

**Counterpublics Revisited:
A Case Study of the Vancouver Women's Library**

by
Rebecca Lillian Wonders Rupke

B.A. (Philosophy), University of British Columbia, 2016

B.F.A. (Visual Arts), Emily Carr University, 2015

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Publishing

in the
Publishing Program
Faculty of Art, Communication and Technology

© Rebecca Rupke 2018
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2018

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution -
NonCommercial - ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Approval

Name: **Rebecca Lillian Wonders Rupke**

Degree: **Master of Publishing**

Title: **Counterpublics Revisited: A Case Study of the
Vancouver Women's Library**

Supervisory Committee:

John Maxwell
Senior Supervisor
Director and Associate Professor

Mauve Pagé
Supervisor
Lecturer

Suzanne Jay
Industry Supervisor
Master of Library and Information Studies, University of
British Columbia

Date Approved: August 16, 2018

Abstract

The notion of counterpublics is revisited by means of a detailed documentation of the founding in early 2017 of the Vancouver Women's Library (VWL) and of its early history. Co-founded by the author, the VWL is described as a hands-on experience in the intellectual, socio-political and organisational dynamics of a twenty-first century continuation of the feminist bookstore movement, which saw its height in the 1970s and 80s. Following up on theoretical work done by Michael Warner, the author makes the point that the VWL provides a living instance of the formation of a feminist counterpublic. The recirculating of the unique relationship between women and books lead to the VWL positioning itself as a counterpublic for women. She recounts the spontaneous, cause-related support between women writers and publishers of earlier days and shows that it has been the VWLs aim to re-awaken this with an emphasis on alternative public circuits of information sharing. Moreover, the story is told of protests and controversy that arose when some of those who identified themselves within the same VWL counterpublic disagreed with its structuring. The conclusion is reached that a counterpublic is spontaneous, ungovernable and ontologically separate from its site of engagement.

Keywords: Counterpublic, reading public, feminist bookstore movement, the Vancouver Women's Library, site of engagement, women's publishing

Dedication

To the bookwomen who have gone unnamed

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the MPub faculty at Simon Fraser University, especially John Maxwell and Mauve Pagé, who recognized the gravity of this project and helped unravel my writing to its fullest potential. Thank you to my cohort for showing me patience and supporting my work. Thank you to the women who have paved the grounds for me and been essential teachers along the way (Suzanne Jay, Lee Lakeman, and the many feminists who inspire me daily with their dedication to women's freedom). Last but not least, thank you to my dad who continues to offer unconditional guidance and support.

Table of Contents

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	vii
List of Acronyms	viii
Glossary	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. (Counter-)publics: some definitions	2
1.1. Defining the creation of a public as publishing	2
1.2. Publics and Counterpublics	3
1.3. Counterpublics as sites of publishing	6
Chapter 2. Tracing women’s book counterpublics from past to present	9
2.1. A brief history of the women’s bookstore movement	9
2.1.1. Women’s bookstores in Vancouver today	12
2.1.2. A brief history of women’s publishing in Vancouver	13
2.1.3. Women’s publishing in Vancouver and beyond	15
2.2. Libraries and (counter-)publics	16
2.2.1. From ideals to praxis: A Vancouver dilemma	20
Chapter 3. Case study: the Vancouver Women’s Library	23
3.1. Publishing a movement: the private becomