal freedom unfathomable for lesbians in the 1970s and 80s. However, the changes wrought by time did not arise out of nowhere; the contemporary milieu of queer experiences- which myself and the other younger interviewers have inherited- is shaped and informed by the past. As Sarah Shulman describes in *Ties That Bind*, “the capacity for feeling, strong enough to overwhelm social expectation, is at the root of the homosexual identity [and gender non-conformity]. This transgression is what coming-out is all about. Without having experienced the coming-out process themselves, straight people often do not have a model for such a fierce level of resistance” (34-35). The most available model for the historical precedence of this resistance comes from our queer pasts and those who experienced it; from those whose actions shaped the present.

Although radical changes have occurred in the last thirty to forty years in the West regarding legal rights, public visibility, and cultural conceptions of queer people, queer forms of kinship and community building have not radically altered the structural

and social paradigm of kinship on a large enough scale to the extent that notions of 'family' are no longer bound up in heteronormativity. Furthermore, it is not just this stable and hegemonic notion of family that propagates queer generational disconnection. The lingering cultural discourses around homosexuality, as it pertains to youth and children in particular, continue to perpetuate anxieties which stymie the connections between older and younger queer people. Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio Roque Ramirez write that the "[...] overly politicized social fear" that older queers and particularly teachers will seduce youth has "[...] thwarted cross-generational activism"; this "specter of sexual impropriety [has] diffused the liberationist promise of cross-generational mentoring and sexual freedom" (Boyd and Ramirez, 10).

Daniel Marshall argues that "[t]he horrifying specter of pedophilia is invoked to oppose and suppress the development of any queer-affirmative dialogue between the generations" (173). Considering this specter looms largely over interactions between men, the argument of pedophilia as the primary issue thwarting intergenerational connections between women is insufficient. Perhaps there is some truth in the social fear of seduction that Boyd and Ramirez refer to; but rather than pertaining to sexual impropriety, this pervasive fear surrounds a general sphere of influence. Stereotypes and homophobic utterances- far from being a thing of the past- still all too often rely on the rhetoric of 'the gay agenda,' and the oft-repeated notion of 'recruitment' (Bernstein, 43). The lesbian- in this collective homophobic consciousness- may not be a sexual predator, but she is still wholly undesirable; an ugly, mannish and abhorrent figure who undermines not only the heterosexual family, but male supremacy as well (Bernstein, 43).

Stereotypes about lesbians may largely veer from pedophilia, but they do serve to create barriers between different age cohorts. In addition to the homophobic and popular collective conceptions of the 'lesbian' as embodying a laundry list of abject characteristics, Victoria Hesford argues that academic queer and feminist critiques have also contributed to casting (out) this figure as an outdated and homogenous entity (228-29). Hesford argues that in both feminist and cultural memory, the lesbian is often perceived as "a monster, she's ridiculous; she's laughable, contemptuous, shameful" (Hesford, 231). My anecdotal experience speaks to Hesford's analysis; I have been told

on many occasions by both straight and queer women that lesbian or dyke were some of the 'ugliest' words you could be called, or call yourself. Furthermore, when this project was presented to the community and a public meeting was held, a younger woman in attendance commented that she did not think she could call herself a lesbian because people would think she was transphobic or hated men. With the circulation of these aforementioned assumptions and stereotypes which surround the 'lesbian' as a figure, and if no other contradictory discourses were offered, who would ever want to claim a lesbian identity or explore its history?

As was evidenced in both the scholarly literature and younger participant's responses- and as I will illustrate throughout this thesis- identity politics and differences between the terms lesbian and queer proved to be a major theme underpinning generational divisions. Difference in identity is not inherently antagonistic, but the ways in which these two terms are deployed do suggest that 'lesbian' signifies something very different for my generation than it did for the women who heralded lesbian identity in the 1970s and 80s. In the late 1980s and early 1990s a new brand of "queer" politics emerged which critiqued and problematized facets of lesbian and gay politics, and more broadly, essentialist and stable notions of identity (Duggan, 156). During this time, "queer" was heralded as a new politically radical identity, not just in terms of non-heterosexual sexualities, but as encompassing non-normative genders and bodies which did not or could not cleave to stable notions of identity. In this context, "lesbian" was branded an outdated identity in lieu of more contemporary (queer) identity politics (Hemmings, 34).

This is not to suggest that critiques of some of the ways that lesbian-feminism was deployed were unwarranted; quite the contrary. Many bodies of lesbian-feminist discourse and feminist discourse more generally have been deployed in ways which have excluded and further marginalized the voices of women of colour, trans\* people, working class butch and femme communities, and sex workers. While not disregarding these indispensable critiques, it is important to note that 'lesbian' as an identity does not inherently point to oppressive or monolithic politics. In "Feminism and its ghosts: The specter of the feminist-as-lesbian" Victoria Hesford argues that the collective memory surrounding the term lesbian constructs her as both an abject figure- "the ball-busting,

selfish, hairy extremist”- but also as transparent and outmoded (231). Many of us are familiar with the notion of the angry, ugly lesbian- and how this notion is used to perpetuate a fear of feminism; but the impact of this collective understanding has ramifications beyond feminist identification; to this list of disparaging characteristics of the lesbian we often also add: outdated, racist, transphobic, anti-sex, and “flannel shirt androgyne” (231). Hesford argues that the over-familiarity or “hypervisibility” of the lesbian figure “blinds” us to the complexity of her personhood and perpetuates a “partial vision” of this figure (231).

These divisions and misconceptions have an impact on the younger generation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people who are thus deprived of the experience of these role models and the possibility of situating themselves within in a historical lineage. This project explores cross-generational oral interviewing as a method that uses the documentation of historical knowledge as a means to promote cross-generational understanding at the grass-roots/community level. Through the diversity of the participant’s voices the goal of the oral history interviews were to expose younger interviewers to new, more complex, and personal understandings of the lesbian past. As one interviewer remarked in her post-interview reflection “my interview with [the narrator] caused me to think more about generations, and specifically what one LGBT generation has to learn from another” (Moses, Reflection 1).

Although identity was a central theme throughout exit assessments, through participating younger interviewers remarked that they learned more about the queer history of the city they lived in, a history that prior to participation they knew little about. Through the interviews younger interviewers were offered a glimpse into what Vancouver during the 70s and 80s looked like for each narrator; what kinds of community spaces existed; how each woman interacted with that space; and how- over time- lesbian identity has transformed. Taking regional specificity and scale into consideration reminds us that histories are lived out in space as well as time (Smith, 62-63). Oral history interviewing can also be employed for accessing or nuancing local community histories, offering a glimpse into not only temporal difference but spatial difference as well. During the interviews narrators shared stories which offered a glimpse into the lesbian past of Vancouver during the 70s and 80s when lesbians

worked to create vibrant and visible communities, including cooperative housing, and more informal support networks; produced a myriad of social spaces such as women's dances, coffee shops, women-centered, lesbian, and feminist publishing, and bookstores; and participated in a variety of political organizations and movements, such as the British Columbia Federation of Women, the Vancouver Women's Caucus, and the Women's Health Collective (Millward, 544; Podmore, 597; Rudy, 196; Creet, 183). These women literally took up space in Vancouver, and yet very few of these former community spaces, which were marked as 'lesbian' or which centered on a collective contingent of women, exist today. Although many queer women living in Vancouver still occupy and experience their social communities in similar geographical areas as lesbians did in the 70s and 80s- such as Commercial Drive strip, and the East Vancouver area more generally- the communities which queer women occupy now look very different.

While oral history is not the only means to explore these changes that communities experience over time, to facilitate intergenerational interaction, or to learn about lesbian history more generally, it is a unique model for locating and exploring hidden personal narratives which might offer suggestions for these changes. As Boyd and Ramirez argue and illustrate throughout *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*: "Oral history with [...] historically undervalued communities entails making *historical* and *generational* discontinuities explicit" (5, emphasis mine). Indeed, all of the younger women who volunteered as interviewers stated that their impetus for participation was based on their lack of knowledge about local lesbian history and an interest in increasing their knowledge through participation; they each approached participating in this project as a means to explore local history and contribute to preserving women's stories. As a method oral history has been used as a form of active resistance to historical erasure; interviewing an older queer mentor, sharing space, and listening to them as they narrate their own lived experience has the potential to encourage intergenerational learning. Daniel Marshall argues, "[...] queer oral histories build a presence in the absence of queer intergenerationality [...] rebuilding activist efforts to forge intergenerational queer networks because it methodologically relies on intimate and personal processes of interaction, knowledge transfer, and trust" (177).

Lesbian-feminism in the 1970's and 1980's was characterized by a politicized identity contingent on the dual understanding of being a woman and a lesbian in a sexist and homophobic culture. It is often currently read as rooted in the context of the second-wave of the feminist movement and the gay liberation movement, both of which influenced and preceded academic feminism, gay and lesbian studies, and queer theory. 'Lesbian' as a category can be used to describe women with many different axes of identity and is a historically located experience; therefore it is relevant and appropriate to conduct projects which seek to expose and address these experiences specifically, exploring 'lesbian' identities as historically informed and situated experiences. As is evidenced by the changing language used to demarcate non-heterosexual women's sexuality, lesbian is a historical term which has been deployed in a number of disparate ways.

The lesbian feminist generation in the 1970s and 80s took up this identity in a uniquely political and unprecedented fashion (Boyd, 362). For women in the 1970s and 80s claiming a lesbian identity was an act of reclamation of a term that prior to this historical moment was used to pathologize female homosexuality. Historians and scholars have shown that 'lesbian', rather than being a transhistorical experience to demarcate female same-sex desire, is a historically positioned term and refers to a disparate set of discourses, experiences, and identities (Rupp, 359; Boyd, 364). As Elise Chenier argues, "[...] lesbian history challenges assumptions about what 'counts' as proper history, and complicates what we think we know about the past" (265). Oral history has been used by communities and researchers for more than just expanding the historical record to be more inclusive and heterogeneous, but also to "empower whole communities of people [...] long forced to live on the social, economic, and political margins of society" (Chenier, 252). Within the larger project of oral history as a method of recovering lost histories it is essential to make women's history a priority. Following the work of Joan Nestle, co-founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York, collecting and preserving lesbian oral histories challenges women's exclusion from history, and also provides a space- real, imagined, and emotional- where community members of all generations can access their shared histories. Spaces like the Herstory Archives and projects such as *Queer Twin Cities* not only contribute to the ongoing



legacy of queer pasts, but they challenge and nuance what we understand as history, storytelling, and identity:

History is much less linear, much more complex than the popular narrative of gay liberation suggests. There is no single story of lesbian life: there are many stories, many simultaneous and overlapping conversations. Stories of personal change often mirror collective identity formation and cultural transformation, but they are not one and the same. Social movements and cultural change operate at the level of concrete, observable phenomena, bringing individuals together in countless daily actions and interactions. But they also operate in more subtle ways, as people bring to their interactions a sense of self that is already partially formed (Stein, 15).

As suggested by the above quote, linear and forward moving narratives of history lead us away from the past but cause a rupture between past and present, and thus, between generations. This historical narration of movements in which one precedes the other in an ordered linear fashion is often structured by a reading of history that is sequential and based on notions of progress (Colebrook, 12). For example, we see this linear, forward-moving impulse in the ways that feminism as a movement- as if it constitutes one monolithic movement- is often constituted through discourse. This narrative of feminism's "waves" of inheritance prompts both a temporal division between past and present and an often selective telling of a "[...] rather restricted range of second-wave subjects" (Hemmings, 34). I am not suggesting that second wave lesbian feminist politics should be beyond reproach or romanticised. However it is the structure of the critique- which casts "the lesbian" as inherently one-dimensional and temporally fixed- which contributes to the division between different generations of lesbian/queer women and precludes a nuanced engagement with lesbian history in the 70s and 80s. These homogenizing critiques can have the effect of precluding further engagement with this important historical moment, and obscuring the complexities of lesbian-feminism and the voices of the women who were a part of it.

Furthermore, this forward-thinking impulse underpins the ways that 'generations' are constituted through discourse, and thus through experience. Generational experiences are not monolithic or homogenous, but they do reflect the specific historical milieu within which they occur. Taking up 'generations' as an object of analysis can provide insight into historically situated and "distinctive ways of seeing" the world (x-xi).

[...] the stories we tell of our lives, being richly bound up with our experiences and habits, always speak of lives lived at particular moments in history at particular points in the life cycle” (Hammack and Cohler, x). Despite this historical relevancy, ‘generations’ as an object of study has been under-researched in the social sciences. This lack also coincides with the “bewildering fragmentation of same-sex identities across generations,” illustrating a need for research which addresses generational divisions, and offers ways to facilitate intergenerational dialogue within queer communities (Hammack and Cohler, xii).

In *Telling Sexual Stories: Narrative Perspectives on the Gay and Lesbian Life Course*, Phillip Hammack and Bertram Cohler argue that “there are always different and contested grounds both between and across generations that make for a portrait of gay and lesbian life as a vast patchwork of plurality of experience and ways of living” (xii). Despite the plurality and richness of lesbian history, forward historical thinking and intergenerational divisions generate a context where “[y]oung [queer] people are left to themselves to figure out who they are *by looking only forward*” (Zusman, 12, emphasis mine). While this forward thinking impulse is not a uniquely queer experience, it is compounded by the overarching context of heteronormativity. If the most intelligible form of passing on historical, familial, and affective knowledge is through reproductive models, this further limits the potential for queer inter-generational conversation. These factors limit the potential for inter-generational conversations between older and younger lesbians to acknowledge their relationship to a shared history. Through cross-generational interviewing this project disrupts this forward thinking and one-directional way of understanding history. As interviewer Candice Klein reflected through her experience of conducting oral history interviews: “And that just because the years have progressed we think that we’re progressive, but I don’t think that that’s true. It just shows that it [history] is circular [...] I think it just showed that like progression is quite circular” (Klein, 4).

This project interrupts the notion that older lesbian generations and their conceptions of identity and community has nothing left to offer, asking the question, following Claire Colebrook, “[...] can we be inspired- in the present- by recalling that optimism of the past?” (Colebrook, 13). In “Stratigraphic Time, Women’s Time,”

Colebrook argues, similarly to Hesford and Zusman, that the most intelligible model for understanding generations is centered on the understanding of time as linear, sequential, and progressive. Although this is the most observable way of understanding how time operates, it does contribute to an understanding of the past as fixed and past conceptions of identity politics or community building as always behind and un-related to the present. Colebrook's 'Stratigraphic time' implies resisting reading certain representations- such as the lesbian- as necessarily fixed in time, and hence dialectically opposed to the present; it requires a reading of history "[...] not according to the time within which it occurred but to a time it might enable" (Colebrook, 13). As Colebrook states, "[...] one line of progressive and unfolding time precludes recognition of those who have offered other models of selfhood" (11). This begs the question: what are these 'other models of selfhood' that might be possible in the lesbian past? What forms of identity and community building might have we be inadvertently discarding by looking only forward? And how might this looking back be possible? Colebrook suggests that it would be productive for feminist researchers to generate a method "[...] which *looks back to the past* in order to redefine who we are" in the present to produce a "more nuanced history" (11, emphasis mine).

As interviewers reflected after conducting the interviews and having had the opportunity to look back to the past, they noted that their perceptions about the past and its pull on the present had changed. Flegg stated that through participating in the project she came to see that "[...] queer didn't start ten years ago, you know? Our community has a history. *Here it is,*" suggesting that through participation she recognized herself as part of this shared history (Flegg, 8-9; emphasis mine). Klein echoed this sentiment, responding "[...] it's good to know where you come from, like where your rights come from (Klein, 9). Participants also remarked that they recognized the value of intergenerational connection. Moses reflected that she felt that "[...] generations have much to share if they are open to listening to each other's stories and ideas" (Reflection, 1). Furthermore, Bosa commented that the affective experience of gaining intergenerational connection through this project was bound to this notion of new historical understanding: "I mean [through interviewing] not only are you gaining connection right? Because that's why we're here. That's why we're on earth, to gain

connection with someone. And even if you're not really like intensely like going to see them every day and stuff, it's nice to get a view of you know, history" (Bosa, 13).

'Getting a view of history,' through intergenerational interviewing can disrupt the often antagonistic relationship between the past and present. In her article, "Jumping Generations," Iris van der Tuin calls for a methodology for generating feminist knowledge that is not structured by opposition, dialecticism, or allegiance to a specific epistemology, but through shared conversations across time and disciplines (van der Tuin, 28). This project deployed oral history as a method for enabling a new or perhaps more nuanced engagement with the past and to engender broader historical understanding, intervening in the linear logic which underpins generational experience. Returning again to her critique of time as sequential, Colebrook argues that the "self-narration" of time like the self-narration of social movements can preclude engagement with the past. This project follows Colebrook's call to (re)visit the past with "[...] an awareness that the past may harbour potentials to which we are not yet attuned" (12). In this process of revisiting lies the potential to recognise that the past is not bound behind us; it is "[...] not a simple object of knowledge, but the milieu within which we think," that there is a queer history that we have inherited, whether we recognize it or not. In "recalling utopian ideals" and examining the past we can perhaps envision new strategies of organizing and resisting, or at least examining how we understand our own identities and the communities we live in and our connection to local lesbian history (Colebrook, 12-13).

### **1.3. 'Lesbian History' through Oral History**

The existence of "lesbian history" as a field of study can trace its antecedents to the advent of lesbian-feminism in the 1970s (Laure, 349). There are a number of existing models for community-based oral histories which focus on lesbian and/or queer subcultures and identities. A pioneering text in this field is *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, published in 1993 by Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis; a thirteen-year oral history project documenting the lives of working-class lesbians living in Buffalo, New York in the pre-Stonewall era. Kennedy and Davis used extensive and iterative oral history interviewing, returning to their narrators to ensure that they felt that

they were represented accurately by the manuscript. At a time when working-class and butch/femme lesbian communities were under scrutiny from many post-Stonewall lesbians and feminists this text delved into the history of a vibrant but largely private and underground community (Simmons, 1417). *Boots of Leather* stands as an iconic lesbian/queer oral history project, which offered a more nuanced glimpse into the private worlds of butch/femme lesbian cultures, exploring the complexities of sexual practices, race and class politics, and modes of survival and community building that existed in a pre-feminist and pre-gay liberation historical milieu. Kennedy and Davis use oral history as a method to expose and explore the “historical nature of sexual identity by charting the change over twenty-odd years in lesbians' self-definition,” and as a reflexive practice, paying critical attention to the self-representation of narrators (Simmons, 1417).

In 1993, cultural anthropologist Esther Newton published *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town*. Through her research, using oral history, archival research, and participant observation, Newton explores the cultural history of this small resort town that became a thriving gay and lesbian enclave, even in the context of severe oppression (Kennedy, 698). *Cherry Grove, Fire Island* shed light on the nuanced identities that comprised this community, illustrating the connections and divergences between gender, race, class, and the emergences of gay and lesbian subcultures. A more recent example of a large-scale urban oral history project is *Queer Twin Cities* (2010), which explores many of the untold histories of queer activism and experience in Minneapolis-St. Paul and surrounding areas. Similarly to Newton's work, *Queer Twin Cities* begins with an understanding of relationship between space, place, and identity, and challenges the notion of the Midwest as a wholly hostile place for LGBTQ communities. All three projects used oral history to examine the multifaceted identities of these diverse communities; to challenge or reify pre-existing discourses about these communities; and to illustrate the connections between sexuality, history, and place.

In examining research that has taken up the question of the history of 'lesbian history' as an object of inquiry, it is clear that the advent of lesbian-feminism not only motivated this research, but profoundly impacted the ways in which the 'lesbian' has been engaged with as a historical subject (Laurie, 283). With the arrival of lesbian-

feminism in the 70s and 80s, and the formation of politicized lesbian identity politics, the interest and investment in finding evidence or ‘traces’ of lesbians throughout history greatly increased. In the early 90s, scholars such as Lillian Faderman, Esther Newton, Elizabeth Kennedy, and Madeline Davis produced research exploring different U.S. based lesbian subcultures, identities, and practices in historical periods ranging from the 1930s to the 1980s (Faderman, 1991; Newton, 1993; Kennedy and Davis, 1993). During the past thirty years, grassroots organizations and scholars alike have used oral history interviews to document lesbian women’s experiences and the history of lesbian-feminist organizing in Canada (Chenier, 247). Lesbian history in Canada has become a vibrant field of research, generating scholarship such as: Becki Ross’ *The House that Jill Built*, a case-study of lesbian-feminist organizing during the 1970s and 80s in Toronto (1995); Elise Chenier’s examination of working-class butch and fem bar culture- also in Toronto- from 1955-1956 (1995; 2004); Julie Podmore’s study on the historical changes in lesbian ‘underground’ geographies in Montreal from the 1950s to 1990s (2006); and, more recently, Cameron Duder’s *Awfully Devoted Women*, which examines both the private relationships or “romantic friendships” between women in Canada from 1900-1950, and the experiencers of middle-class lesbian-identified women in the post-war period (2008). Specifically looking at local lesbian histories, Rachel Torrie’s thesis project explored the experiences of rural lesbians living in B.C. from 1950-1970 (2007), and Vanessa Cosco’s research examined experiences of identity formation, isolation, and secrecy in Vancouver from 1945-1969 (1997). This expanse of work was in many ways made possible due to the efforts of lesbians in the 1970s and 80s to ensure that lesbian lives were recognized as worthy of documenting and remembering.

The lesbian-feminist movements in the West ushered in unprecedented change in terms of greater visibility for lesbians; there was a proliferation of literature, public activism, expressions of pride in a lesbian identity, and creations of visible women’s communities. Even the ability to use the university as a site from which to explore these sub-cultural communities is still relatively novel, and also follows from this historical antecedent: “It is still a relatively recent opportunity for scholars to be able to research, write, and produce a history of queer sex and genders without the risk of academic sanction or public reprisal” (Boyd and Ramirez, 11). Beginning in the early 1970s, when the first women’s studies programs were initiated in the United States and Canada,

scholars from many disciplines and community activists alike worked to locate and preserve gay and lesbian, and eventually bisexual and transgender, history and experience. Arlene Stein notes:

An extraordinary outpouring of studies of lesbian/gay history traced the growth and formation of lesbian and gay community, explored the emergence of movements for gay self-determination, and made important contributions to understanding the development of a distinctive lesbian identity and culture [...] (Stein, 13).

## 1.4. Intergenerational Oral History

Although the academic tradition of oral history is both established and nuanced, there is a discernable lack of research on intergenerational oral history as an object of inquiry as well as intergenerational interviewing as a method. Angela Zusman's *Story Bridges: A Guide to Conducting Intergenerational Oral History Projects*- written in accessible language for a non-academic audience- provides a working model for conducting intergenerational oral history projects. In addressing the historical distance that often occurs between different generations of people Zusman states, "we start afresh with each generation instead of drawing upon the wisdom of our inheritance [...] Elders are left with attics full of stories [...] yet each generation has so much to offer the other" (12). Zusman argues throughout her text that oral history provides a pedagogical tool for community building which opens up the potential for seeing across the gulfs of difference that often prove to be alienating within communities. She also asserts that this work has benefits both to elders and to youth: elders are given space to reminisce and have their stories validated while youth can become more engaged in history and begin to see their own connections to it (25). Oral histories "bridge communities by bringing people together around a common theme;" it is through doing oral history, Zusman states, that "[...] we learn from each other; we come to respect our differences and find unexpected places of unity" (Zusman, 13).

Research into the field of oral history community-based research illustrates that there are a discernable lack of projects which explore the pedagogical characteristics and benefits of oral history and intergenerational dialogue. "Women's Lives, 1945-1995: Personal Narratives and the Pedagogy of Intergenerational Interviewing" by Doris

Friedensohn was one of the few examples of an oral history project that uses cross-generational interviewing to encourage women of a diversity of ages to come together across generational differences. Her project brought together students at Jersey State College with older female family members to encourage students to examine how each narrator's experience of womanhood had changed over the course of her life time and to find both commonalities and differences between their experiences and the narrators' (120). Angela La Porte's "Oral History as Intergenerational Dialogue in Art Education," focuses on research with school aged children, teenagers, adults and elders in Harlem, encouraging community art projects to facilitate intergenerational dialogue. La Porte contends that understanding and connecting with the past is essential for how one approaches the present; "for [youth] to have a sense of self, they must have a sense of what came before them [...] by talking with community members, [youth] can then learn to appreciate the richness of their neighborhoods" and communities (39). La Porte stresses how oral history as a methodology makes explicit the relationship between the past and the present, and can serve to dismantle divisions; "life experiences and ways of thinking and valuing may differ in many ways between generations, but when shared can foster insights into the[ir] historical and cultural contexts" (40, emphasis mine).

In the context of feminist research, oral history has been a useful tool for challenging the notion that women's lives, and particularly those lived out in the private sphere of the home and family, are not historically or politically significant. According to Chenier, "women often say, 'I don't have anything important to say' [...] People think of 'history' as important events, but history is the everyday" (Darch, 2012). A number of Friedensohn's narrators reflected that they were pleased with the significant changes they observed for women over the course of their lifetimes, whereas some lamented a nostalgic longing for the past. Friedensohn concluded that through her project narrators echoed a general sense of satisfaction with the process "and a belief [...] that the next generations achievements are also their own" (126). She contends that her students in this project began to use the past as a tool to understand inequalities and began to "[...] value their opportunities, and live differently" based on their reflections (126). This project illustrates how effective oral history generally, and intergenerational oral history specifically, can be in understanding how intimately connected the past and present



really are, and valuing the work of previous generations that precipitated positive changes for the next.

The following chapters will take up these theoretical ideas read in conjunction with interviewer's reflections to explore the experiences and possibilities of cross-generational oral history interviewing. Chapter 2 examines the pedagogical use of oral history as a method; outlines the methodological framework of this project; and provides the timeline for the project launch, planning, field work, and plans for dissemination. Chapter 3 engages with two central themes that arose in the assessment materials as discussed by interviewers: primarily, lesbian and queer identities and community spaces. The differences between lesbian feminist identities and communities in the 1970s and 1980s are examined and juxtaposed with what interviewers revealed about their own identities and communities, allowing for insight into some of the historical and generational differences between these cohorts. Through an analysis of interviewer reflections, Chapter 4 examines the effectiveness, impact, and limitations of intergenerational oral history interviewing for creating cross-generational connections and challenging generational divisions. The concluding chapter will summarize these findings and limitations, and also provide guidelines for how to initiate and coordinate community-based oral history projects.

As this research will illustrate, the interviewer's assessment materials provided insight into some of the issues and social underpinnings that both structure and stymie cross-generational interactions between lesbian/queer women. However, further research into the structural, discursive, and social issues that limit inter-and-cross-generational interaction and conversation is necessary to challenge these divisions on a larger scale. Intergenerational oral history is one way to contribute to a "queer culture-building project for the future," deconstructing the harmful legacies of homophobic stereotypes, and actively combatting the historical erasure of older generations (Marshall, 176). The lack of queer intergenerational mentoring relationships "represents a historical loss" which can be challenged by oral history and other forms of interaction that "[...] claim the possibility and importance of non-sexual intergenerational relationships" (176).

Divisions between different queer generations not only deprives youth of historical knowledge and mentorship but constitutes a form of forward-thinking myopia where older queer forms of identity, community building, and activism are deemed outdated and irrelevant in the present. Although oral history interviewing is a temporally limited encounter, it is a worthy and fruitful start which (re)engages forms of kinship building outside of a heteronormative framework: “[...] queer oral histories build a presence in the absence of queer intergenerationality [...] rebuilding activist efforts to forge intergenerational queer networks because it methodologically relies on intimate and personal processes of interaction, knowledge transfer, and trust” (Marshall, 177). Oral history interviewing is a unique method which requires the presence of people coming together to claim historical space; furthermore, it is not necessarily bound by disciplinary or even academic limits, allowing for a broad range of use as a historical method in many contexts. “Queer oral history as a method [privileges] the relational and personal over the official and hegemonic [...] *all oral history is a little queer* in the sense that it calls into question institutional knowledge by prioritizing people’s memories,” challenging what ‘counts’ as proper history (Marshall, 181, emphasis mine).

## Chapter 2.

### Methodology and Process

**Project Research Question:** To examine oral history interviewing as a pedagogical tool for prompting cross-generational engagement and broader historical understanding.

This project draws from a small sample of women living in Vancouver in the 1970s and 1980s whose oral history narratives reflect their own experiences as they intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality, and geographical location. In total, five women, ages 19-30, including me, worked as interviewers; fifteen women, all over the age of 55 shared their stories of lesbian experience in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s. The conclusions drawn from this project do not stand as representative of a lesbian history of Vancouver, but multiple and partial lesbian histories providing a glimpse into the subjective and affective worlds which were the experiences of women who self-identified as lesbians in Vancouver during this historical moment.

This research is situated within a lineage of feminist critiques of traditional or positivist approaches to research that tended to privilege maximizing the “[...] hierarchal distance between experimenter and research participants,” or, in this context, interviewer and narrator (Jayaratne and Stewart, 45). Measuring the particularities of the encounter between the interviewer and narrator is a difficult task, and there is no ideal method to fully capture how new forms of knowledge are gained or quantified. Feminist interventions into methodology have critiqued the notion that any object of inquiry can be wholly understood through research; that knowledges themselves like the people who espouse them, are always partial, contingent, and situated (Haraway, 350). I address this tension by ensuring that my methods for measuring the value of doing intergenerational oral history are flexible and that the conclusions I have drawn are

based on the personal and subjective responses of the interviewer's. Oral history interviewing is a collaborative, shared, and iterative process which is shaped by the exchanges between the narrator and interviewer; the product of this interaction is always shaped by both parties "[...] as the conversation flows back and forth" (Norkunas, 64). In this project, interviewers were not only co-creators of the interviews themselves but their responses and reflections on conducting intergenerational oral history provided the basis for my research: examining oral history as a method for intergenerational inquiry; exploring generational shifts between lesbian/queer women's lives in Vancouver; and questioning the structural underpinnings of queer intergenerational divisions. Interviewer's reflections and discussions of their participation provided the evidence for making my research claims, and as such, their insights into these experiences are central to this project. Taking a few steps back beyond the data itself, the following sub-sections will describe the process and timeline of the project, how the interviews were structured and planned, the collection of the data and mode of analysis, and finally, the plans for dissemination of the research.

## **2.1. Process**

### **2.1.1. Recruiting Volunteers**

Initial recruitment of volunteers occurred as part of a community-lead response to the 500<sup>th</sup> Issue of *Xtra! Magazine*, self-described as Canada's gay and lesbian newspaper which featured a timeline of 'gay and lesbian' activism in Vancouver since the 1970s. However, women's activism and lesbian activism more specifically was largely excluded from this timeline prompting critique from a number of lesbian and feminist community members. One local group that responded was Quirk-e, the Queer Imagining and Riting Kollektive for Elders, who compiled an extensive list of lesbian and women's activism and submitted it to *Xtra!*. This publication provoked a larger conversation around the exclusion of lesbians- particularly older lesbians who were active in the 1970s lesbian-feminist and women's liberation movement- within the broader LGBTQ\* community in Vancouver. Although Vancouver has an extensive and vibrant history of lesbian activism there has been no major oral history project

documenting the lesbian feminist stories from the 1970s and 1980s. This lack of recorded history certainly contributes to the lack of understanding younger queer generations have of this history. As Erin Flegg wrote in coverage of the *Xtra!* debacle in the *Vancouver Observer*: “Information about these groups and events is not readily available. A quick Google search won’t do the trick. So while it’s unsurprising that much of it gets left out, it also makes it all the more important to use these opportunities to bring overlooked histories to light” (Flegg, 2012). Although a Google search would certainly illicit a bevy of information on lesbian-feminist history, the details of Vancouver local lesbian history from the 70s and 80s are largely undocumented. Dr. Elise Chenier, my thesis supervisor, and I saw this conversation as an opportunity to gather women together to continue this important discussion and launch this oral history project. Conversations around lesbian exclusion worked as a catalyst for our November 25<sup>th</sup> 2012 public community meeting where we launched the project and invited community members to participate. The event was well attended, with at least sixty to seventy women of all ages crowding into a medium-sized room at SFU Harbour Centre overlooking Gastown. We lined the walls of the room with craft paper and as women filled the room they were given the opportunity to create a collaborative timeline, from 1960 to 2000, filling in their own landmark events from their own personal histories.

Dr. Chenier and I first opened up discussion around the *Xtra!* publication, setting the tone for a conversation around lesbian exclusion from the historical record, and the importance of remembering and archiving lesbian history. The three-hour event featured storytelling from many of the older cohort in attendance: participants- including Ellen Woodsworth, Margo Dunn, and Quirk-e members who had been active in the women’s and lesbian-feminist movements during the 70s and 80s- shared their experiences of participating in the Abortion Caravan in 1968, a five-day occupation of the *Georgia Straight* in response to ongoing issues of sexism in the newspaper, and holding some of the first workshops on lesbian-feminism at the Indo-Chinese Conference Women’s Conference in Vancouver in the early 70s (Darch, 2012). Additionally, participants brought with them ephemera from the 1970s and 80s including letters, flyers, and t-shirts emblazoned with lesbian iconography and slogans such as “Proud and Strong Lesbian Sisters Rise” (Darch, 2012).

During the event, Dr. Chenier and I addressed the importance of intergenerational collaboration within queer communities, calling upon the younger women present to participate as interviewers and the older women to participate as narrators, in a community-based oral history project. We discussed the issue of intergenerational division, noting that queer people have to work to create their own chosen families, and that queer youth do not often have access to role models in their communities. To recruit volunteers for this project, Dr. Chenier and I called on community members to participate in the project as narrators, interviewers, and/or as community advisory committee members respectively. Biographical information forms were passed around and volunteers wrote information about what kinds of activism they have been involved in, what they envisioned as the focus and scope of the project, and selected how and in what role(s) they would like to contribute.

The call for narrators was issued on the basis of having been involved in the lesbian political and cultural community in Vancouver in the 1970s and 1980s, being lesbian or queer identified, and being dedicated to having their stories preserved in the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony (A LOT). Narrators were self-selected and volunteered according to this criterion. Narrators were also encouraged to give other potential narrators my contact information (“snowball recruitment”) if they wished to take part in the project. All interviewers for this project were over the age of 19, identify within the spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities, and committed to the project for a minimum of six months. After the launch I compiled all the names of volunteers into a database, based on the role they were interested in, and began more detailed planning for the informed consent and donation forms as well as the oral history training workshops.

### **2.1.2. Project Set Up**

I was granted ethics approval by the Research Ethics Board at Simon Fraser University on January 18th, 2013. After the initial launch and assessment of the volunteer forms, Dr. Chenier and I held two full-day workshops on January 12th, and January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013 with volunteers who were interested in conducting oral history interviews. Both workshops were held at Britannia Community Centre on Commercial

Drive and were attended by fifteen women of various ages. As an established oral historian Dr. Chenier initiated a detailed lecture and discussion on oral history as a method, including information on key theories, texts, and scholars, as well as practical approaches to conducting interviews (see Appendix G). As we were all new to oral history interviewing Dr. Chenier also discussed important facets of interviewing to consider such as active listening, body language, and sensitivity to difficult topics, in addition to more concrete concerns such as position and framing of the narrator, lighting, sound, and how to set up equipment. Furthermore, in order to apply these concepts we held a number of practice interviews, pairing up and rotating the roles of narrator and interviewer for each participant to get a feel for the process of interviewing itself.

I explained to volunteers that for the purposes of my MA thesis work I would be working with the younger cohort of women, but that any volunteer regardless of age could conduct an interview which the project would support, and would be included in the A LOT archives. I also brought a proposed interview guide which each participant read and added their own contributions. Dr. Chenier and I expressed the importance of using the guide as a support during the interview not as a set list of mandatory questions, as oral history interviewing ideally will allow for digressions from a pre-determined narrative or lines of questioning. Volunteers agreed during these workshops that they would prefer that I pre-select narrators for them to interview, but we agreed as a group that after selection they were responsible for contacting and planning the details of setting up the interview on their own time and without my supervision. At the end of the workshops each participant was provided with a booklet of oral history readings, including Alessandro Portelli's "What Makes Oral History Different," and Susan Geiger's "Feminism and Oral History," a guide outlining the purpose and goals of the project, as well as a reading list of 1970s and 80s lesbian and feminist literature (Appendix G).

Many community members who attended the November launch had expressed interest in participating in a community advisory committee. After compiling the names of volunteers and contacting them, the first meeting was held on January 20th, 2013, and attended by five women. The advisory committee was comprised of a rotation of volunteers from the community who were able and interested in assisting with community outreach, and for generating feedback on the interview and project process.

The central goal behind working with an advisory committee of community members, and training a large group of volunteers in the principles of oral history was to ensure that the possibilities for interviewing extended beyond the purview of my MA thesis work. Thus, this project employs principles of participatory action research (PAR), a model which has been used by researchers across the social sciences to address hierarchies of power between researchers and participants through the “active co-construction of knowledge” (McIntyre, ix). PAR is structured around the ideology that participants have primacy in the research- as it is their knowledge and experience being shared- and that they should be involved and benefit from the structuring, gathering, and dissemination of the research. The advisory committee assisted in editing the interview guide, and offered to support and promote the project through additional preliminary community networking.

Although in these early stages of recruitment and training the project had just begun to form and would continue to evolve throughout 2013, the central objective of the project remained unchanged: to explore the value of oral history as a pedagogical tool for intergenerational engagement. After the oral history training workshops and compilation of all the names and information of narrators was completed, initial planning of the interviews commenced and spanned from January to February 2013. Using the feedback from the workshops and the first advisory meeting I compiled an interview guide and an equipment guide for interviewers which included basic information on how to structure oral history interviews. As is often the case with larger group projects which require a great deal of commitment and time, while the project progressed the amount of women who initially volunteered gradually decreased.

When the interviews commenced in February 2013, the group of interviewers, including the principal researcher, was at four: Erin Flegg (26), Naomi Moses (29), Candice Klein (27), and myself, Nadine Boulay (26). Eventually, a later recruit, Aliza Bosa (19), was added, bringing the total to five. The pre-interview planning process began with emailing interviewers the names and contact information of narrators who had already confirmed their interest in participating. Prior to passing on their contact information, I also provided each potential narrator with electronic copies of the consent and donation forms for the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony (A LOT) for their review



(Appendix C). Interviewers and narrators decided upon the date, time, and place of the interviews without my supervision. Allowing for all parties involved to arrange the interviews did involve a considerable amount of time, stretching the interview process from February to October 2013. However this change in the project timeline also provided all participants the flexibility to allow for each interview to take as much time as necessary, and to fit the interviews within their own schedule. While it was difficult to coordinate all the interviews, and be flexible to all the competing schedules of busy volunteers in addition to graduate student life, the experience I gained overseeing this project has been invaluable and provided insight into how to move forward with similar projects in the future.

### **2.1.3. Interviews**

In addition to organizing and coordinating the project, as principal researcher I also conducted interviews with narrators. After interviewers informed me that an interview had been scheduled I arranged a meeting before the interview to provide them with the video equipment, consent and donor forms, and the interview guide. Interviewers and narrators met up at a pre-arranged location of the narrator's choice- typically their home- and recorded the interview in either video or audio depending on the preference of the narrator. After each interview was completed I contacted both the narrator and interviewer to ensure that the experience was agreeable for both parties and to troubleshoot any issues that may have arisen. After each interview interviewers wrote personal reflections on their experience interviewing based on a series of prompts I provided (see Appendix D). These prompts were meant to assist the interviewer in reflecting on the experience of conducting an oral history interview as well as to assess and strengthen their own interview practice. Drawing from the personal narrative form of oral history interviewing I chose not to pre-emptively enforce a structure to the reflections that interviewer's produced. These reflections not only provided ongoing insight into the pedagogical and affective aspects of interviewing, but were structured to assist interviewers in refining their technique. The prompts were as follows:

- How did you feel going into the interview and why?
- Describe the setting of the interview? How did this affect the interview itself?

- What was interesting to you about the interview? What was challenging?
- Did the narrator ask any questions about you? If so, how did that feel?
- Describe your feelings during the course of the interview. Did you feel comfortable? Nervous? Excited?
- Did your emotions and comfort levels change throughout the interview? How so?
- Where there any difficult questions or topics that came up? How did you respond to that?
- How did listening to the narrator's story affect you? Did you find any parallels to your own experience? Conversely, what were the differences you noticed?
- If there is anything you could change for the next interview what would you do?
- Over all, what did you learn from conducting the interview?

Considering that the interviews took place over a span of nine months, and I did not oversee any interviews that I did not conduct directly, the ongoing reflection questions offered me some insight into each participant's practice and experience of interviewing. I designed these reflection questions to encourage interviewers to think about the logistical facets of oral history interviewing; to see what content or broader themes they found personally interesting; and to measure their emotional responses to oral history, as well how they conceptualized the historical period being discussed. These questions were designed to measure what themes interviewers either related to, or conversely found irrelative to their own identities and experiences, providing me a sense of analytical insight into the historical connections and divisions between these two generations.

#### **2.1.4. Data Collection and Analysis**

To assess if oral history is a useful pedagogical tool for intergenerational connection this project utilized a mixed methods approach drawing from both quantitative and qualitative methods in social science research. This approach was deployed in the form of reflections written throughout the duration of the project; an exit questionnaire which employed both qualitative and quantitative questions; and finally, semi-structured exit interviews. As many feminist scholars have argued, quantitative

methods have been deployed in ways contrary to feminist research goals, such as essentializing all women's experience as one and the same, or ignoring gender completely (Grady, 1981); operating under the guise of 'objectivity' and failing to critique hierarchal relations of power in the researcher-researched exchange (Bleiber, 1984; Harding, 1987); "improper interpretation and superficial nature of findings" (Jayaratne, 1983); simplifying complex emotional responses into units of data, and overgeneralizing findings beyond their scope (Jayaratne and Stewart, 44-45). In using a mixed-methods approach, also known as 'triangulation,' the goal was to counterbalance the weaknesses of one method with the strengths of another for a more holistic approach to research. This strategy:

[...] takes the form of promoting the value and appropriate use of both qualitative and quantitative methods as feminist research tools. The emphasis here is on using methods which can best answer particular research questions, but always using them in ways which are consistent with feminist goals and ideology (Jayaratne and Stewart, 47).

In October 2013 after the interview portion of the project was finalized, interviewers completed a questionnaire which was structured drawing from Jen Marchbank and Gail Letherby's use of mixed qualitative and quantitative feminist methods (see Appendix F). In addition to short answer questions and personal responses, the questionnaire included questions structured according to the Likert scale. The Likert or rating scale is often deployed in research questionnaires in psychology, using a question and corresponding rating scale to attempt to quantify changes in attitudes or feelings on a given subject. I used a five point scale to measure interviewer's attitudes for each question, with the additional option to state "not applicable." Rating scales generally allow for different degrees of opinion; however, they do only allow for a limited closed-ended answer and will always be interpreted differently by each interviewer. Understanding that using a purely quantitative approach to measure something as complex as increase in knowledge or changes in attitude provides a very limited response, there was additional space included on the forms for interviewers to write a full response or personal interpretation of the question.

The questionnaire was separated into two major sections: 1) knowledge and 2) method. Within each section the questions attempted to capture the interviewers

understanding of both lesbian history and oral history before and after their participation. In the first section 'knowledge' was divided into three categories: lesbian histories, identities, and activism and organizing. These broad categories were left undefined to allow for each interviewer to interpret based on their own experiences and level of knowledge. Interviewers were first asked why they wanted to take part in the project and what they wanted to learn, and were also given the option to respond in long answer form. Next, there was a series of questions using the Likert scale to assess interviewer's level of knowledge of lesbian history, lesbian identity, and lesbian activism and organizing in Vancouver during the 1970s and 80s, both before and after participating in the project. Options on the Likert-scale ranged from Very Low, Low, Average, High, and Very High. Below each scale there was space for interviewers to add their own comments which were read alongside the quantitative responses.

The second section of the questionnaire focused on oral history as a method and was structured to evaluate how effective interviewers considered oral history as a method for engaging with the past. Interviewers were asked to gauge their level of knowledge of oral history before participating; if they considered oral history to be easy to learn and accessible; if their knowledge of the lives of older lesbians in Vancouver has increased as a result of their participation; if oral history is an effective method for understanding the lives of older lesbians; and finally, if oral history is an effective method for intergenerational understanding. Options on the Likert-scale ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Again, beneath each rating scale interviewers had the opportunity to write their own long-answer responses. The final question aimed to assess the project as a whole and inquired if interviewers had suggestions for changes or improvements for this project were it to continue or expand. As this was a collaborative project, interviewers participated as co-creators in the research process. Their suggestions, critiques, and reflections provided the data for analyzing oral history as a pedagogical tool for intergenerational engagement, as well guidelines for conducting community based intergenerational oral history projects. For a summary of the qualitative responses see Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1. Questionnaire Data**

	Naomi M.	Candice K.	Erin F.	Aliza B.
<b><i>Knowledge Before</i></b>				
<b>History</b>	Low	Average	Low	Low
<b>Identity</b>	Low	Average	Low	Low
<b>Activism</b>	Low	Low	Very Low	Low
<b><i>Knowledge After</i></b>				
<b>History</b>	Average	High	Average	Average
<b>Identity</b>	Average	High	High	Average
<b>Activism</b>	Average	High	High	Average
<b><i>Did Project Meet Expectations?</i></b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b><i>Oral History Before</i></b>				
	Low	High	Average	Low
<b><i>Oral History After</i></b>				
<b>Increased Knowledge</b>	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree
<b>Accessible/Easy to learn</b>	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Effective</b>	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree

Finally, and read in conjunction with the questionnaires, interviewees participated in short exit interviews with me, the principal researcher. Exit interviews were semi-structured and developed to add breadth to the more linear questions posed in the questionnaire. Interviewees were asked what they learned throughout their participation; what key stories or narratives struck them as personally meaningful; how they named and understood their queer identity; how they conceived of their own oral history practice and how it evolved throughout participation; what value they recognized in queer intergenerational connection; and finally, what suggestions and critiques they had for improving or expanding grassroots oral history projects. All exit interviews were held between September and October 2013 and were video recorded. The general structure of the exit interviews were based around the following questions, but varied in their sequential order and focus (also, see Appendix E):

- Why did you decide to volunteer for this project?
- How do you identify in terms of sexuality and gender?

- Before you began work with this project, what did you want to learn about?
- Did you learn about this? Has your knowledge on \_\_\_\_\_ increased?
- Did working on this project make you think differently about your own identity?
- Have you ever used oral history before? How would you describe oral history as a method for learning about the past?
- Do you see there being an age-based division in the LGBTTTQ community? If yes, why do you think that is?
- What do you see as the benefits of intergenerational oral history and dialogue?
- Did you have any pre-conceived notions that were challenged? Reified?
- What recommendations would you have for this project and/or future oral history projects?

These questions were designed to measure and explore 1) what younger queer women knew about lesbian history in the 70s and 80s both prior and after participating, 2) how they identify in terms of sexuality and gender, 3) what they learned about this historical moment, and how it impacted their understanding of a (shared) queer history, and finally 4) the value, potentials, and limitations of oral history for cross-generational and broader historical understanding.

### **2.1.5. Analysis and Dissemination**

The data from the questionnaires and the exit interviews were analyzed in conjunction with the reflections that interviewers authored over the course of the project. An analysis of my observations combined with the exit interviews and reflections allowed me to explore the value of oral interviewing for better historical understanding, and as a way to facilitate cross-generational communication. To keep community members informed about the project and to allow for continued participation a website was launched as of November 1st, 2013 ([lesbiangenerations.com](http://lesbiangenerations.com)). This website is linked to the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony and includes information about the project, excerpts from interviews, as well as an interactive community map of lesbian activism and organizing in Vancouver. I serve as administrator of the website and community members may interact and add content as well as view portions of the interview material. Included in the concluding chapter of this thesis are my own reflections on conducting

and coordinating this project, which will ideally serve as a guide for other scholars and activists interested in coordinating other community-based intergenerational and collaborative oral history projects. These reflections and suggestions draw from the experiences of coordinating and participating in this project; the suggestions from the interviewees exit interviewers; and finally, the limitations and logistics of this research. It is my intention that with the website and guide in addition to the written thesis, the goals and dissemination of project will extend beyond the purview of my Master's degree and that my findings will open up new lines of engagement with intergenerational oral history interviewing and cross-generational research.

## Chapter 3.

### Lesbian and Queer Generations: Identity and Community

*“[W]hat it means to be a lesbian has changed so much in the last 50 years. It's crazy. Like what it meant for my aunt in the 90s was I think something totally different than the 80s and the 70s, because I think what I learned from these interviews was that lesbian- being a lesbian was like being a feminist. They were like one and the same (Candice Klein, 2-3).*

From February to October 2012, five queer women ages 19-29 conducted and recorded interviews with fifteen lesbian-identified women ranging in ages from 59-73. Conducting these interviews provided an opportunity to learn more about Vancouver in the 70s and 80s as it was experienced by a small sample of lesbian narrators. Rather than attempting to reconstruct a comprehensive representation of lesbian history in Vancouver during this time period, the objective of this pilot study was to explore the use of oral history storytelling as a pedagogical tool for younger queer women to engage with this particular historical moment, as told through the life stories of women who experienced it. Prior to participating, interviewees stated that their knowledge of 'lesbian history' as discussed in chapter 2, specifically Vancouver's lesbian history in the 1970s and 80s, ranged from mostly "low" to "average." However they all commented during their exit interviews that they had not experienced any significant cross-generational encounters with lesbians who came of age during this period in Vancouver. Although I was familiar with the politics of lesbian-feminism and some nuances of lesbian history in Canada I had also experienced a lack of intergenerational engagement with older lesbians. Through their interview reflections, exit interviews, and questionnaires, interviewees shared their experiences of conducting these cross-generational interviews. Drawing from these assessment materials this chapter explores the overarching themes which emerged from these reflections, specifically lesbian and queer identity formations and the production of community spaces. These reflections provide an understanding of



some of the key generational differences between lesbians in the 1970s and 80s and younger queer women today. Furthermore, this chapter questions some of the structural and theoretical underpinnings of different generational identity politics, and questions how discursive temporal changes may have impacted the production of lesbian/queer women's space in Vancouver.

As Candice Klein's opening quote suggests, rather than signifying a timeless, transhistorical entity, 'lesbian' identity has a history. It is a contested term; its meaning changes depending on time and place as well as who claims it and why. As Nan Alamilla Boyd argues, "[o]ne of the reasons why lesbian is contested, is that lesbian history, as a field, often confuses the identity, as a container, with the community or social form that engages that identity" (Boyd, 362). Klein- who worked as a transcriptionist for the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony prior to participating in this project- had the unique opportunity of being able to listen to lesbian oral histories from the 40s, 50s, and 60s; the 70s and 80s through this project; and having a lesbian aunt who came of age in the 90s. Having these perspectival glimpses across 50-years of lesbian history offered Klein an understanding of how 'lesbian' as a term changed, as well as how it was unique in the 70s and 80s, specifically in terms of how it was articulated in conjunction with feminist politics.

What is unique about the generational cohort of women from the 1970s and 80s who shared their oral histories for this project was their use of 'lesbian' to mark a self-selected and politicized identity. Although the term did not originate in the 70s, prior to the advent of feminist iterations of lesbianism 'lesbian' was largely seen as a highly negative term; it did not signify a political identity as it did during the feminist second-wave (Riley, 167). Although identity-based terms may appear to be stable referents "each [term] carries different histories and connotations- demonstrating the historical specificity of gay identities" (Cosco, 8). Lillian Faderman argues that the term has a long history of being deployed by anti-feminists to "scare women off" from participating in feminism; a by no means defunct tactic known as 'dyke baiting' (Faderman, 377). Although Faderman argues that this ploy was used throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, calling a woman who espoused feminist ideas a lesbian to somehow derail her politics

was also a “prominent tactic of anti-feminists and anti-lesbian feminists” in the late 60s and early 70s (Hesford, 231).

The fear surrounding lesbian as a term can be linked to its historical construction as a pathological illness; Victoria Hesford argues “lesbian feminism came into being partly as a response to that [dyke] baiting” and to the larger history which constructed lesbianism as a pathological illness, a “congenital defect,” and a form of deviance (Hesford, 231; Faderman, 314; Cosco, 13). The rise of sexology in the early twentieth century and the influence of psychoanalysis sought to name and categorize a myriad of sexual ‘dysfunctions,’ diagnosing lesbianism as a congenital condition or a result of delayed childhood development (Foucault, 21; Faderman, 314). Vanessa Cosco illustrates that the discourses surrounding lesbianism in the pre-lesbian feminist generation were also characteristic of mid-century post-WWII North American culture (Cosco, 9; Riley, 168). In her thesis project which explores lesbian identities in Vancouver from 1945-1969 Cosco shows that these discourses were often contradictory and underpinned by anxieties surrounding the ‘threat’ that sexual and gendered deviance was seen to pose to the maintenance of the status quo. The patriarchal heterosexual family structured by ‘natural’ gender-differentiated roles was upheld as the ultimate exemplar of normalcy and morality (Cosco, 11). Both ‘excessive’ forms of female sexuality and homosexuality were seen as social-ills, while lesbianism specifically- Cosco argues- was often completely unintelligible and unspoken. Cosco’s narrators described growing up with almost no intelligible models of lesbian identity and no words to name the feelings that they had for other women (Cosco, 21). This paradoxical discursive landscape was informed by the rise of scientific and medical ‘experts’ who “[...] medicalized, diagnosed, and prescribed psychiatric treatment and cures for the sick homosexual mind/body” (Cosco, 12).

These discourses are a part of the history of ‘lesbian history,’ as they have informed and shaped the ways that both the term itself and women who identify with it have understood and constructed their identities. As Boyd argues “Lesbian history includes all those involved in the discursive production of the category; [...] it includes all of the actors and institutions that participate in the production of meanings that contribute to the articulation and rearticulation of the concept lesbian, as it changes over

time and moves across space” (Boyd, 362). This was the historical context that women who came of age in the 70s and 80s grew up. Through interviewing, interviewers learned about these oppressive and overwhelmingly homophobic discourses surrounding homosexuality, providing a more personalized sense of the environment in which narrators came out. Naomi Moses stated that she was “surprised” by a narrator’s description of coming to terms with her sexuality “[...] as being a very deeply traumatic experience. Like her sexuality had been experienced as trauma over many years” (Moses, 5). This experience was not unique however as homosexuality was considered to be a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association until 1973; many women who grew up in these previous generations were subjected to the various form of ‘scientific’ methods to ‘cure’ their lesbianism (Faderman, 330; Gartrell, 611). Thus, public and prideful declarations of one’s lesbian or gay identity during the 70s and 80s was not only a radical and political act, it was a great risk.

‘Coming-out’ was invoked by Gay Liberationists during the late 60s and into the 70s as a strategy to counter these oppressive and pathologizing discourses surrounding homosexuality (Ross, 33). ‘Coming out’ was both personally and politically motivated; it created an alternative and positive intelligible form of homosexuality; promoted gay and lesbian identities as sources of pride; produced a claim to use as the basis to establish and build communities (Faderman, 385). “Coming out- perceived as the first necessary and prideful step towards liberation- was not just a linguistic act; it became a physical and psychic dramatization of one’s essential lesbianness” (Ross, 118). Naomi Moses described that through interviewing she acquired a broader historical sense of the importance of the coming out story; in reflection she remarked, “[a]nd in that sense, they did kind of pave the road for a time when we don't have to do that as often. I know less people still do. But some people have the luxury of not having to do that” (6). Moses stated that she recognized that the imperative for publicly claiming a lesbian identity was, during the 70s and 80s a matter of survival, of necessity, and of refusing to “be erased” (6).

While not all women who identified as lesbians in the 70s and 80s were feminists, the ways that ‘lesbian’ as an identity marker were taken up during this period was nevertheless impacted by the women’s movement (Riley, 167; Rudy, 195). The

1970s and 80s was a time of cultural and political change in North America, and saw the advent of the women's liberation movement, gay liberation movement, and other leftist and identity-based movements (Rudy, 197; Riley, 167). Among many other critiques and challenges to the status quo feminists challenged patriarchal forms of kinship by arguing that the nuclear-family with its gender-differentiated roles "are not naturally determined, but socially constructed," and that this constructed "female role" inherently exploits women and their unpaid labour within the home (Riley, 195). In many feminist circles, lesbianism was upheld as a form of subjectivity that disrupted this proscribed female role: "[...] there was a growing sentiment in feminist discourse that lesbianism, was the most legitimate way to act out [feminist] politics" (Riley, 195). As Candice Klein observed from her interviews during the 1970s and 80s lesbianism was largely articulated through feminist politics, culminating in what is known as lesbian-feminism. However, lesbian-feminism was not a monolithic or unified front; often described as the "daughter" of the women's movement and gay liberation, lesbian-feminists pushed against instances of homophobia and dyke-baiting in the women's movement, challenged the 'compulsory' institution of heterosexuality, and confronted issues of male privilege and sexism of some gay liberationists (Riley, 167; Creet, 183; Lehring, 326).

Although not all of the women that were interviewed for this project identified as lesbian-feminists or were politically active, they were influenced by the proliferation of new politics and new possibilities for living as a lesbian in ways which prior to this historical moment had been inconceivable. This generational cohort of women produced an unprecedented amount of literature and evidence for their existence, as well as a wealth of physical sites for creating lesbian public cultures (Millward, 544; Podmore, 597; Rudy, 196). Lesbian-feminism refers to a range of identity politics, theoretical positions, and cultural movement's part of the larger second wave of feminism in the 1970s and 1980s in the West. Although lesbians/gay women created community prior to this historical moment, they did so largely on the margins of society. Studies that have attempted to reconstruct mid-century North American public lesbian communities have often focused on working-class butch and femme cultures that used bar spaces to resist dominant discourses that defined them as aberrant (Cosco, 3). Although these butch/femme bar cultures existed throughout the 70s and 80s as well they are often characterised as indicative of an early generation of gay women in the 50s and 60s

(Ross 110, 114). As Flegg remarked: “[...] There was the mention of that like very 50s, like that dichotomy of butch femme as being very 50s (6). During the 1970s “new gender norms were devised through feminist practice” (Stein, 68). Often when attempts to define lesbian-feminist aesthetic are made it is described as ‘androgynous’, eschewing visible markers of femininity, and donning attire such as flannel, t-shirts, jeans and work boots (Stein, 81). Although this aesthetic is largely considered to be masculine, lesbian-feminists who embraced this aesthetic strongly rejected ‘butch’ identity and were often critical of this earlier generation of homosexual women (Ross, 115). As Klein noted of the ‘look’ that narrators described of the lesbians in the 1970s and 80s:

[...] I think it was definitely more on the masculine side of things, but yeah like so mostly just like shirts and jeans and nothing very professional looking [...] There was no real specific like gender presentation. Like definitely if I ever used the term like any kind of butch, like that was hot button and they were just like ‘No, no!’ And I was like, ‘Whoa, crazy!’ Like because just the generation before was still very butch/femme, and it was crazy how much they rejected it, they were like, ‘No, you can’t use that term’ (Klein, 5)

As a movement and a burgeoning identity politic, lesbian-feminism emerged within the larger milieu of social and identity-centered movements. Lesbian-feminists heralded lesbian identity as a healthy and positive alternative to heterosexuality as well as a legitimate and radical political position, imagining and producing a proliferation of physical sites to create community (Riley, 167; Ellis and Peel, 198; Millward, 544). The women who were interviewed for this project all contributed to or interacted within the developing lesbian communities in Vancouver and around the Lower Mainland at different points during the 1970s and 80s. As Liz Millward describes in “Making a Scene: struggles over lesbian placemaking in Anglophone Canada, 1964-1984,” beginning in the early 60s lesbians began to create “[...] a loose network of different types of space in which women could situate themselves as part of a lesbian scene” (553). The impact of various social movements in conjunction with liberalization of licensing laws of public establishments as well as changes to the Criminal Code in 1969 which decriminalized homosexuality opened up more physical and commercial spaces to women (556). During the 1970s and 80s there was also an increased availability of government grants and federal funding which helped support many new community

initiatives and women's grassroots organizing (Rebick, 19). These initiatives would no longer be possible even a decade later with the advent of a decades-long "[...] backlash against feminism and the funding cuts to women's groups" in the late 80s and early 90s (Rebick, 254). After hearing about these forms of funding and support, Klein suggested that these opportunities would not be possible even now in 2014. These observations challenged her previously held perception of what it meant to be a lesbian in the past:

[...] just learning that there were programs. Like there were government ran programs for gay women and for feminists which [...] contradicts what you learn about what it means to be a gay woman in Canada. People are like 'rights were hard to come by,' but at the same time you still have the government in the 1970s handing out money to these like organizations [...] But just showing that maybe, you know, we weren't as uptight, or maybe it wasn't as much of a struggle in certain eras as we think. And that just because the years have progressed we think that we're progressive, but I don't think that that's true. It just shows that it's circular, that you can be open and then you know back [...] I think it just showed that like progression is quite circular (Klein, 4).

The "wealth of physical sites" produced by lesbians during the 70s and 80s was "pivotal to the creation of lesbian subjectivity" during this time period, offering spaces for women to connect with and meet one another (Millward, 544). These sites included but were not limited to: bars, cafes and restaurants, collective houses, women's centers, lesbian drop-in nights, health clinics, workshops, conferences, lesbian rap groups, dances, and fundraisers (Millward, 554; Riley, 167; Ross, 113). There was a rapid growth in women's services, transition homes, women-owned businesses, printing presses, social and spiritual organizations, as well as Women's Studies programs which were first initiated in the early 1970s. While "not all these establishments were peopled exclusively by lesbians [...] a definable [acceptance] and perhaps even valorization of lesbians circulated" (Rudy, 196). Additionally the advent of lesbian literature, newsletters, and public emanations of lesbian feminist discourse throughout North America allowed women to situate themselves within an "imagined" community across the vast expanse of Canada (Millward, 555; Anderson, 6-7). Lesbian and feminist newsletters were produced and circulated and used as outreach materials, creating informal networks of women in both rural and urban places across the country.

Although lesbian placemaking existed before this historical moment, public lesbian spaces became more possible than before and flourished in cities throughout Canada during the 1970s and 1980s (Millward, 554; Podmore, 597). The production of a wide range of lesbian places- incorporating a sense of both the “material and the mental”- offered physical sites for lesbian communities to emerge. Although community is an ambiguous term at best, it often refers to a sense of connectivity to others or a “sense of shared interest;” it can be imagined or named, material or discursive (Lo and Healy, 32-33). Research indicates that during the 1970s and 80s lesbians in major cities across Canada and the U.S. established enclaves and a system of public and private networks in “diverse, inner-city neighborhoods,” often alongside other ‘counter-culture movements’, and established many women-only commercial and private spaces (Podmore, 596, 612, 620). From her perspective, Flegg described these communities as smaller and insular, and often separate from men’s communities:

[...] Different people said different things about what kind of communities they interacted with. There wasn't a lot of interaction with men's communities. But I think also that was the time, and there was a certain level of distrust [...] Even just among like white lesbian women and white gay men [...] but the communities were small. And tight knit to a certain extent sounds a bit mistrustful, and rightly so, but mistrustful (Flegg, 4-5).

Historically, “[...] the concept of an imagined community [appears] to be a common reference for gay and lesbian populations” (Lo and Healy, 33; Anderson, 6-7). Klein observed this in her responses saying that she found narrators to describe ‘lesbian community’ as they experienced in the 70s and 80s as an “emotional and mental community” or “hub” which was widely dispersed throughout the city of Vancouver and on the surrounding islands (Klein, 3).

Well I thought the history of Vancouver like civil history is really interesting to me. I really wanted to know how gay women fit in the landscape of the city, you know geographically. Like where, if there was an actually, physical community, or if it was like pretty typical it seems with like the lesbian community is that there isn't really like a- I thought maybe Commercial Drive? I thought the women would be saying ‘Commercial Drive, Commercial Drive,’ but it was interesting to learn that it was quite spread out all over the city. That there wasn't really a hub, it was like there was an emotional, mental hub, but not so much physical space. And I think that was interesting, I wanted to see if it, you know, if there was a physical space but it didn't seem like there was [...] I was happy

to learn about- just a lot of them were talking about the Gulf Islands. That you know, I've always fond those places to be kind of like a magical space, and it was good to hear that yeah, it was kind of like an epicenter of conferences and like, hang outs. Lots of time on Saturna I learned, so Saturna and Galliano (Klein, 3-4).

As scholarly studies, interviewer reflections, as well as anecdotal experience of living Vancouver illustrate, there are spaces in Vancouver which tend to be associated with and populated by larger contingents of lesbian/queer women (Lo and Healy, 34). Although a few of the narrators in this project lived in the area around the West end and Kitsilano, the majority of both the narrators and the younger interviewers including myself live in East Vancouver and particularly on the Commercial Drive strip, which was the site of many lesbian collectives, dances, cafes, and organizations throughout the 70s and 80s. Studies into sexual geographies in cities such as Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver have shown that this is common; lesbian geographies are often “territorially based and involved territorial strategies at the urban scale;” lesbian enclaves tend to be “neighborhood based,” involve “fluid, informal networks,” private and public sites, and are both “quasi-public” and underground (Podmore, 596; Lo and Healy, 34-35). Interviewer Erin Flegg who lives on ‘the Drive’ as it is colloquially known stated that ‘East Van’ is the central site of the majority of her queer community. Flegg remarked that she learned from the interviews she conducted that there is a history of East Vancouver and the Drive being associated with lesbian/queer women’s cultures (Lo and Healy, 30):

Flegg: Well not to put myself right in the middle of a stereotype, East Van really has been the main site of those [community] things in terms of like social events, and a lot of it has been social events. That's actually one thing that I found is that the social and political tends to overlap in the queer community in Vancouver [...] And I think in a lot of cases it still was geographically similar. Like a lot of the community [in the 70s and 80s] was East Van, which is also interesting in as much as there's that thread that connects us, it still looks very different than it does today, which was cool to find out about (Flegg, 1; 4).

Aliza Bosa remarked that she enjoyed the opportunity to explore this now absent past, the “culture, parties, events, [and] collectives” that emerged in a different historical moment and in her city, and how those spaces have changed. “I wanted to hear about the collectives *that weren't here anymore that, you know, they just moved on*” (Bosa, 7, emphasis mine):



Bosa: Well [conducting the interview] made me think a lot about how [the community] evolved [...] how it changed. And just like thinking about, I think one of the things I think about a lot is those underground spaces that were torn down, or not there anymore. Or you know, activism spaces and you know underground lesbian clubs. I've always been really interested in seeing pictures or you know, understanding a little bit more about that. And I got to look into that a little bit from somebody else's perspective, who's been there (Bosa, 8)

As Flegg, Bosa, and Klein all observed this community 'looks very different' from today; the collectives, activist spaces, and underground clubs that lesbian's built up in the 70s and 80s are no longer present. Although lesbians in the 70s and 80s and queer women living in Vancouver in 2014 may be connected through shared geographical space, these communities are dissimilar both in terms of the language used to discuss identities as well as what tangible community spaces exist. All of the interviewers including myself were involved in what we understood to be a 'queer community' in Vancouver. Similarly to Julie Podmore's discussion of lesbian enclaves, these forms of communities that we participate in are both private and public, involving kinship networks and friend groups, as well as organizing and participating in queer and LGBTQ-associated events, organizations, workshops, and social spaces.

Bosa- the youngest interviewer at age 19- was involved with many queer youth groups across the Lower Mainland, including *Qmunity's* Gab Youth, Fraser Valley and Surrey Youth, in addition to the *Queer Film Festival* and *Camp Out* (Bosa, 3-4). Moses was one of the founders of a non-profit called *Friends Help Friends*, which raises money for "queer women and trans people and their friends in case of health crisis," and volunteers with a women's coming-out group run through *Qmunity*, an LGBTQ resource centre in the West End of Vancouver (1-2). Moses also stated that she is active in more recreational ways, playing queer softball and attending drag events. Erin Flegg also described her community in terms of both interpersonal connections, as well as social and political events:

That's actually one thing that I found is that the social and political tends to overlap in the queer community in Vancouver. You know we've talked about dance parties, or shows, or events, you know, drag shows are a huge thing right? And those sorts of conversations overlap. Like going out and having fun, the celebrating of identity[at]the

Cobalt and community spaces on the Drive and poetry readings, events, things like that [where] those kinds of identities are celebrated” (Flegg, 1)

Klein remarked that she does not see the ‘queer community’ as “[...] so many little small groups and it's not necessarily one big group” (7). Although she is only 27, Klein is the oldest in her group of friends and stated that she felt that a lot of ‘queer’ events- such as the *Man-Up* drag king scene at the Cobalt Hotel- cater to a very young crowd. “And if it is one big group I usually find it's like much younger people. And I just can't really relate to. And maybe it's like in some ways a little bit difficult to be out in certain ways I guess” (Klein, 6-7). Based on my own experience I concur with Flegg's observations that the social and political do tend to overlap in Vancouver's queer community spaces, as well as Klein's remarks that the ‘community’ is not one big group, but many different groups, identities, and networks spread across the city. I am also a part of the *Man-Up* scene, which is a local queer variety show that features drag kings, burlesque, and genderqueer performances at a monthly event at the Cobalt Hotel on Main Street. Although *Man-Up* welcomes queers of all genders and celebrates a diversity of gender performance, it is centered in East Van and seems to be one of the few events that caters largely to queer women. I also have a small group of friends and who all tend to participate in similar events: poetry readings, social-justice workshops, and social events; all these aforementioned events are largely social and happen monthly or not on a regular basis. There are consistent opportunities for participating in workshops, organizations, and queer social spaces which bring together a myriad of identifiable anti-oppressive queer politics; there are however few consistent spaces which either name themselves as ‘lesbian’ and ‘feminist,’ or cater specifically to queer women.

During the interviews I conducted with older lesbians I was fascinated to hear about the production of lesbian cultural sites, the women's dances, the grassroots political organizing, the networks of living and working collectively. In hearing about how many lesbian and women's spaces existed in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s and reflection on their absence in our contemporary milieu, it was impossible not to wonder what happened to these spaces, and why? When “public visibility” of the ‘LGBTQ community’ is in many ways mainstream in large urban North American spaces, why are there less ‘lesbian’ or ‘women's’ spaces? (Podmore, 597). After reflecting on the

different lesbian spaces that women produced in the 1970s and 80s and their absence in the community now, I asked Bosa why she thought these spaces might have disappeared:

Bosa: [...] I don't know too much about that because I haven't really researched too much about the spaces. But if I were to just guess I would say there would probably be a lot of push back from men. From gay men maybe? Not just cis-gendered heterosexual men. [The narrator] did talk a little bit about that there was some you know, what do you call those things? There was a little bit of conflict between gay men and lesbian women sometimes? I also think that those spaces have changed a lot because of our idea of what gender is now. I know it's a lot different than what it was back then, right? And um those things about how just- wait let me think- trans rights I think is a huge part of it right? And I don't know how accepting these lesbian communities were of trans women and I think that that's a big influence on you know- as well as the word or the definition of lesbian I think has evolved. So just then just like the definition of gender and sexuality has evolved. It's not just gay and lesbian anymore, right? So definitely um changes of labels, changes of - or more looking deeper into like those identities, I think that that's what's probably a possible factor in why there isn't many lesbian communities anymore, or lesbian spaces. Lesbian only spaces (Bosa, 10)

As Bosa's response points to, scholars suggest that these changes are impacted by structural and discursive changes to the queer community in the past twenty to thirty years. Jenny Lo and Theresa Healy argue in their article "Flagrantly Flaunting It: Contesting Perceptions of Locational Identity Among Urban Vancouver Lesbians" that lesbian-specific access to space is impacted by gendered economic disparities as well as different needs, resources, and ideologies of space (30-35). In reflecting on the disappearance of these many lesbian/women's spaces Candice Klein echoed this argument:

[W]ith gay landscape and lesbian landscapes there isn't a physical space. For gay men there is. For gay men and that's the thing. And that's kind of where feminist theory comes in, you know men can occupy space and are expected to occupy space. Whereas women are supposed to hold tightly and take up as little space as possible. And so I wonder if that's maybe part of it, why there isn't such a lesbian space because we still live in a patriarchy where we can't really take up space. It's not easy and there's so many other things happening that people don't have the energy to make that the focus" (Klein, 10).

As Klein reminds us these spaces that women produced in Vancouver were not only lesbian, but were informed by a rise in feminist-centered politics. Julie Podmore suggests that the decline in lesbian space and the ways in which spaces were produced mirror changes in identity politics throughout the late 80s and 90s (614). During the 1990s, queer politics and theoretical impulses brought the discursive “diversification” and “unification” of ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’ under the umbrella LGB and then LGBT or queer (Podmore, 598; Ellis and Peel, 199). In the twenty years since there has also been a growth in the queer “consumer market”; particularly in large urban spaces ‘LGBTQ’ community resources and centers, businesses, bars, and large-scale events like Pride have become not only common and public, but more socially accepted (Podmore, 598, 600). Although these particular spaces are now commonplace, Liz Millward reminds us that the public spaces that house contemporary LGBTQ-community events and organizations have historical antecedents, and that lesbian forms of organizing during the 70s and 80s differ from these current forms. “Now commonly made up of commercial clubs/bars and support/information groups that are sometimes run from commercial spaces, [...] the [lesbian] ‘scene’ has come to be strongly associated with an urban milieu. However, each of these now-standard components once had to be *imagined, created from scratch, and sustained*” (553, emphasis mine).

This exploration of generational community spaces and identity politics is not meant to posit one identity, iteration of community, or historical period as ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than the other. Nor am I suggesting that lesbian or feminist politics should be idealised or are beyond reproach. Certain strands of lesbian-feminist politics have been rightfully problematized for lacking an analysis of race and white privilege; for excluding and marginalizing the voices of transpeople; for suggesting that being a woman necessarily connects all women to a shared experience; and for arguing that ‘womanhood’ is necessarily contingent upon biology (Rudy, 200; Millward, 556). Furthermore, the ‘queer’ turn in the early 1990s in both theory and activism has undoubtedly opened up epistemological space for a range of queer identities and intellectual forms. Queer theories and postmodern modes of analysis from Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality: Volume I* (1978), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (both 1990) and scholarship that followed questioned the “normalizing implications of dominant narratives around desire, pleasure, and identity;” historicized

and critiqued transhistorical notions of sex, gender, and sexuality; and fuelled the “radically anti-identitarian politics of queer activism” in the early 1990s (Winnubst, 136-137).

My generation grew up within this context of queering notions of identity, which questioned the stability of normative constructions such as gender, sex, and sexuality. Indeed, my critique of generational linearity and temporality can be traced to contemporary queer theoretical debates which argue that social norms- such as capitalism, whiteness, heterosexuality, and nationalism- are structured by a forward-thinking temporality which “orients us always and only towards the future” (Winnubst, 137). However, through reflecting on the changes to lesbian/queer identities and spaces it is relevant to question why 1970s and 80s forms of lesbian placemaking that narrators described in their interviews are no longer present, and what does ‘queer’ have to do with it?

*“[T]o be a lesbian, does that mean to be queer? Is queer different?”  
(Klein, 2-3)*

The different vocabulary around sexuality and gender is an obvious marker of historical change and belonging to a specific generational cohort. Klein observed that the terms used to name sexuality seem to “[...] change into something totally different every decade,” with the current vocabulary being, as she described, “ultra-inclusive.” But what does queer signify for younger participants? And how do they understand it as different from ‘lesbian’? This section will take up these questions through an exploration of how all five younger interviewees reflected on the terms they use to name their own identities. Based on the initial call for volunteers it was understood that all participants identified within the spectrum of LGBTQ; however during the exit interviews each interviewer delved more deeply into their own identity politics. These discussions surrounding the ways in which these women from within my own generational cohort take up certain terms illustrate some of the changes in queer identities over time. I first asked each interviewer how they identify themselves in terms of their sexuality and gender, how they understand these terms, and to also discuss some of the changes and iterations of these terms over their lifetime.

Naomi Moses stated that she found the term lesbian to fit her identity in a political sense, but that she found the term limited in fully encapsulating her sexual and personal identity which she described as “much more fluid”: “And I am less concerned with defining myself in a personal, sexual context, than I am with defining myself politically. So when it comes to a political definition of self I'm quite comfortable with queer. I accept lesbian as it's applied to me. I rarely apply it to myself just because I think it's a bit limited” (Moses, 1-2). In creating a historical trajectory of coming to name herself as queer, she described it as a process of thinking through not only her sexuality, but how sexuality connected to her political positionality eventually moving from bisexual which she found limiting, to queer, as a “nice umbrella term”:

Moses: I think I primarily identify as queer. I'm comfortable with using the word lesbian in a kind of political context. I consider it more a word that applies to my political identity, than my personal, sexual identity, which I think is much more, much broader, much more fluid. [...] And where it came from? I mean it came from a long process of thinking about my own sexual identity and then also thinking about how- what the political implications of that were. And I think I started out when I was younger by thinking of myself as being bisexual, which after a while I found very limiting, and just not very descriptive of my life, or my feelings, or even my political identity, and then clear once I became comfortable with using that word [queer], seemed like it was a good fit (Moses, 1-2)

Erin Flegg stated that she does use 'bisexual' to describe herself, but also prefers the term queer. Flegg described her personal identity politic as having been shaped and nurtured by feeling supported and welcomed by networks she has made in queer community spaces:

Well I identify as queer typically, bisexual if pressed I suppose. I didn't really come out until [...] it was sort of a slow process. [...] I met a couple people here that were really supportive of that confusing, exploratory stage where you don't really know what to say, or how to say it, or where you belong. [...] I think I was very lucky to meet a few people in particular who were very warm and welcoming community that kind of allowed me a lot of space to do that and kind of freed me from a lot of the judgement that I was concerned about (Flegg, 1).

Candice Klein who also used the term queer insisted that she preferred not to name her identity, but that she “just dates people.” Klein charted her own history as one of consistent resistance to being labelled according to her sexuality or by the gender of

her partners. When describing an encounter where a label was demanded of her, Klein resisted the imperative to name her identity:

I would say I don't really have an identity for it, like I'm not straight, I'm not gay, I'm not- I don't know I guess I consider myself queer. That would probably be the closest thing [...] when I first started dating women after high school I remember like my parents, like my friends parents being like, 'So, you're gay?' And like 'No, I'm not gay.' And they're like, 'but you're dating a woman,' and I was like, 'so?' Or like, you know, then I had a boyfriend after and they were like, 'So, you're straight again?' And I'm like 'I'm not straight, I'm nothing' and people are like 'Ah! You need to be something!' Like, 'No, I don't' [laughs]" (Klein, 1-2).

Growing up in a small rural area, Klein described that the atmosphere around queerness as not supportive, but that with her family it was a non-issue: "[T]he people around me, yeah, it was super I guess negative. But within my own family I didn't even realize that those terms existed" (2). Growing up with a lesbian aunt Klein was exposed to a glimpse of lesbian community in the 1990s. "And I went to a ton of like lesbian-feminist like rallies and stuff with them and like cafes and I didn't even really realize that there was a term lesbian. I just thought, I just knew that my aunty had a girlfriend, and people were like trying to tell me like she's a lesbian, and I was like, 'I don't even know what that means'" (2).

Aliza Bosa's responses also suggested a resistance to stable categories of identity as she uses the terms queer, lesbian, and polysexual to describe and name her sexuality and gender. Although comfortable with the term lesbian, similarly to Moses, Bosa stated that it suggests to her a limitation or assumption of the gender you are attracted to. She prefers the term polysexual to describe an attraction to 'queer people' and queer genders stating "I am attracted to queer people regardless of gender," including genderqueer and transgender people (Bosa, 4). Finally, Bosa's response suggests that not only does she use these terms interchangeably, but that her use of these terms are contingent upon space and audience. Bosa uses the term polysexual with her intimate sphere of friends who understand the implications of the term and to who it refers, whereas outside of this more intimate sphere she uses the more well-known term lesbian.

So, I came out as a lesbian when I was 12. When I came out it's just like, I was out. There was no like going back in the closet; there was no like trying to hide it. It was just I came out. I was out. And I identified as a lesbian for a really long time. I still do. Although I most- or some of my friends who understand what polysexual means understand that that's also part of my identity because I don't want- I don't think that my identity is limiting as the word lesbian is pretty limiting. And so for me the way I identify as polysexual, it's I like queer people (Bosa, 4).

My own identity and the many iterations it has taken throughout my life echoes many of the comments by Moses, Klein, Flegg, and Bosa. I currently use both the terms lesbian and queer when describing my sexuality- and at times my gender- and even to signify how I participate in community spaces. Throughout my teenage years I identified as bisexual, but came to recognize that rather than being a genuine desire, I dated men because it had been presented to me as the default. As I became immersed in feminism, lesbian history, and queer theory, I felt a kinship with all three of these terms. I began to love the word lesbian; the history it held, and the discomfort it seemed to illicit in other people, but I personally do not see it as contradicting queer as an identity marker either. I enjoy the ambiguity that queer can signify, particularly around performative acts which challenge binary notions of gender, and how it can be used to question and disrupt norms. However, I understand 'lesbian' to speak to a politicized and collective feminist subjectivity which I prioritize over any individual or personal sense of identity.

While each interviewer connected to some degree with the term lesbian or with women-centered sexuality more generally, from these responses it is evident that currently 'queer' has a wider application than 'lesbian'. The application of the term queer is not localized to Vancouver, but is indicative of the post-90s North American historical context. The proliferation of sexual and particularly gender-based terminology and the use of multiple terms interchangeably to describe different facets of identity is characteristic of the generations which proceeded lesbian-feminism. Queer has been theoretically deployed to challenge "[s]eemingly fixed attributes of the self, such as sexuality and gender [...] re-imagined as social constructs rather than biological certainties, and their contingent appearances and interconnection taken as a matter of analysis and investigation" (Brown and Nash, 5). It is taken up to signify ambiguity and



fluidity of gender and sexuality and is now often used to as an umbrella term for the 'LGBTQ-community'.

Despite the convenience of queer to denote a wide range of ideas, the ambiguity which it suggests can mask internal hierarchies and exclusions: "[...] the term queer can at times be used in such a way as to imply the existence of some sort of queer solidarity [...] the use of queer as an umbrella term can [...] have the effect of (mis)representing us as one big happy (queer) family" (Sullivan, 45). However, transgender people, people of colour, women, seniors, and economically disadvantaged queer people have less access to privileges like public and commercial community spaces and resources. While queer theoretical challenges to binary notions of gender have made space to explore the geographies of people whose identifies fall outside of the gender binary, such as transgender and genderqueer people, "[...] queer commercial territories are produced through gender and other asymmetries that challenge lesbian visibility" (Browne et. al, 573; Podmore, 598). Furthermore, "Queer communities are [seemingly] less dependent upon mechanisms that police membership, less dependent on similar identifications and identities. In the new queer world, it is expected that people will have multiple and often conflicting identities" (Rudy, 216).

Erin Flegg noted that one narrator described the lesbian community in the 1970s and 80s as being fractured by identity politics, where different people used "[...] their own identifiers to cordon themselves off [saying], 'I am this thing and I am this thing and I am not this thing'" (3). Flegg remarked that although she recognizes that identity politics are still a central facet of queer community and culture in Vancouver she found this phenomenon of adhering to identity-based silos "completely counter to [her] own experience." She found that if anything, identity politics have become more central to the ways in which the queer communities are structured, as more identities, experiences, and terms have become intelligible and expanded.

Flegg: [...] But identity politics, in my experience, especially here, especially among the queer community, is huge. Especially the idea of creating identifiers for ourselves and creating categories, and using those as points of connection rather than points of segregation. Using them as different ways to find commonalities with different people and the idea that you can have multiple identities and have multiple identifiers, and those things can be used to connect with other people and to self-define

and to find ways of effectively presenting yourself [...] So to me those things are still huge, and it's just interesting to hear her [the narrator] say that was a problem, that was something that kept people apart, because now I see that as something that brings people together (Flegg, 3).

Since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the growth and proliferation of visible sexual minority communities and politics LGBTQ people have been “heavily invested in debating [the] consequences” of identity politics and their meanings” (Stein, 5). This discursive change mirrors shifts in community structuring; although gendered ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ enclaves and neighborhoods still exist in Vancouver, the sense of separation is less obvious than it was in the 1970s and 80s (Lo and Healy, 29-30). As Rudy argues, from a contemporary standpoint single-gendered space may appear to be retrograde and exclusionary. Nevertheless, for women in the 1970s and 80s claiming and producing physical sites that were lesbian, feminist, and woman-centered was crucial to the maintenance of lesbian subjectivity and, more importantly, was unprecedented in a public milieu (Millward, 557). Lesbian and women-only spaces during the 1970s and 80s were a necessary way of claiming space in a way that was unique and characterized a historical moment of “rare control that these women had over commercialized, ‘sexualized’ space” (Podmore, 612). Through oral history interviewing, it is possible to recognize not only the importance of creating these lesbian and feminist scenes and ideas, but to understand the historical context within which they arose:

Moses: I really found that I am fortunate in the sense that I rarely need to defend or even precisely describe what my sexuality is to anyone [...] And so I think that because, just because we're at a time now where people are more able to define their sexuality in other ways, or choose to leave it sort of undefined, I haven't had to sort of stake out a political identity the way some of the narrators did [...] But it's caused me to feel like that is an advantage to not have to say, you know, I'm a lesbian because I have to assert my political identity or else I will be erased. And you know, to wave my flag all day long, perfectly happy to wave the flag whenever it's necessary, but I don't have to do that a lot of the time. I can be privately exactly who I am, and not be worried about that. So that I feel really good about doing that now. I feel more confident about doing it now (Moses, 6).

As other studies have shown, this production of lesbian-feminist cultures was mirrored in other major cities across North America (Podmore, 597; Millward, 564; Riley, 167). Drawing from research into gay and lesbian geographies such as A. M.

Bouthillette's 1997 study on queer and gendered housing in Vancouver, during the 1970s and 80s lesbians across Canada "established their territorial enclave in a diverse, inner-city neighborhood [East Vancouver/Commercial Drive] where counter-culture movements and 'marginal' forms of gentrification by a diversity of social groups thrived and expanded" (Podmore, 620). As Klein observed from conducting these interviews on the 70s and 80s:

Back then [lesbian community] was everywhere, like it was just basically where there was cheaper housing, because you know a lot of lesbian women didn't want to have like typical straight jobs, or they couldn't necessarily get those kind[s] of jobs. You know more like androgynous looking women and stuff, and they wanted to be involved in the feminist scene (Klein, 3).

This was a unique historical moment where women both initiated and controlled the creation of public spaces which often centered on a collective ethics of supporting other women through a myriad of material spaces:

[...] the alternative institutions founded by early radical feminists-including rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, bookstores, newspapers, publishing and recording companies, recovery groups, support groups concerned with health and identity issues, spirituality groups, restaurants and coffeehouses, and other women-owned businesses-[had] increasingly come to be driven by the commitment of lesbians and women in the process of coming out (Taylor and Rupp, 38).

However, as interviewers observed these lesbian and feminist scenes are now largely absent. Scholarship focusing on the geographies of lesbian communities suggests that these changes are not limited to Vancouver. Liz Millward argues that changes to lesbian spaces in Canada began in the 1980s with a "[...] generalized shift towards an emphasis on cultural events and academic discussions of sexuality, and away from the initial emphasis on simply creating places to meet" (Millward, 556). In her research into rise and decline of the lesbian bar scene in Montreal from the 1950s to the early 2000s, Julie Podmore argues that this shift also coincides with both the discursive move from 'gay' and 'lesbian' to 'LGBTQ' and 'queer', as well as a rise in queer public cultures and consumer markets. Podmore describes the 1980s in Montreal as the "golden age of lesbian public visibility at the urban scale, a decade during which lesbians created and made use of a 'visible' concentration of bars, restaurants, bookstores and

commercial spaces” in one district (Podmore, 597). Podmore’s findings suggest that “contemporary lesbian visibility at the urban scale may have been undermined by an increased identification with the ‘queer’ forms of community;” she argues that these “[...] queer commercial territories are produced through gender and other asymmetries that challenge lesbian visibility” (Podmore, 595; 600). Podmore also argues that with the shift to queer identities younger women in the 1990s began to reject the spaces they identified as connected to older generations of lesbians in lieu of ‘queer’ bars and spaces which often had a mixed crowd (Podmore, 614).

It may be suggested that this loss of lesbian/women’s space may be merely generational- and that gay male spaces have also disappeared. Yet research indicates that this is not the case (Podmore, 615-217; Lo and Healy, 35). Although Julie Podmore argues that there is a “lack of long-range historical geographies and comparatives of lesbian and gay men in the same city over time” there is evidence that suggests that urban spaces associated with gay men have not met the same fate as lesbian, feminist, and women’s cultural spaces (Podmore, 597). The growth in the ‘gay consumer’ market’ has largely benefitted gay men’s cultures and geographical spaces, often at the expense of the maintenance and production of lesbian/queer women’s spaces that have historically been centered around ethics of collectivism, anti-capitalism, and anti-patriarchy (Podmore, 600; Rudy, 216).

In the 1990s there was a decline in feminist institutions and bars, which also coincided with “increased public visibility” for the queer community. This decade “[...] brought queer politics and the unification of gays, lesbians, and queer populations generally under the umbrella of the GLBT ‘community,’ to large urban centers” (Podmore, 598; Rudy, 212). In the past twenty years there has been a discernable growth in the LGBTQ “consumer market” as well as recognition of queer folks as an “official political constituency” (Podmore, 600). This is not to suggest that the advancements of rights and protections for sexual-minorities that have occurred in the past twenty years are inconsequential, but to question what other forms of culture, identity, and community building have been foreclosed by these changes. As Elizabeth Freeman argues, with new advancements- particularly those that do not necessarily

threaten to alter the status quo- “[s]ome cultural practices are given the means to continue; others are squelched or allowed to die on the vine” (Freeman, 57).

What is suggested and often concealed by these shifts are the tendencies to obscure the ongoing issue of sexism and gender disparity between men and women, the erosion of feminist institutions, and the valorizing of individualism over collectivism. Many lesbian-feminist physical sites produced in the 1970s and 80s hinged on political ideologies that were critical of capitalism and were structured with ideals of collectivism (Taylor and Rupp, 38). Although acknowledging the important intellectual legacies that queer theories have produced, Kathy Rudy argues that many queer critiques and efforts to deconstruct the categories ‘men’ and ‘women’ “[...] often inadvertently leads to the valorization of those things associated with the male, public sphere;” furthermore, she argues that in shifting the focus from identities and the self to performance and acts, there are “tendencies within queer theory that mediate individualism at the expense of collectivism”(216; 218). The focus on individualism and the “[...] assumption that liberation is synonymous with participation in a narrowly defined public sphere” are facets of what Lisa Duggan has described as ‘homonormativity’ (Rudy, 218; Duggan, 179). Homonormativity- “a new neo-liberal sexual politics”- is contingent upon the “the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 179). With select gays and lesbians now granted rights that have been “traditionally granted to white, middle-class heterosexuals, such as privacy, domesticity, and consumption,” gay and lesbian “respectability” demands involvement in “capitalist reproductive economies” (Ward and Schneider, 434-35; Puar, 30). The combined influences of homonormativity, neo-liberalism, and the growth in an androcentric gay consumer market have had a profound effect on the maintenance of lesbian, feminist, and women-centered physical spaces and placemaking.

Lesbian-feminist forms of community and identity- which often focused on collectivism as opposed to individualism, incorporated feminist critiques of capitalism, patriarchy, and state-sanctioned tools of hegemony, such as marriage- run counter to neo-liberal, homonormative, and patriarchal forms of community building. Many queer people and communities in Vancouver, including the younger interviewers in this project,

are still explicitly critical of such normativizing impulses and actively critique them. However, these larger structural issues still impact and limit access to community spaces such as feminist, anti-capitalist, collective, and radical forms of activism, which are severely limited. Spaces that are available tend to be both commercial and social, such as monthly women's dance nights, drag events, and community resources such as *Qmunity*, through which social networking, health and wellness, and community building is made available (Millward, 553). While these contemporary spaces are important, in exploring the historical changes in Vancouver from the 1970s and 80s for lesbians/queer women it is clear that some institutions, organizations, and forms of identity have continued and others have not. Therefore, questioning the structural and discursive paradigms which impact or produce these changes is an issue of historical significance.

Elizabeth Freeman argues, the temporal pace of 'generations' is structured by a hegemonic impulse where "[...] Some groups have their needs and freedoms deferred or snatched away, and some don't [...] Some events count as historically significant, some don't; some are choreographed as such from the first instance and thereby overtake others" (Freeman, 57). Listening to and learning about the lives of older queer generations- whose forms of culture-building may no longer be physically present- can be a productive form of acknowledging and validating their work and experiences even if our own queer presents disavow such forms of community. We might also ask why certain forms of queer pasts have been "allowed to die on the vine" (57). While change is both inevitable and often desirable, how can younger queer generations situate themselves within a shared queer history if our language and community looks radically different? Kathy Rudy suggests that this paradox of bearing witness to the past while not abandoning progression and critique is not only productive but necessary (219). While many iterations of 'lesbian' may not seem politically useful or interesting to younger generations, are there forms of lesbian-feminist community building that might be useful to us now? Can we trouble or queer the temporal pace of linear generationality to create anachronistic relationships between the past and the present? "[C]an we be inspired- in the present- by recalling that optimism of the past?" (Colebrook, 13).

To work towards creating spaces that foster queer inter-generational community building and cross-generational conversation these divisions and differences must be conceptualized not as antagonistic, but as potentially productive. In asking these questions and exploring the changes of identity and community structuring between these two generations this project brings 'lesbian' and 'queer' generations in conversation with one another through oral history interviewing. Interviewer's responses and reflections demonstrate that oral history interviewing provides a pedagogical model for glimpsing into the past and bringing it in conversation with the present.

## Chapter 4.

### Making the Connection: The Possibilities of Intergenerational Oral History

*“If identity is always in temporal drag, constituted and haunted by the failed love-project that precedes it, perhaps the shared culture-making projects we call ‘movements’ might do well to feel the tug backwards as a potentially transformative part of movement itself” (Elizabeth Freeman, 743).*

In “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations” Elizabeth Freeman argues that looking to the past can offer new ways of understanding shared experiences and forms of kinship across time, and in doing so challenges “[...] the inevitable ‘generation gap’ that supposedly aligns members of a chronological cohort with one another as they move away from their predecessors [...]” (Freeman, 740). Through conducting oral history interviews with older lesbians, interviewers not only made historical connections between the past and the present- looking at how the social and cultural queer landscape of the city has changed- but made generational connections through finding commonalities of experience in the act of interviewing itself. Learning about the past through oral history interviewing provided the opportunity to think historically, and to recognize that despite the differences between queer generations, there are important points of connection. As Erin Flegg aptly remarked: “There are not these huge gaps between these experiences, there are progressions” (Flegg, 10).

While participation did not inspire intergenerational connection to continue beyond the purview of this project, interviewer’s reflections pointed to some of the broader issues and factors which prevent or work as barriers to intergenerational community-building on a larger scale. Although intergenerational interviewing in this research was successful in terms of providing a pedagogical space for broader historical understanding of lesbian histories in Vancouver in the 1970s and 80s, the transformation



occurred at the individual level. The project was also limited in terms of the small sample of women who were interviewed, the vast majority of whom were white, cis-gendered, and middle-class. Nevertheless, the outcomes through oral history interviewing illustrate some of the broader issues which structure and prevent large-scale queer cross-generational connections, opening up new lines of questioning for further research. This chapter first illustrates and analyzes interviewer's responses to taking up the method and practice of intergenerational oral history interviewing, and explores their reflections on what they felt they gained from their experience. Utilizing both interviewer reflections and assessment materials, in addition to feminist and queer scholarship which explores both generationality and temporality as objects of inquiry, the second section of this chapter engages with some of these structural barriers to intergenerational connections. While cross-generational queer community building requires ongoing commitments from participants, this research provides a working model and proven method for encouraging intergenerational engagement and broader historical understanding through oral history interviewing.

In the reflections, exit interviews, and the corresponding questionnaire each interviewer affirmed that through the oral history interviews they gained a broader historical understanding of lesbian-feminism in Vancouver during the 1970s and 80s (See Chapter 2, Figure 1.0). Interviewers reflected that through listening to the life stories of older lesbians they recognized the value of intergenerational conversations with older people who share similar or related identity categories, politics, and histories. They also commented that oral history interviewing provided an accessible method for listening to and learning about the lived experiences of an older generation of lesbian women. While oral history is a well-established method for exploring narratives of the past, this research contributes to queer oral history literature which lacks an examination of both intergenerational interviewing as a method, and 'generation' as an object of queer historical analysis. Although the interview encounters described in this project were temporally limited, this work provides incentive and structure for conducting additional intergenerational oral histories. Finally, this research further illustrates that oral history interviewing is an accessible, grassroots method for expanding historical knowledge.

Through participation, interviewers recognized the value of gaining intergenerational connection, as well as the importance of learning about history from 'living sources:'

Bosa: I think that it's [intergenerational oral history] definitely a great thing. I mean not only are you gaining connection right? Because that's why we're here. That's why we're on earth, to gain connection with someone. And even if you're not really like intensely like going to see them every day and stuff, it's nice to get a view of you know, history. I find that reading things in textbooks just isn't good enough, sometimes it's great to get an opinion, like a firsthand opinion on things. And just it's nice to get to know people in general. I think it's great. I loved it (Bosa, 13).

Unlike other historical sources and methods, oral history interviewing literally brings people together and illustrates how history is lived out and experienced by individual people (Abrams, 15). As oral historian Michael Riordon describes in *An Unauthorized Biography of the World*, "oral history demands, and celebrates, connection" between people (Riordon, 6). As Bosa's comment suggests oral history interviewing has the potential to allow people to 'gain connection' to one another, providing an opportunity to disrupt or at least glimpse into the issues which perpetuate and structure divisions between different generations and age-cohorts.

The lack of connection between different generations or movements, as Elizabeth Freeman points to and as was illustrated by interviewer's responses, is not only connected to changes in identity politics but produced through the pace or "temporal mechanism" through which time becomes intelligible (Freeman, 729). A 'generation' is one mechanism or taxonomy used to distinguish a marked temporal difference. Generational models- in which one succeeds and often rejects the former to establish a 'new' identity- are structured by hegemonic understandings of time as linear and sequential. While this is an organizational way to understand history, this linear and sequential logic can foreclose connections between different queer generational cohorts as it relies on a heterosexual and patriarchal biopolitical logic: "Webster, following Herodotus, defines a generation as the period of time it takes for father to be succeeded by son, 'usually taken to be about thirty-three years,'" (Berger, 10). Although this reading of generation "[...] relies on [the heterosexual] family as its dominant metaphor and identity as the commodity it passes on," 'generational' analyses can useful to

explore connections between different groups “linked by political work [and] [...] shared subjectivities that go beyond the family” (Freeman, 729).

Despite differences in experience which are informed by temporality, cross-generational oral history interviewing provides an opportunity to disrupt the logic which presumes the past is politically outdated. Additionally, it offers a model for thinking beyond individual queer experience to envisioning the possibilities of collective queer generational connections across time and differences in identity. As Freeman argues “‘Generation,’ a word for both biological and technological forms of replication” is a productive concept for queer theorists and historians to understand and connect diverse and disparate lines of connection across time: “[I]t may be crucial to complicate the idea of horizontal political generations succeeding one another [...] through less in the psychic time of the individual than in the movement time of collective political life” (Freeman, 728). Oral history interviewing can provide an opportunity both to complicate the linear and sequential model of generations and to recognize shared historical and political connections which do not adhere to heteronormative notions of family, community, or generationality. Candice Klein remarked in her post-interview reflections that through interviewing she observed that “many of these women interviewed have [led] parallel lives to younger generations. It’s surprising and comforting at the same time” (Klein, 1). History is full of these nuances; it has the ability to both “comfort” and “confront,” offering new insights into the past and new “understandings which helps towards change” (Thompson, 20, 87). Similarly, Erin Flegg wrote that she found many commonalities- both deeply personal and ephemeral- with the narrator from her first interview. She found that through listening to the narrator speak so candidly about life in her 20s, Flegg recalled some of her own early queer experiences:

There was a feeling of being able to relate to one another, in spite of the common perception that everyone forgets what it’s like to be any given age once you’re far enough removed from it. During the process of coming into her sexuality, she had conversations I remember having with myself about whether or not I might be a lesbian. Honest and serious and important conversations, if a little funny looking back on them. I find it fascinating the way different people in very different contexts can follow almost identical permutations of feelings and sequences of logic” (Flegg, Reflection, 1).

In her post-interview reflections Flegg also noted that although the narrator's experiences were "not exactly the same" as hers, they were relatable: "the values [she] espoused were similar and her discussions of coming out could just as easily have been those of people I know now" (1). Flegg wrote that she appreciated hearing more than just the more professional activist stories, but was told stories which depicted the nuances of sociality that occurred within these groups; "I couldn't help but smile when she told me about working with a group of women to end homophobia in schools and address violence and all the while sleeping with each other's girlfriends" (1). Moses' responses echoed Flegg's reflections noting that although she now recognizes that lesbians from this older generation in a sense have 'paved the way' for the next, narrators- who were mostly young women in their 20s and 30s during the 70s and 80s- were just 'living their lives': "They didn't see themselves as being political forerunners, for the most part, which isn't to say they weren't politically active. But I don't think any of them saw themselves as paving the way for anything in particular. They were living their lives and that in and of itself is really interesting to find out about" (Moses, 2).

Listening to another person share their life story through oral history is an embodied and personal experience, providing an opportunity for the listener to challenge or "[...] disrupt our own identity location in order to not only hear but also see and experience what life is like from a radically different orientation;" to empathize with experiences which we are unfamiliar with; and to recognize how personal choices are historically and social contextual (Norkunas, 68-69). As a free-lance journalist and a former student of history, Erin Flegg was interested to hear about the tangible realities of lesbian life in the 70s and 80s, and remarked at the bravery of these women claiming space in a culture that was immensely hostile to their existence. She continuously drew parallels to her own experiences coming out in the East Vancouver queer community, remarking that gaining insight into the past gave her a broader sense of how radically queer spaces and experiences have changed:

Flegg: [...] It's been such a positive experience for me, and even among my peers it's been very positive. I mean, you know, I have a safe place to live; I have a safe community to live in. I walk down the street holding my partners' hand. You know, I don't live in fear. And when I talk to people who did, basically violence was a day to day reality for them. [...] they were segregated from their children, they had to fight to keep their

children, you know? All of these terrible stories about losing custody [...] And then even just people who lived in these really difficult circumstances who didn't necessarily live in fear. [...] the idea that like a day to day struggle really was there in a way that I've never personally experienced and probably never will personally experience (Flegg, 4).

In considering the different historical conditions and contexts that these women experienced, interviewers clearly affirmed that they were able to recognize similarities of experience and even to reconsider why some conflicting perspectives might occur. Naomi Moses wrote in an interview reflection that listening to this particular narrator in question had a “profound effect” on her and prompted her to rethink how she conceptualized the issues surrounding sexuality and gender that an older generation had faced:

Moses: Listening to [the narrator's] struggles, triumphs, and dogged determination to live her own life and make her own choices no matter what the consequences genuinely moved me. The sacrifices she has made over the course of her life astonished me. Listening to stories like hers is the reason I find oral history – and especially intergenerational oral history – so interesting. Speaking to [her] has taught me to be much more thoughtful when considering the experiences and choices of my elders, particularly when it comes to issues of sexual and gender identity (Moses, 2).

Through oral history interviewing participants also reflected that they gained a more personalized understanding of the importance of lesbian identity for these women. Although as a term it is often now eschewed for what many understand to be its limited scope, for women coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s this term holds great historical and personal meaning. As Victoria Hesford has argued, stereotypical accounts and “hypervisibility” of the lesbian figure both through popular cultural and academic discourse “blinds” us to the complexity of her personhood and perpetuates a “partial vision” of this figure (231). Through listening to women who took up this identity as a political and collective identity and a refusal to be erased, interviewers were offered subjective accounts of the historical importance and contingency of this identity. Flegg wrote that through participation she gained a “[b]etter sense of what was at stake being a lesbian and publically identifying as such,” a “[...]clearer sense of the politics inherent in the word,” as well as a “[b]etter understanding of why older generations holds onto it so strongly” (Flegg, Questionnaire, 3). Moses also observed that to narrators ‘lesbian’

was a “political identity” and that during the 70s and 80s stating “I’m a lesbian because I have to assert my political identity or else I will be erased” was a matter of survival (6). Klein also wrote in her questionnaire responses that she was fascinated to discover how lesbian- feminist politics were so politically public and salient during this time period in Vancouver:

I did not know that there was a lot of activism surrounding the lesbian identity, I thought it was more about feminism. I didn’t realize they intersected [...] It was incredible to hear stories of different women, especially where they fitted [sic] together [...] I think I have a better understanding of the lesbian identity for women in this period [...] I did not realize that many lesbian women were activists as well (Klein, Questionnaire, 2-3).

Similarly, Flegg reflected that through participation in this project that she also became more aware of the activist history of the lesbian community and gained a “much better sense of overlapping issues, what kind of work was being done, [as well as] organizations and publications (6).” Through interviewing she gained a new historical perspective; a “[...] much better sense of what the city was like and what it was like to be queer before I was born” (6). Similarly, Aliza Bosa stated that interviewing made her “[...] think a lot about how [the community] evolved [...] how it changed” (8).

Through exploring how queer identities change historically across space and time even touchstone queer experiences such as ‘coming out’ take on new meaning. Coming out in the context of the 70s and 80s was a remarkably different experience than the coming out experience for women of my generation who were born in the late 80s and early 90s. In her reflections on the differences between coming out in the 1970s and 80s- between asserting identity or leaving it undefined- Moses’ responses illustrate that she was able to think historically through identifying that for women in the 70s and 80s asserting a lesbian identity and publically claiming ‘I exist,’ was a necessary political act. Recognizing how this has changed and how she has not had to emphasize her identity in the same way, Moses’ comments illustrate that she understood that the political work that these women did has allowed later generations more freedom in naming and living out their sexual identities.

[...] there were choices that she made along the road. And I think that a lot of the time we, I don't know, when we're forced to defend our sexuality, when we're put in a corner we're like 'Oh, it's not a choice!' But we all make choices, you know? We all make choices about what we pursue, where we go, who we enter and end relationships with [...] and this narrator had made choices that had irrevocably changed the relationships that she had with her family, with other people in her life. And for her to say, like 'I made those choices because I felt that they were the best ones for me, even though they came at a terrible cost.' I thought that was just really, really incredible (Moses, 5-6).

In recognizing the choices that this narrator made in coming out- when at the time it carried great social, personal, and political risks and losses- Moses stated that she saw her own experience of openly identifying as queer in a different light:

And it did cause me to reflect on the fact that I can make choices in my life without experiencing those consequences. I don't have to choose between you know, my relationships and my family. I'm never going to have to make that choice. So that really hit home for me, that people had to make those choices, when I don't (Moses, 5-6).

Although homophobia and heteronormativity still shape queer lives, my generation and those succeeding it benefits from having a language to name these aforementioned systems of oppression and a diversity of identity politics and tactics we have inherited to either utilize or reject; we have a legacy of identity markers which are not defined primarily in negative terms or couched in the language of sin or abnormality; a legacy of out and proud aphorisms, stories of courage and survival, and the presence of older community members who helped usher in a more public and mobilized queer epoch. Recalling Claire Colebrook's notion of recognizing complex and anachronistic lines of inheritance, revisiting the past provides an opportunity to recognize that the past is not irrelevant to our current circumstances; it is "[...] not a simple object of knowledge, but the milieu within which we think (12). Flegg remarked that having these moments of sharing common experiences across generational difference allowed her to recognize herself within a broader historical context:

You're not the first. I feel like that's one of the sort of sobering realizations, you know that it happens at a lot of stages. You're not the first. You're not the first person to feel any of these things [...] [S]o there are people who understand and who have been doing it for a long time. And you're sort of like oh right! This isn't, you know, queer didn't start ten

years ago, you know? Our community has a history. Here it is (Flegg, 8-9).

Naomi Moses expressed a similar form of historical thinking in her reflections remarking that she now sees how each generation can learn from one another. She wrote that as she gets older she is beginning to seek out “meaningful” ways to interact with the much older and younger friends and relatives in her life: “I feel that generations have much to share if they are open to listening to each other’s stories and ideas. [A narrator] said at the end of our interview that she felt the intergenerational aspect was the most interesting part of this project, and I had to agree” (Moses, Reflection 1). Again, interrogating the temporal differences between coming-out in different historical periods Moses reflected on how choices are acted out in historical contexts, which in turn shape these pivotal queer experiences. Moses added that as she gets older she considers what the experiences of the next queer generation might be, and what her generations’ legacy might offer: “[Both the narrator’s] and my experiences are different in many ways. For instance, my generation is often obsessed with labeling and sexual identity, whereas [this narrator] came of age in a time and place where sexuality was often not discussed. This caused me to reflect on how different ‘coming out’ may be for the next generation [...]” (Reflection 1).

Through oral history interviewing participants gained new insights into the past through storytelling which in turn effected and challenged the ways in which they understood history and how it impacts present or future generations. Recalling my discussion in Chapter 1 of Iris van der Tuin’s “jumping generations,” a conceptual methodology structured by non-dialectical “shared conversations across time,” it is evident that the insights gained through a glimpse into these subjective past perspectives enabled broader historical thinking and intergenerational understanding (van der Tuin, 28). Oral history projects allow us to explore and reconceptualise ideas and experiences from the past that may appear to be one-dimensional and temporally fixed offering new frameworks for understanding our own lives. Klein remarked that oral history can help challenge the forward-thinking myopia of youth and to understand that the world we live we have inherited from the past:



Well it's good to know where you come from, like where your rights come from. What women had to go through or what they experienced or what it meant to be gay in different eras, because you know, we're so ego-centric [...] and I think, you know it's important to, when you can, take time to reflect on things before you. And you know, like get out of yourself for a second (Klein, 9).

In addition to understanding how rights and experiences have changed historically, through oral history interviewing it can become possible to understand how different generations fit into the community, and that the temporal gaps we see between different age cohorts are not as disparate as they seem:

Flegg: I think the biggest thing is [...] just finding your elders and knowing that they're out there and there are not these huge gaps between us and the people who came before us [...] So just seeing that and seeing where they fit in the city and in the community and finding ways to connect and finding that they want to connect, I think is huge (Flegg, 10).

This suggests that cross-generational interviewing can be a unique method both for simultaneously disrupting linear models of generations as well as exploring the complexities and historical and personal meanings of identities from the past; “[...] we need to trouble the neat linearity of the idea that one ‘horizontal’ generation hands over intact and complete its [...] legacy to another, but we also need to confront the acts of burial and silencing- the agencies of repression- that are an inevitable part of the history of any social movement” (Freeman, 234). As Joan Nestle the iconoclastic writer, editor, and founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York proclaimed “[...] all lesbians [are] worthy of inclusion in herstory...if you have the courage to touch another woman, you are a famous lesbian” (Nestle, [www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org](http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org)). While changes in identity politics are not inconsequential, it is important to remember the historical legacy that ‘lesbian’ signified and continues to signify to many women. ‘Lesbian’ is not simply a pre-cursor to ‘queer’ and it is an important task for both historians and community members alike not to subsume and forget the differences and specificities to which lesbian history refers.

Lesbian histories remain an important part of Vancouver’s local history and require further and continuing historical exploration, documentation, and preservation. Candice Klein spoke to the importance of knowing local history and recognizing how

lesbians fit into that history. She asserted that oral history projects are an important and accessible method for engaging with local and queer genealogies: “I think like people should really do this! I think this should continue because we don't know anything about lesbian history. Like the general public knows nothing. Especially you know Vancouver- this history of Vancouver, you have to include this story because it's a part of it, you know? (Klein, 13). In addition to the historical knowledge gained through participation, based on their reflections interviewer's also clearly recognized the importance of making cross-generational queer connections and the importance of role models more generally. Moses described the possible benefits of intergenerational connection and mentorships as “endless,” “unquantifiable,” and “impossible to overstate” (8). Recalling the influence her great aunt Reva Potashin has had on her own life Moses reflected on the benefits she felt having someone in her life who challenged many stereotypical archetypes set out for women:

[W]hen I think about the influence that my great aunt had in my life, and she would not have identified as queer, but in many ways her life was queer. She did not follow the path that was laid out for her in 1921 when she was born. She never married, she never had children [...] And the fact that I had a role model like that in my life, just to say, ‘you don't have to follow the path that the culture has laid out for you’, I think the benefits of that have been tremendous (Moses, 8)

Flegg also shared with me her first experience of finding older queer role models. In October 2012, Flegg and I participated in a Queer Memoir retreat on the sunshine coast along with a group of older lesbians, exposing her for the first time to the stories of lesbians who lived in Vancouver during the 1970s and 80s. Flegg stated that the memoir retreat was “eye-opening,” and encouraged her to think about the possibilities of having lesbian/queer elders and suggested that these opportunities for queer people are thwarted by structural barriers:

[...] I think the first time I was introduced to older lesbians was the retreat we went to last year, which was sort of eye-opening. And it was just sort of a reminder of young queers having not grown up with their elders and having this group of women that are considered our elders but are distanced from us, they're not our biological families. It's something different and so to have to seek out those connections and be reminded that those people are there and those relationships are there and have to be built was interesting. It was nice (Flegg, 2).

Although interviewers were able to find moments of connection and commonalities of experience between different generations through oral history interviewing, generally opportunities for queer cross-generational encounters are rare. The dominant models of social relationship building and kinship are structured as heterosexual and reproductive; therefore younger queers do not have opportunities to learn about shared collective queer histories and cultural memories or “homoknowledges” through their families of origin or through non-queer communities (Wiener and Young, 225). Queer histories disrupt and fall outside of the hegemonic and heteronormative paradigm of ‘generational’ history and hence “[...]making other queers is a *social* matter” (Freeman, 61, emphasis mine). However, if different generations cannot connect with one another, “[y]oung people are left to themselves to figure out who they are by looking only forward [...] instead of drawing upon the wisdom of our inheritance” (Zusman, 12).

Interviewers reflected on this generational disconnect in their exit interviews. Erin Flegg remarked that although she is out to “most of the people in [her] life, and [her] immediate family” she does not discuss her queer identity with older relatives (Flegg, 8). She stated that one of her reasons for this distance was partially based on assumed generational differences; “I think I tried to think of that in terms of being older, of a certain age, or raised in a certain context, it [being queer] is going to be difficult for them to understand.” However, her understanding changed through listening to older lesbians of this very same older generation speak openly about queer experiences she could relate to; “And then to see people the age of my grandparents who are like ‘I totally understand your process and what’s it been like for you, and this is what it was like for me’, and we have some common ground” (8).

In the reflections and the exit interviews, interviewers remarked on this generational disconnection, and pointed to some of the structural, logistical, and personal factors which underpin these divisions. Aliza Bosa informed me that she has had mentorship figures in the organizational and community spaces she takes part in: “[...] I definitely have met older lesbians. Although I never got the chance to actually ask them in details, ‘like what was it like being a lesbian in the 80s?’ (1). However, she stated that rarely are these mentors older than fifty; “We have groups of older lesbians or

older queer identified people. And we have groups for younger queer identified people. But I never see those groups, well sometimes, occasionally, but I never really see those two things collide” (6). Bosa added that queer spaces tend to be divided by age, but based on her experience in both the youth and ‘Generations’ group- offered by *Qmunity* to bring diverse ages together- these divisions relate more to different needs and interests:

I think that there are activities that younger people are really into and then there are activities that older people are really into, and sometimes those clash or sometimes there's accessibility, or you know even energy levels can also be a factor right? So [...] thinking about like events that could happen where both older people and younger people could both participate in and enjoy? Because um Gab You used to do this thing where we would go over to Generations, which is the older group, and we would play Jeopardy. And it was really boring. It was so boring. And the questions were really dull and we didn't understand the questions and they kind of understood the questions, but the questions were really generalized and there wasn't a lot of participation or interest (Bosa, 6).

Bosa’s reflections point to the relevant differences in interest and knowledge that each generational cohort might share. In reflecting on an experience where intergenerational connection seemed to fail, Bosa suggested that dialogue might be a more effective way to bridge these gaps in experience and understanding:

And I think it would be really cool to have an intergenerational group [...] I would really like to have actual one-on-one dialogue discussion [...] Or just more icebreakers. I think that I would really love to do a bunch of icebreakers with you know, with a group like that [...] Because you know it's all about getting to know each other. Like why would I want to spend time with a mentor if I never really knew who they were, right? (Bosa, 6).

Bosa’s responses suggest that one-on-one dialogue could provide a productive space where individuals from different generations could speak and interact with one another, sharing stories from their own particular experiences. She suggests that a more substantial way of continuing these forms of interpersonal dialogue and connection beyond the purview of this project would be to form an intergenerational group. She offered that one of the barriers to intergenerational connection might be some of the ways that communities structure these encounters when they do occur. Although this project did provide an opportunity to ‘get to know’ an older lesbian from the community

the next logical step would be to provide a forum for a reciprocal, back-and-forth dialogue, as well as an assessment on how older generations perceived these divisions between age-cohorts.

Similarly to Bosa, Moses suggested that generational divisions are also influenced by “stage of life” differences and needs. However, Moses also remarked that often generations have preconceived assumptions or misconceptions of one another, which is another factor that could perpetuate these divisions even further:

I think part of it is- part of it is what we might call stage of life. Part of it is that younger people as a group a maybe engaged in different activities than older people as a group. But [...] interests of a person that's in their 60s may be really similar to the interests of a person in their 20s. [...] And we assume that there isn't enough overlap for people to spend time together and get to know each other [...] [A]ge just- it allows for all kinds of misconceptions about the way younger and older people see the world. And I think it makes it harder for us to interact if we believe we won't be able to understand each other or we believe that the gap is such that we can't understand each other. And I think each group probably makes assumptions about the other (Moses, 3-4).

Age is not an inconsequential form of difference. Lives are lived out in historical moments which beget diverging experiences and understandings; however, it is important to resist the impetus to view temporal differences of identity and experience as a reason to forestall “shared conversations” between queer generations (Van der Tuin, 26). This work requires challenging the “chronopolitics of development,” the progressive reproductive ‘pace’ of life which posits anteriority as obsolete (Freeman, 58). This is not to suggest a conservative reading of history in which change threatens established ‘tradition’, but to question what is lost or obscured amidst the “chronopolitics” or pace of generationality and temporality for queer communities. As Victoria Hesford argues revisiting or reinvisioning the past “is not simply an act of remembrance, but also a way of resisting the hegemony in the present: the past becomes resource for the possibility of a different future” (Hesford, 230). Poet, essayist, and lesbian feminist Adrienne Rich has written extensively on the necessity of claiming and recognizing historical legacies, particularly for women; without connections to those who came before us, even if we see the world differently, we are deprived of “[...] the precious resource of knowing where we

come from: the valor and the wavering's, the visions and defeats of those who went before us" (Rich, 136).

In acknowledging and confronting the structural barriers to queer cross-generational connection and community building, we must also question how fear of difference stymies queer sociality. If, as Freeman states, "making other queers is a social matter" we must work to create connections across spatial, individual, and temporal barriers: "[...] "sexual dissidents must create continuing queer lifeworlds while not being witness to this future or able to guarantee its form in advance, on the wager that there will be more queers to inhabit such worlds: we are 'bound' to queer successors who we must not recognize" (Freeman, 61). It is then essential to find and create opportunities- such as oral history interviewing- to challenge these misconceptions and divisions between generations. Although Moses implies that these generational misconceptions are commonplace, it takes opportunities such as oral history interviewing to challenge these misconceptions and to consider what differing experience might have meant in another time and place:

I found even in doing interviews that lots of the kind of misconceptions that I had, or even misconceptions that even came up over the course of an interview, they were things I had to work through that you usually don't have to work through with someone your own age [...] And with an older person you have to think about 'Wow, what did that mean for them at the time?' It was different than what it means for us today. So sometimes it takes more work and it takes more open-mindedness. And it takes opportunities. Those opportunities don't really exist if you're like a 20, 22, 23 year old, and most of your social activity happens at the bar, and you know you're 60, 65 year old and most of your social activity happens at a community centre, you're never going to run into each other. So part of it is just practical (Moses, 3-4).

As Moses suggests, listening through misconceptions, attempting to empathize, and think historically takes both individual effort and available opportunities. Her response illustrates that these divisions are not only hindered by personal biases and perceptions, but also by practical issues such as lack of spaces and opportunities to facilitate these exchanges. Both Klein and Flegg expressed similar experiences of lack of practical opportunities for these encounters. Based on her experiences of witnessing the generational silos within the queer community Klein stated: "Yeah, I think I've

definitely like never really spoken to older gay women like about their past or anything like that, so I really liked this project for that. But yeah, there's definitely a huge, you know, [separation of] this age and this age. There isn't a lot of intermingling" (Klein, 7). Reflecting on a situation where she observed younger queer women being hostile towards an older and "stereotypically butch" woman in a social space composed primarily of younger queers, Klein suggested that younger generations might also be hostile to older lesbians, seeing their politics and their aesthetic as dated:

You know like kind of staying stuff about here because she was older and clearly like a different era of what being gay is [...] And I just remember being like, 'that's kind of strange, why are people- who cares?' But I kind of find younger generations to be really judgemental about that stuff [...] Like, if you don't have the look, if you're not like cool looking enough or something? It was weird. I was like, 'Whoa, these are straight issues! Why are they happening in this community?' (Klein, 7).

Klein's remark that 'these are straight issues' perhaps points to the degree to which heteronormative and patriarchal temporal structures still influence and inform the production of queer generations and communities. The older lesbian or butch person in this example signifies what Elizabeth Freeman refers to as "temporal drag," or a "stubborn identification with a set of social coordinates that exceeded [the current] temporal moment; she is a "sign of times gone by," (727-28).

As interviewers noted, through oral history interviewing they were able to question some of these misconceptions and consider the particular historical meanings and importance of different "social coordinates" (Freeman, 727-28). Although this oral history project provided an opportunity for learning about cross-generational issues, participants did not continue conversations with one another after the project had concluded, illustrating perhaps that broader structural issues strongly factor in to intergenerational divisions. As interviewers also noted, 'stage of life' and similarity of experiences are important factors in terms of how we create community and kinship networks. While age does not necessarily determine interests, it is a factor that shapes the ways we connect with others and the activities we engage in. However, as I have argued, finding opportunities for intergenerational queer dialogue, sharing queer histories, and making age-diverse spaces, does have an important role to play in queer communities.

During the exit interviews, each interviewer described being engaged by different stories and nuances of lesbian experience in Vancouver during the 1970s and 80s. Going in to the project with varying degrees of knowledge on lesbian history in Vancouver, each interviewer reflected on both the differences and similarities of experience between the narrator's generation and ours. Through the exit interviews it is clear that although the term lesbian is still used by women of my generation, there is now a much more expansive vocabulary in the queer lexicon- with less insistence on claiming one identity per se, or in fact any identity at all. Through interviewing older lesbians younger interviewers described gaining a greater understanding about the physical spaces that lesbians used to organize and meet one another; the changes and internal polemics surrounding the emergence and existence of different forms of lesbian identity; and the difficult process of coming out and asserting a lesbian identity in a hostile time where there were no positive frameworks for doing so. And finally, through comparing the stories they heard to their own experiences and noting both the similarities and differences, interviewers were able to think historically about lesbian identity; about the past and present of Vancouver's 'queer community'; and how many of these women created space for new possibilities of living for later generations of women.

As evidenced through the exit interviews, questionnaires, and reflections, interviewers empathized with narrators, found common experiences, and were able to place themselves in a different historical context across generational differences. Reflections also served a form of self-assessment, allowing interviewers to think critically about their oral history practice as well as the content of the interview and to continue learning and refining their skills as interviewers. Interviewers reported not only being excited by commonalities they drew from narrator's stories, but that through listening to older women narrate their life stories their understandings of the past not only increased, but became more nuanced. The reflections interviewers produced clearly suggest that oral history intergenerational interviewing holds great potential for "facilitating relationships" between different age cohorts of LGBTQ people (Marshall, 173). Although participants remarked that after participating they understood more about lesbian history, identity, and activism in Vancouver during the 1970s and 80s, they rightly pointed out that these perspectives were partial, and only reflected a limited history based on the perceptions of primarily white, middle and working-class, cis-



gendered lesbians. Oral histories and sources are as Alessandro Portelli states “incomplete by definition;” they are unfinished, inexhaustible, and continually in flux; and hence, projects like these will always need to continue with more voices and perspectives (40). Through community oral history projects, scholars, activists, and community members alike can glimpse at the subtleties of personal experience as they relate to and are informed by a different historical milieu. Through oral history interviewing, interviewers were able to explore some of the intimate connections between personal and historical experience: “[...] I heard stories that I think were amazing, like not only of personal significance, but historical significance” (Moses, 9). Community oral history projects offer accessible opportunities for learning more about local history; they offer space to challenge preconceived notions about the past or a group of people; they provide a community the tools to reclaim silenced or repressed histories; and finally, with the added component of intergenerational interviewing, they provide opportunities for different generations to learn more about the other and encourage the formation of collaborative mentorship relationships. As Flegg summarized:

But like I said, this idea to place yourself in context to you know, find this like thread of women and thread of people who, like are essentially your elders, who lived in similar places and had similar experience and had different experiences and kind of paved the way for us in many ways. It was very affirming to find ways to relate. *And realize that I am part of that continuum. I am part of that history* (Flegg, 10; emphasis mine).

## Chapter 5.

### Conclusion

Oral history interviewing is an established method that was been used by scholars and community members alike to record and preserve stories from the recent past, and has been particularly useful for reclaiming and exploring the histories of marginalized communities or “social groups at the margins of power,” (Thompson, 97). As a method, it centers on subjective experience as a lens into the past and is co-produced through the interaction between the narrator and the interviewer; as one narrator described it, oral history is a “[...] very humanized way to present history” (Atkinson, 1). It has been taken up by feminist, queer, and other anti-oppressive researchers to explore the private, hidden, and often silenced experiences of women, people of colour, subaltern communities, the working-class and queer subcultures- whose stories are often excluded from the “official time line” of history (Freeman, 57). Another narrator described her interest in oral history as follows:

I think oral history tends to record voices of people who would (likely) otherwise be voiceless and that because it is individual voices it (can/may) portray both the concreteness and diversity of individual experiences, and yet also illuminate how those individual experiences were shaped by/played out against broader economic/social/cultural/historical contexts (Hughes, 1).

Due to the embodied and interpersonal nature of the oral history encounter it is also a useful pedagogical tool for encouraging cross-generational engagement and broader historical understanding. Through oral history interviewing younger generations can glimpse into the past through the subjective experience of an older person who they might perhaps not have the opportunity to meet otherwise. Dominant conceptions of ‘generations’ are contingent upon the heterosexual and reproductive family and kinship as well as notions of history as linear and progressively unfolding. When the dominant

means of transmitting community history is through the heterosexual family model and heteronormative models of kinship, the inevitable “[...] ‘generation gap’ that supposedly aligns members of a chronological cohort with one another as they move away from their predecessors [...]” is even more pronounced for LGBTQ people and communities (Freeman, 740). These discursive issues, coupled with lingering cultural anxieties around cross-generational queer interactions, stymie conversation and mentorship relationships between queer generations, and contributes to the uni-generational structure of queer communities. Younger queer generations today have the benefit of having older activists, mentors, and role models, many of whom were on the vanguard of LGBTQ rights movements such as Gay Liberation, lesbian-feminism, the Women’s Movement during the 1960s-1980s (Marshall, 170). As Daniel Marshall argues, “[...] now you could imagine that there’s a whole generation of older gay men and lesbians who’ve had activist experience who might be able to play some sort of mentoring role” (170). As one narrator described:

I wanted to do this project because I never had any lesbian role models. Like that's just not- I think that's something that just doesn't happen. Because when you get with a lot of marginalized communities people a lot of time will get models of resistance or whatever role models through family. And LGBT people don't have family [...] in the same way (Waymark, 42-43).

Although these role models are present today in queer communities, very few opportunities exist for cross or inter-generational conversation. As all interviewees stated prior to their participation they had met very few older lesbians and rarely had they had the opportunity to ask them questions about the past. This division and lack of interaction impacts the ways that “homoknowledges” about the queer past, models of resistance, disparate lines of connection and shared experience, and queer histories are shared and live on through younger generations (Wiener and Young, 227-228). Again, interviewees all stated that they knew very little about lesbian history in the 1970s and 80s- even within their own city and in the context of shared spaces where lesbians created community and organized. While no major project on lesbian history in Vancouver during this time period has been conducted, the lesbian-feminist generational cohort produced an unpredicted amount of evidence for their existence; this generation produced a public and politicized lesbian identity, created community space, a

proliferation of literature, and cultural activities, and has been widely written and critiqued in academic disciplines. This project worked to disrupt the problem of divisions between different queer generations using oral history interviewing as a tool for cross-generational engagement. This pilot study brought together two generations of lesbian and queer women in an attempt to build a “presence in the absence of queer intergenerationality (Marshall, 177). As one narrator observed, this ongoing lack of connection between generations is characterized by a myopic vision of queer history:

At the same time, for someone of my generation, it sometimes seems that younger people are inventing the world for the first time, with no or little awareness that the things they are working on have been the subjects of activism for a long time and that they are very much standing on the shoulders of many previous generations (Whynot, 1).

Through cross-generational interviewing younger interviewers reflected that they gained insights into the complex meanings that ‘lesbian identity’ held for older narrators, complicating many of the prevailing and one-dimensional stereotypes and negative depictions surrounding the ‘lesbian’ as an abject figure (Hesford, 231). In listening to stories about Vancouver in the past, they learned about some of the physical sites, organizations, collectives, conferences, political and social spaces, and ideas that characterized the 1970s and 80s for these women. Interviewers’ reflections on the interviews, as well as their discussions of their own queer identities, offered a glimpse into some of the ways that identities have shifted from the 1970s and 80s to present time. These reflections and the data from the exit assessment materials provided insight into many of the central discursive and historical changes between these two generations.

Furthermore, interviewers’ reflections clearly illustrate that oral history functions as a pedagogical tool for cross-generational interaction and broader historical understanding. While oral history is an established method for encouraging broader historical understanding, this project contributes to the lack of research on 1) interviewing as intergenerational pedagogy, and 2) intergenerational divisions in queer communities. Interviewers remarked that they found oral history interviewing in this project to be accessible; they described it as a “a more comfortable form of interviewing”; that it was easy to “[...] jump in and participate, [and making] each party feel like they

have a role to play”; and while oral history can be “intimidating at first, it’s easy to adapt and develop skills” quickly” (Bosa, 11; Flegg, Questionnaire, 5; Klein, Questionnaire, 5). Interviewers’ responses illustrate that through conducting interviews they recognized commonalities of experience between generations.

Learning about the past, specifically the more oppressive social contexts that these women experienced, also gave interviewers a broader perspective of queer history through which to reconceptualise their own experiences and identities. They learned about the “culture, parties, events, [and] collectives” and “activism spaces and [...] underground lesbian clubs” that lesbians produced and cultivated in Vancouver during the 1970s and 80s, most of which no longer exist (Bosa, 7; 8). Although many material spaces- like East Vancouver more generally and the Commercial Drive strip specifically – are still associated with lesbian/queer women’s cultures the community looks very different than it did in the 70s and 80s. Many of the organizations and spaces that lesbians participated in and initiated were centered on a commitment to feminist politics, challenging patriarchy, sexism, male supremacy through both politics and physical sites of resistance (Taylor and Rupp, 35). “The culture of lesbian feminist communities both [served] as a base of mobilization for women involved in a wide range of protest activities aimed at political and institutional change and provides continuity from earlier stages of the women's movement to the future flowering of feminism” (34).

During the 1990s the existence of “feminist institutions” and lesbian-centered spaces which were at an all-time high in the late 70s and 80s began to decline (Podmore, 598; Rudy, 212). These shifts paralleled changes to the ways that sexual minority communities began to conceptualize and name their identities. ‘Queer’ theories and forms of activism challenged what they considered to be ‘essentialist’ forms of gay and lesbian identity, arguing for a more inclusive language to describe the fluidity and flexibility of sex, sexuality, and gender (Browne and Nash, 5). Queer challenges to identity politics have created space to deconstruct the assumed ‘natural’ categories of man and woman; encouraged inclusivity for transgender, genderqueer, and queer identities that fall outside of a gender binary; and produced important scholarly interventions into the ‘heterosexual matrix’ of intelligibility (Browne et. al, 573; Butler, 12). As suggested by interviewer discussions on their own identities ‘queer’ has changed and

shaped the cultural landscape in the decades since the 1970s and 80s. One narrator observed of the younger queer community:

I think there's as wide a range of political awareness and attitudes as [there was] in older community. I sometimes think there's more subtlety in friendships, more blurring of the line between friendship/intimacy, like they have a broader range of descriptors for who they are (North, 1).

While 'queer' communities are seemingly "[...] less dependent upon mechanisms that police membership, less dependent on similar identifications and identities" there is strong evidence that certain forms of hegemony- primarily sexism and gender-based disparity as well as homonormativity- still persist within these communities (Rudy, 216; Duggan, 179). While many queer interventions and progressions have been influential and encouraged more inclusivity in communities which now fall under the discursive moniker of 'queer' or LGBTQ, they have also been a contributing factor to the decline of feminist institutions since the 1990s (Podmore, 598). The shift from 'lesbian' and 'gay' to 'queer' enclaves has the tendency to obscure "lesbian specificity" in terms of physical space and identity (Rudy, 217). Queer deconstruction of gender as a social role rather than biological certainty has been shown to be an important intellectual contribution. However, 'gender' still remains a category of experience that impacts and shapes women's lives. This change in understanding gender is characteristic of these two different lesbian/queer generations, as discussed in this project. As one narrator observed:

I don't have enough knowledge or experience to have perceptions [of younger generations] other than that it seems to me that younger people are now much more seeing gender itself as fluid/to be questioned/to be played with and that is quite different from how 30 years ago we saw gender as fixed and a source of oppression, not play (Hughes, 1).

These changes may be a factor influencing the ways that communities take up space. As interviewers observed and scholarships suggests many of the "alternative institutions" of the 1970s and 80s, such as "[...] rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, bookstores, newspapers, publishing and recording companies, recovery groups, support groups concerned with health and identity issues, spirituality groups, restaurants and coffeehouses, and other women-owned businesses" have disappeared (Taylor and Rupp, 38). Furthermore, and as discussed in Chapter 3 the effects of neo-

liberalism, homonormativity, and the growth in the 'gay consumer' market- which largely benefits gay male culture and spaces- have proved to be barriers to the maintenance and production of lesbian/queer women's spaces that might be more focused on collectivism, anti-capitalism, and anti-patriarchy (Rudy, 216; Duggan, 179).

Through participation, interviewers did gain an understanding of some of the complex ways that lesbian identity was taken up by women in the 1970s and 1980s. They recognized that lesbian identity was politicized and often iterated through a feminist ideology; "I did not know that there was a lot of activism surrounding the lesbian identity, I thought it was more about feminism. I didn't realize they intersected" (Klein, Questionnaire, 2-3). They reflected on the meaning and context of those politics in comparison to their own experience; "I haven't had to sort of stake out a political identity the way some of the narrators did. [...] But it's caused me to feel like that is an advantage to not have to say, you know, I'm a lesbian because I have to assert my political identity or else I will be erased (Moses, 6). They empathized with women who shared stories of experiencing hostility around their identity; that the "day to day struggle really was there in a way that I've never personally experienced and probably never will personally experience" (Flegg, 4). Through oral history interviewing, younger interviewers were able to think historically and "consider the context" from which the narrator was speaking particularly around topics which they disagreed on or could not relate to; "I had to work hard to consider the context from which she was speaking [...]. While both of us have had to struggle to carve out space in our lives to be who we are, [the narrator's] social and historical context has given [the narrator] a completely different perspective [...]" (Moses, Reflection 2). These reflections and observations illustrate that cross-generational interviewing can "bridge communities by bringing people together around a common theme;" it is through doing oral history, that "[...] we learn from each other; we come to respect our differences and find unexpected places of unity" (Zusman, 13). Again, as Erin Flegg noted, generations are not inherently separate from one another; "[t]here are not these huge gaps between these experiences, there are progressions" (Flegg, 10).

While interviewers clearly gained some historical knowledge about lesbians in Vancouver during the 1970s and 1980s and recognized the importance of cross-

generational connections in queer communities there were limitations to this project. Considering that participants did not sustain contact beyond the purview of the interviews, these changes in awareness and knowledge- while important- occurred only on an individual level. As outlined in Chapter 4, Interviewer's reflections correspond with scholarly work that suggests that the barriers to intergenerational queer community building are also structural and discursive. While differences in age undoubtedly impact interests, activities, and the ways that individuals participate in community, logistical, structural, and practical obstacles also create barriers between facilitating cross-generational engagement. As one narrator reflected on her experience:

It is hard for me to see myself as being very much 'part of 'the LGBTTQ community' since I am not involved socially or politically with any groups/projects/community activities. For me personally, my 'community' tends to be my friendship network and that network tends to be people I worked with/lived with/ went to events with 30 years ago. I think it becomes much more difficult to make friends as I grow older and I know that how I made friends when I was younger was by working with or living with women. If I'm not working/socializing in any groups my opportunities to make new friends are very limited. I imagine that is true for all the women (and possibly the men) my age (Hughes, 2)

Individual interests in cultivating cross-generational connections are clearly not enough to challenge these divisions which are perpetuated by heteronormative kinship structures; notions of time as linear and progressive; clashes between different iterations of identity politics; gender inequalities in access to spaces and resources; as well conceptualizing ideas from the past as retrograde and disconnected from the present. Although we have access to information in a way which is historically unprecedented, the personal and subjective meanings of events or different historical moments are often neglected.

Perhaps this is a function of my age, but it seems to me we live by a paradox these days. Although we can record everything and it is potentially with us forever, we don't actually value much of what has gone before. Maybe that is because it's so incredibly easy to find the factoids for reference when someone asks, but less easy to understand their meanings. Maybe in intergenerational contact, it might be possible for meanings to be experienced more directly (Whynot, 2).



### 5.1.1. Guidelines and Limitations

This pilot project strongly indicates that oral history is a useful tool for facilitating dialogue. A more comprehensive project should seek to encourage participation beyond those who are most available for white graduate students to reach. Holding larger community events can encourage more participants who can speak to a broader diversity of queer experiences, such as women of colour, immigrant women, and trans\* women. To plan for and create spaces which could facilitate more community inclusion will necessarily involve a longer pre-planning stage. In reflection, while using the *Xtra!* issue of exclusion as a jumping off point for initiating the project did ensure that there was high levels of interest in addressing the issues of intergenerational divisions between women, leaving the invitation open- rather than circulating it directly to a multitude of different groups, organizations, and networks- contributed to the exclusive group in attendance and those who volunteered. As a researcher, doing one's due diligence includes ensuring that you move beyond just including self-selected volunteers, and conducting more expansive networking with community organizations and other scholars and activists whose experiences are not primarily of white, middle-class, and cisgender contexts. Furthermore, as interviewer's suggested to me during their post-interview reflections, having a more concise, structured plan before any interviews were initiated would have also assisted in giving them more guidance for conducting interviews and connecting with narrators. Some concrete suggestions for initiating these projects are as follows:

- In the initial stages, create a clear and concise research question and plan. Even if this changes throughout the project- and it likely will- it will help you when you approach other people to work with and give them a clear sense of what they are committing to.
- For a large scale project, consider both who you want to reach with this research and who also might be interested in supporting it. Make an expansive list of potential sources of community networks, be it individual activists, scholars, or local organizations that you can approach with your project and ask for support. Examples of this include organizations such as *Qmunity* and *Our City of Colors* in Vancouver as well as collaborating with other scholars who work in lesbian or queer local histories. Creating a network will not only help to ensure you are including as many voices and perspectives in your work, but will be useful for future projects and community building initiatives to utilize.

- As Klein suggested in her assessment feedback, having prepared even a basic historical overview of the history you want to document is helpful in ensuring that your volunteers and supporters have some basic knowledge of the topic. This can and should also be conducted in the planning stage of the project and will be useful for producing the first drafts of your interview guide.
- While interviewer's appreciated flexibility in scheduling, I found it frustrating and difficult to coordinate with many competing and busy schedules of both interviewers and narrators. Creating an interview schedule well in advance, perhaps using an online database might help to quell many of these frustrations. However, schedules do change and volunteers can only take on so much, so maintaining flexibility is essential in large-scale community projects.

### 5.1.2. Further Research Directions

While this specific research primarily focused on the impact and experience of cross-generational interviewing for younger participants it provides the groundwork for further research into intergenerational interviewing and queer generations. To provide a more comprehensive analysis of divisions between these lesbian and queer generations in Vancouver, research into the experiences of older generational cohorts is necessary, paying particular attention to the important legacy of lesbian feminism which is largely unknown to younger generations of lesbian and queer women:

I think paying attention to history matters and that Canadian lesbian/feminist history is under-documented. I was interested in being part of a project that was addressing that 'absence.' Also my decades as lesbian-feminist activist in Vancouver were a very intense and formative period of my life and now as I was moving into retirement and into the last decades of my life it seemed valuable to re-visit that time (Hughes, 1)

In addition to the benefits of recording, preserving, and disseminating the important histories of older queer generations, cross-generational connections do not only benefit youth, but are reciprocal:

I believe that the younger generation can benefit from hearing the history of the elders...we lesbians who are seniors now have lived through some amazing times. The older generation needs to stay in touch with the present and to listen to the histories of the younger lesbians and learn from them (Atkinson, 2).

Older narrators shared that they too rarely have the opportunity to meet with and engage with younger lesbians/queer women, and that they also value and desire opportunities for engaging with younger generations:

I don't spend much time with younger lesbian women. I am not involved in activism and find myself mostly spending time with my age cohort or extended family. I am glad to see the activism of younger women. For several years about a generation ago I was discouraged by the lack of activism I saw (Whynot, 1).

There's always benefit to knowing history and there's always benefit to knowing what youth are thinking. Makes our experience of the world more complex, more interesting (North, 1).

I really value seeing/hearing how things have changed/stayed the same. I think without personal connections/conversations I am cut off from having any understanding of other younger lives and that is a loss (Hughes, 1).

Furthermore, it would be beneficial for scholars, activists, and community members alike to work towards creating spaces and opportunities to encourage intergenerational queer community building. Although cross-generational interviewing and oral history projects provide opportunities to encourage these engagements, they are temporally limited by broader structural barriers and differing interests between generations. As a part of the assessment materials, interviewers suggested ways that research like this could be continued or improved upon. Participants remarked that intergenerational connection was beneficial for both younger and older generations, and suggested some alternative ways for these conversations to continue, such as "volunteering for each other's social events" (Atkinson, 2). One narrator also responded: "I find events that bring together a range of ages around a common interest work well" (North, 1). Other suggestions included "[h]aving a coffeehouse night," or a "a community drop in or events" (Moses, 8). "Storytelling. Working together on a shared creative project – some kind of art project? Theatre? Music? [...] building in ongoing ways to create/recreate community seems to me to be a useful addition" (Hughes, 1-2). Naomi Moses suggested:

I think you probably have more luck with the younger generation at scheduling something rather than doing a drop in. But those, like I would go to those events. I would be so enthusiastic to go to them. And I would

love to see the people that I interviewed again. So I think the benefits of that are really extensive. Particularly for young- like for young queers who don't have role models in their families, that the benefits of that are huge (Moses 8).

Considering this project was a pilot study and was my first time conducting and coordinating a project of this size, I incorporated an assessment of the project as a whole into the exit materials (the interview and the questionnaire) that interviewers completed. In these assessments, interviewers offered their suggestions for improving or expanding this project or similar future projects. These suggestions provided valuable feedback and contributed to the ongoing creation of a working model for intergenerational oral history projects. Again, Klein- who had prior experience of transcribing oral history interviews- suggested that knowing some of the history and understanding how interviews are conducted prior to participating helped her feel comfortable in the role of interviewer:

I strongly recommend listening to other interviews of gay women. That way it may help when formulating your own questions and improve interviews. Also, I suggest reading primary and secondary documents, if available, about the gay liberation movement and lesbians in general. Knowing a bit about the context may aid interviewing. Basically, make sure you do a bit of prior research about the time period, such as who was Prime Minister, and the American Gay Liberation Front, etc. (Klein, 7).

Similarly, Moses stated that in hindsight she would have had discussions off-camera prior to interviewing, as attempting to tell entire life histories can be difficult in terms of volume and breadth:

It [interviewing] takes a lot of time, but also people sometimes would feel they hadn't discussed things they wanted to discuss, and hadn't discussed things that they needed to discuss for as long as they had. So I would plan more at the beginning at the interview. And maybe that's something that you can include in your preparation materials, just say 'Take 3-5 minutes before you start the camera ask, 'what are some topics you want to cover,' and then we can go from there. That would have helped me to feel less like 'Oh! Where is my next question coming from?' (Moses, 7-8).

Erin Flegg suggested that although she "appreciated the flexibility and self-guided approach, having a slight more structured schedule might help with the corralling

of well-intentioned, busy people,” adding that a “strong framework or timeline of events/organizations happening at the time might serve as a solid background for digging deeper into questions of identity [and] further develop context as more information comes to light through interviews” (Flegg, 4, 7). Moses agreed that “wrangling volunteers” can be difficult as people who participate in these projects tend to be busy, but suggested that creating more opportunities to meet during the project might have encouraged more motivation. “I think the projects could be expanded, and could also involve some informal interactions between the narrators and the interviews, rather than just interviews alone” (Moses, 7).

The project started out with a very ambitious goal of not only preserving lesbian oral histories, but creating intergenerational conversation and encouraging community support. As the months wore on, it became more and more difficult for me to schedule group meetings where large groups of volunteers could be involved. While all volunteers were excited and motivated to participate in the project, coordinating interviews and scheduling meetings proved to be difficult and time-consuming. While I had initially hoped the project would involve more regular gatherings of participants, the majority of the time was spent doing one-on-one interviews. Although this produced a collection of interviews and offered insights into different generational experiences in Vancouver, it did not encourage cross-generational community building on a large or collective scale.

Reflections from both narrators and interviewees- in addition to my own experience of coordinating this project -has shown that community events which both bring people of multiple generations together and are supported by larger groups of people would be more effective for future projects. These initiatives could be inspired by the dedication to collective work that lesbian feminists during the 1970s and 1980s utilized, and may be useful in challenging the structural barriers to intergenerational engagement. Again, drawing from my own experience in coordinating this project and participant’s reflections, I would encourage those who are interested in setting up similar projects to start out small, with very clear and precise outlines about what you aim to accomplish. Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize the needs and different interests of different age-cohorts in determining how to move forward. As one narrator reflected: “If my generation is mostly too tired and/or too busy to be involved in cultural or social or

political groups, those ‘visible and public’ community groups/activities/events would then necessarily involve mostly younger people” (Hughes, 2). Considering queer communities tend to be uni-generational younger generations can have the tendency to take up the majority of the ‘visible and public’ spaces and may plan events which structurally curtail the participation of older generations. For example, specific times and locations might not be conducive to different ages and cohorts. With the lack of availability many younger queers have to mentors in their community and knowledge of their histories, understanding the different ways that older generations lived and experienced the world in a context different from their own may be lost. Another narrator noted:

I found that the interviewer seemed to have some preconceived ideas, described in the political terms of the present, about what it was like 30 years ago. She seemed relatively naïve about her own preconceptions and how language and politics change over time (Whynot, 1).

While there are limitations to this research, it is clear that cross-generational oral history interviewing is an effective method for encouraging intergenerational connection, broader historical understanding, and providing a means to explore some of the divisions between queer generations. Additionally, this project opens up new lines of questioning into the historical production of lesbian/queer identities, the consolidation of community spaces, and suggests that intergenerational community work- such as oral history projects- provide an opportunity to encourage broader cross-generational understanding. However, further research into the experiences of older generations is necessary; how do older lesbians create community space? What are their perceptions of younger generations? How do they envision age-diverse collaborations? Furthermore, how can we create connections between different generations even across differences in identity which may at times be the cause of disagreement? In taking up these questions future projects can continue to explore what “[...] what one LGBT generation has to learn from another” and contribute towards building age-diverse queer communities with awareness of their complex lines of historical connection across time (Moses, Reflection, 1). Oral history storytelling is a method for exploring and sharing these historical connections using the stories of queer lives as they are lived out in different historical moments, providing examples of “[...] one way we might live. But we need more stories than just

this one. Always and always, long as we live and breathe, this is what we need: more stories” (Cvetkovich, 146).

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## Appendix A.

### Project Consent Form- Narrators

#### CONSENT FORM

Lesbian Generations in Vancouver: An Intergenerational Oral History Project

You are invited to be in a research study of the history of the lesbian community in Vancouver during the 1970s and 1980s, and to share your experience in relationship to lesbian identity. This project aims to document and preserve lesbian history in Vancouver. This project also aims to bring together women who were active in this community with youth (ages 19-30) who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited or queer (LGBTQ\*) in cross-generational conversation. You were selected as a possible participant because you have personal information and/or experiences about this culture and community that you are willing to share for the purposes of this study. This research is being undertaken under permission of the Research Ethics Board from Simon Fraser University.

I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by:

Nadine Boulay  
Master's Student  
Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies  
Simon Fraser University  
8888 University Drive  
Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6, Canada  
Telephone:XXXXX  
Email: XXXXXX

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is:

(a) to find out about participants experiences and/or knowledge of lesbian identity and culture in Vancouver during the 1970s and 1980s.

(b) to hear about participants experiences in the lesbian 'community', what the lesbian community was like, and what community spaces and organizations existed.

(c) to explore the value of oral history interviewing for better historical understanding, and as a way to facilitate cross-generational understanding.

#### **Procedures:**



If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

(a) take part in a minimum of two in-depth interviews with open-ended questions (typically each interview lasts one and a half to two hours).

(b) consent to have the audio recording of your interview and the written transcript preserved in the Archive of Lesbian Oral Testimony (A LOT) at Simon Fraser University. A LOT is an online digital archive, which is publically accessible.

(c) pass on the researcher's contact information to other potential narrators of your choosing.

## **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this study. As this project aims to **preserve** lesbian history, all interviews will be either video or audio recorded. Therefore, complete confidentiality cannot be maintained.

All the information you provide will be stored in a locked office at Simon Fraser University, and personal names will be used only with your permission. You may be assigned a pseudonym if you wish. You may determine the pace of the interview and stop at any time. If you feel a question invades your privacy or goes beyond what you are willing to talk about, you may decline to answer such a question and stop the interview at any time.

The benefits to participation are: this study will allow you to tell your story and have it recorded and preserved for the future.

## **Recording:**

Each interview will be recorded either in the form of audio or video, as per your preference or *availability of equipment*. Please select which you would prefer:

Audio\_\_\_\_\_ Video\_\_\_\_\_

## **Confidentiality:**

This project aims to document and preserve lesbian history in Vancouver. Transcripts and all recordings of interviews for this study will be preserved in the Archive of Lesbian Oral Testimony (A LOT), which is a public online archive. The records of this study (transcripts and tapes) will be stored in A LOT where researchers and community members will have access to them.

If you consent to donate your interviews and transcripts to A LOT, **they will be publically available on the internet, and you may be recognizable by your face or your voice, depending on the format of the interview recording**. If you desire access to your interview to be restricted, the interview will be placed behind a protected firewall, and will only be accessible to researchers and not the public.

“I understand that these interviews will be posted on a website where they can be accessed by the public.” Do you consent to donating your interview(s) to A LOT? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Would you prefer to use a pseudonym? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

Preferred pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with myself or Simon Fraser University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

### **Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is: Nadine Boulay. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are **encouraged** to contact me at: Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6, Canada. Telephone: XXXX Email: XXXXX

If you have any concerns or complaints, they can be addressed to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Elise Chenier, Director, Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony (A LOT), Associate Professor, Department of History, Simon Fraser University, at XXXX or XXXX and/or Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research Ethics, Simon Fraser University, at XXXX or XXXXX

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator:\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B.

### Project Consent Form- Interviewer's

#### CONSENT FORM

Lesbian Generations in Vancouver: An Intergenerational Oral History Project

You are invited to be in a research study of the history of the lesbian community and lesbian experience in Vancouver during the 1970s and 1980s. This project aims to document and preserve lesbian history in Vancouver. This project also aims to bring together women who were active in this community with youth (ages 19-30) who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited or queer (LGBTQT\*) in cross-generational conversation. You have been selected to take part in this project as part of a team of LGBTQT\*-identified interviewers. This research is being undertaken under permission of the Research Ethics Board from Simon Fraser University.

I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by:

Nadine Boulay  
Master's Student  
Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies  
Simon Fraser University  
8888 University Drive  
Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6, Canada  
Telephone: XXXXX Email: XXXXX

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is:

(a) to find out about participants experiences and/or knowledge of lesbian identity and culture in Vancouver during the 1970s and 1980s.

(b) to explore the value of oral history interviewing for better historical understanding, and as a way to facilitate cross-generational understanding.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

(a) commit to participate in the project for a total of six months, from January to June 2013.

(b) meet with the researcher (Nadine Boulay) and her project supervisor (Dr. Elise Chenier) for two workshops for training in oral history methodologies to be conducted on January 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013, and to meet with the researcher and other interviewers once a month for six months.

(c) from February to June 2013 conduct and record a minimum of two interviews per month with a participant, to be assigned to you by the researcher (Nadine Boulay). After each interview, to write a reflection of your experience of conducting an interview, which you will share on a private blog with the researcher.

(e) at the end of the six months, to consent to be interviewed by the researcher on your experience of conducting intergenerational oral history interviewing.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this study. However, complete confidentiality cannot be maintained. You may choose to use a pseudonym during your participation, but you may be recognizable by your face or your voice, depending on the format of the interview recording. Records of your written reflections will be kept on a password protected blog, and recordings of your exit interviews will be available to the researcher and her supervisor. The benefits to participation are: you will be trained in oral history methods and have the opportunity to work on a research team.

### **Confidentiality:**

As part of this project, records of your participation will be available to the researcher, her thesis supervisor, and other youth interviewers. The written reflections you provide to the researcher will be available to the researcher and her thesis supervisor and kept on a password protected blog and on the researchers' password protected computer. The exit interviews with the researcher will be referenced in her Master's thesis work, and may be referenced in conference presentation or publications.

Do you consent to sharing your written reflections of each interview you conduct with the researcher? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

Do you consent to taking part in a minimum of one exit interview with the researcher in June 2013? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

Do you consent to the use of your reflections and/or exit interview(s) with the researcher to be used in any of the following: thesis work, conference presentations, and/or publications?

Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

Transcripts and all recordings of interviews for this study will be preserved in the Archive of Lesbian Oral Testimony (A LOT), which is a public online archive. If you consent to donate your interviews and transcripts to A LOT, **they will be publically**

**available on the internet, and you may be recognizable by your face or your voice, depending on the format of the interview recording.** If you desire access to your interview to be restricted, the interview will be placed behind a protected firewall, and will only be accessible to researchers and not the public.

“I understand that these interviews will be posted on a website where they can be accessed by the public.” Do you consent to donating your interview(s) to A LOT? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Would you prefer to use a pseudonym? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with myself or Simon Fraser University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

### **Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is: Nadine Boulay. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are **encouraged** to contact me at: Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6, Canada. Telephone: XXXX Email: XXXXX

If you have any concerns or complaints, they can be addressed to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Elise Chenier, Director, Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony (A LOT), Associate Professor, Department of History, Simon Fraser University, at XXXXX or XXXXX and/or Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research Ethics, Simon Fraser University, at XXXXX or XXXXX. *You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C.

### Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony- Donor Form

#### An Oral History of Vancouver's Lesbian Culture and Community in the 1970s and 1980s

Informed consent and copyright permission to donate oral history interviews, images, and personal documents to the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony at Simon Fraser University.

Participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone and/or email: \_\_\_\_\_

I voluntarily agree to donate my interview for the historical study of lesbian culture and community in the Vancouver area to the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony (A LOT) at Simon Fraser University. I understand that the following items created from my interview will be donated to A LOT:

- an audio and/or video recording
- an edited transcript and summary
- a photograph of me
- copies of any personal documents or additional photos that I wish to share

I understand that my interview (and other items above) may be distributed to the public for educational purposes, including formats such as print, public programming, and the Internet.

Also, I agree to share my interview (and other items above) under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License according to the terms described below. This means that I retain the copyright, but that the public or researchers (see below) may copy, modify, and share these items for noncommercial purposes under the same terms, if they include the original source information.

In return, A LOT promises to send one free copy of the interview recording, transcript, and related items to my address above.

You may post my interview on the A LOT website (choose only ONE of the following:)

in the open-access area of the A LOT website in its entirety with myself identified by my full name, (this would mean that if a person searched your name on the internet, they would likely be guided to the interview);

In its entirety on the open-access area of the A LOT website with the restriction that only my first name is used (this would mean that if a person searched your name on the internet, they would not likely be guided to the interview since your last name would not be available);

In its entirety on the open-access area of the A LOT website with the restriction that a pseudonym be used instead of my own name (this would mean that if a person searched your name on the internet, they would not likely be guided to the interview since your last name would not be available). Please use they pseudonym:

\_\_\_\_\_;

Behind a password protected wall so that only people who have applied for and been granted access to the interview material on A LOT will be able to access my interview.

In this case, I would like said researchers to have access to (choose one):

- My full name
- My first name only
- This pseudonym:

\_\_\_\_\_.

Once the interview is completed, I agree to identify on the transcript sections of the interview you may use in the open access area of the web site. I reserve the right to exclude the entire interview from the open access area. Initial here:

\_\_\_\_\_

Please note that the information you provide on this form is kept in a confidential file at Simon Fraser University library separate from your interview, thus should you choose to remain anonymous on the web site there is no risk of your name or contact information being available to A LOT users. It will only be available to administrators for the purpose of ensuring copyright permission has been obtained.

Also note that we will delete information that identifies third parties (i.e. names) if either Simon Fraser University or the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony deems the information to be potentially slanderous or of a personal nature such that it would be unethical to share it without the person's permission to do so.

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature

Date

---

Elise Chenier, Director, A LOT

Date

Questions? Prof. Elise Chenier, Simon Fraser University, XXXXX

*Reminder: Sign TWO copies: one stays with the participant, and the other returns to the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony. Once the form is signed by Elise, a copy will be mailed to the participant.*



## **Appendix D.**

### **Reflection Prompts and Exit Interview Questions**

- How did you feel going into the interview and why?
- Describe the setting of the interview? How did this affect the interview itself?
- What was interesting to you about the interview? What was challenging?
- Did the narrator ask any questions about you? If so, how did that feel?
- Describe your feelings during the course of the interview. Did you feel comfortable? Nervous? Excited?
- Did your emotions and comfort levels change throughout the interview? How so?
- Where there any difficult questions or topics that came up? How did you respond to that?
- How did listening to the narrator's story affect you? Did you find any parallels to your own experience? Conversely, what were the differences you noticed?
- If there is anything you could change for the next interview what would you do?
- Over all, what did you learn from conducting the interview?

## Appendix E.

### Exit Interview Questions

- Why did you decide to volunteer for this project?
- How do you identify in terms of sexuality and gender?
- Before you began work with this project, what did you want to learn about?
- Did you learn about this? Has your knowledge on \_\_\_\_\_ increased?
- Did working on this project make you think differently about your own identity?
- Have you ever used oral history before? How would describe oral history as a method for learning about the past?
- Do you see there being an age gap in the LGBTTTQ community? Why do you think that is?
- What do you see as the benefits of intergenerational oral history and dialogue?
- Did you have any pre-conceived notions that were challenged? Reified?
- What recommendations would you have for this project and/or future oral history projects?

## Appendix F.

### Exit Questionnaire

#### Vancouver's Lesbian History: Project Questionnaire

Please fill in the blank, circle the best answer for each question according to the following scales, or write your own response, as applicable.

#### SECTION I: Knowledge

##### *Before Participation*

1) Why did you want to participate as an interviewer in this project?

2) What did you want to learn through participating in this project?

3) Before becoming involved in this project I would rate my knowledge of lesbian history in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s as:

Very Low      Low      Average      High      Very High      N/A

Describe your knowledge of lesbian history in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s prior to participating in this project:

- 4) Before becoming involved in the project I would rate my knowledge of lesbian identity(s) in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s as:

Very Low    Low    Average    High    Very High    N/A

Describe your knowledge of lesbian identity(s) in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s prior to participating in this project:

- 5) Before becoming involved in the project I would rate my knowledge of lesbian activism and organizing in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s as:

Very Low    Low    Average    High    Very High    N/A

Describe your knowledge of lesbian activism and organizing in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s prior to participating in this project:

*After Participation*

- 1) After participating in this project I would rate my knowledge of lesbian history in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s as:

Very Low    Low    Average    High    Very High    N/A

Comments:

2) After participating in this project I would rate my knowledge of lesbian identity in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s as:

Very Low      Low      Average      High      Very High      N/A

Comments:

3) After participating in this project I would rate my knowledge of lesbian activism and organizing in Vancouver during the 70s and 80s as:

Very Low      Low      Average      High      Very High      N/A

Comments:

4) Did the project meet your expectations in terms of what you wanted to learn?

5) If this project continued or expanded, what are some questions you think should be further explored?

SECTION II: Method

*Before Participating*

- 1) Before participating in this project had you ever had prior experience with oral history methods? If so, in what respect?

- 2) Before participating in this project, my knowledge of oral history was:

Very Low      Low      Average      High      Very High      N/A

Comments:

- 3) As a method, oral history was relatively easy to learn and accessible:

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree      N/A

Comments:

*After Participating*

- 4) After participating in this project and using oral history interviewing, my knowledge and understanding of lesbian's living in Vancouver during the 1970s and 1980s has increased:

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree      N/A

Comments:

- 5) Oral history is an effective method for understanding more about the lives of older lesbians:

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree    N/A

Comments:

- 6) Oral history is an effective method for intergenerational and historical understanding:

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree    N/A

Comments:

- 7) Your responses will be used to create a guideline for structuring and coordinating community based oral history projects. Do you have any recommendations for improving upon future projects of this kind?

## Appendix G. Oral History Readings

### Vancouver's Lesbian History: Select Reading List

#### Second Wave Feminism

- Gloria Anzaldua, Gloria and Cherrie Moraga (eds). *The Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour*. 1981.
- Simone de Beauvoir, *Simone The Second Sex*. 1949.
- Mary Daly. *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. 1978.
- Shulamith Firestone. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for a Feminist Revolution*. 1970.
- Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963.
- Germaine Greer. *The Female Eunuch*. 1970.
- bell hooks. *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. 1981.
- Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. 1984.
- Kate Millett. *Sexual Politics*. 1970.

\*All are available from the Vancouver Public Library

#### Lesbian-feminism

- Charlotte Bunch. "Lesbians in Revolt." *The Furies*. 1972.
- Jill Johnston. *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution*. 1973.
- The Radicalesbians. "The Woman-Identified Woman." *Radical Feminism*. Eds. Anne Koedt etl. NY: Quadrangle Books, 1973.
- Adrienne Rich. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Powers of Desire*. Eds. Ann Snitow et al. 1980.
- Monique Wittig. *Le Corps Lesbien/The Lesbian Body*. 1975.

#### Feminism in Canada

- Kate Alderdice. *Women's Liberation in Canada*. 1975.
- Maggie Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation." *Voices from Women's Liberation*. Ed. Leslie B. Tanner. New York: Mentor. 1970.
- Margaret Fulford. *The Canadian Women's Movement, 1960-1990: A Guide to Archival Resources*. 1992.
- Becki Ross. *The House that Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation*. 1995.



## Appendix H. Interview Guide

### Vancouver's Lesbian History: Interview Guide

This project aims to preserve the histories of older women born before 1955 who lived in the Lower Mainland at any time during the 1970s and 1980s, who had intimate relationship with other women. Each narrator will be interviewed twice, and interviews will be anywhere from one to two hours. The first interview will be based on biographical information/life history. The second interview will be focused on living in Vancouver during the 1970s and 1980s, and lesbian experience. Here is a guide of the basic pre and post interview steps:

1. Contact Nadine for interviewee name and contact info
2. Set up the meeting with the interviewee
3. Book and pick up equipment; test and re-test and experiment
4. Pre-interview equipment and paperwork check
5. Interview= 2.5 hours plus travel time
6. Save, label, and upload interview and forms
7. Return equipment to Nadine
8. Re-play interview, make notes for follow-up
9. Start at 1 again

**Before the interview(s)** here are some important things to consider:

- Try to conduct the interview in a place where the narrator will feel comfortable, preferably at their home. This also helps cut down on background noise, which can be distracting. Make sure to turn your cell phone off, and ask that the narrator do so as well. If you are using video for the interview, watch for how the lighting is in the room. Try to aim for natural light, coming from behind wherever the narrator is sitting. If using audio recording place the recorder between yourself and the narrator, so that it picks up both of your voices clearly. Do a quick sound test to make sure.
- Under the category 'biographical information/life history' (listed below), think of these as prompts to give you ideas to use during the first interview which aim to get a broader understanding of the narrators life.

- Each narrator will be different. Take some time before the interview to chat beforehand. They may want to know things about you. Give them space to ask you questions, but don't assume they are interested.
- Begin each interview with an introduction: Say your name, the date of the interview, and then ask them their name and age.
- Listen to the terms they use to describe themselves. Ask "what terms would you use to describe yourself?" and additionally, "what terms wouldn't you use to describe yourself?" It is important to pay attention to language, and to respect the terms that narrators use to talk about their identities.
- Remember to pay attention to body language. Be compassionate. When people seem ready to go in a certain direction, don't be afraid to check in! But also be ready to deal with your own feelings. It's all part of being a good, empathetic listener.
- If someone requests to turn the tape recorder off, or for something to be off the record *you must* do this, and respect confidentiality.
- At certain points you will have exhausted a topic. Don't hesitate to look at the interview guide and figure out where to go next. This is also a good moment to check with the narrator if they have time and energy to do a few more questions/topics.
- Finally, remember that these questions are here to guide you through the interview. Oral history is not formulaic. These questions are not meant to go in a specific order. Remember, not all of the questions will be applicable to each narrator. Narrators may go in a different direction and tell you something you never thought to ask. Trust your instincts, and listen carefully.

### **Biographical background/ Life history**

- Name
- When and where were you born?
- Where was your mother/father/family from?
- If immigrants to Canada, when did they arrive?
- What was your mother's occupation (before and after marriage)?
- What was your father's occupation?
- Did you have any siblings?
- What was your relationship to them growing up?
- Can you describe your family?
- What schools, colleges, universities did you attend?

- Were you raised in a religious/spiritual home or community? Has that changed?
- Have you had a/any long term partner(s) or were you married?
- If never married/partnered, did you live with a partner for a long period of time?
- What was/is the age, nationality, occupation and sex of your partner?
- Did you have any children? When were they born?
- Did you work? What kinds of jobs did you do?

### **Sexuality**

- What would you say is your sexual preference/identity?
- When did you first apply that word to yourself? Do you still use this word?
- Where and when did you first hear these terms, and in what context?
- Have you always felt that that you were [stated preference]?
- Are there any other words you have used to describe your sexual preference in the past?
- What words didn't you use?
- Growing up, was anything said to you about sexual relationships between people of the same sex?
- How were homosexual women and men described to you?
- Did you know any homosexual women or men when you were growing up?
- When was the first time you met someone who you knew was homosexual?
- Where were you at the time?
- How did you feel towards them?
- When did you first realise that you were attracted to women?
- Would you describe it as an emotional or a physical attraction, or both?
- When and where did you have your first intimate experience with another woman?
- What was your relationship to that person: were they a friend, acquaintance, teacher etc.?
- What made you realize that you were attracted to them?
- What feelings did you have? Were your feelings reciprocated?
- Did you feel uncomfortable about being attracted to that person? If so, in what ways did you feel uncomfortable?

- How did you feel about it at the time?
- What ideas had you had beforehand about what it would be like?
- Did your first experience meet with those expectations?
- What was it that you did? [specific phrasing of question will depend on stated sexual preference]
- How often would you say you had intimate contacts after that?
- Did you ever have a relationship with a person from another racial group?
- If not, why not?
- Did you have a 'coming-out' experience? If so, what was it like? In what social circles were you out? Where were you not out?
- How did you dress? Why did you dress this way? Did many other women dress this way? How did people react to how you dressed?
- What was your dating and romantic life like in the 1970s and 1980s?
- In what kinds of space did you meet romantic partners?
- How would you have described your sexual politics?
- What were your understandings of S&M sexual practices at that time?

**Living in the Lower Mainland in the 1970s and 1980s**

- If not originally from the Lower Mainland, when did you move here? Why?
- Where did you live in the city? What was this area(s) like? What was your living situation like?
- What did you do for work? Were you 'out' at work?
- Would you have described yourself as physically and mentally healthy during this time?
- What was your social life like?
- Were there women in your social group that had children?
- In what ways did you/didn't you fit in?
- Did you go to any gay or lesbian bars? What were these spaces like?
- What recreational activities did you take part in? (sports, music, women's festivals, art)
- Were you a part of any spiritual or religious communities?
- Were you a part of any cultural groups or organizations?

- How important were politics to you at this time? Were you involved with any political/ social movements, organizations, or activism at this time? (use the list of organizations provided, and add to the list if needed)
- What was your understanding of lesbian-feminism at this time? Were you involved with any lesbian-feminist groups or organizations? Why or why not?
- Can you tell me about any major social/cultural/political events you took part in during this time? How did that impact your life?
- What was your relationship to the women's movement/feminism at this time?
- What were your relationships to heterosexual women? To gay men?
- How did you relate to men?
- What was your relationship like with your family of origin at this time?
- Did you have any interactions with police or the criminal justice system? What were they?
- What was your relationship to drugs and alcohol? Were drugs and alcohol used by your friends/social groups?

**Intergenerational reflection questions:**

- What were some of the most important memories you have about the 1970s and 1980s?
- Do you still have many of the same friends?
- How have your social networks changed?
- What kind of social/cultural/political groups are you involved with presently?
- What events/stories do you think [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer] youth should hear?
- What do you think [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer] youth can learn from the events that you experienced in the 1970s and 1980s?
- Are there questions you'd like to ask or things you would like to learn about young women's experiences today?

**After the interview:**

- Listen to the tape and use this guide to check off what was covered and what was not. Use this list to guide the second interview and ask questions that were not covered.
- Import the interview to your computer or save it to a disc. Make sure to label it with the name of the narrator, your name, and the date. If you are not comfortable with this, just return the recorder to Nadine.

- Make contact with Nadine and discuss. Make contact with the narrator and plan the second interview. Write your reflection as soon as you can after each interview. If there are any issues, ask Nadine!
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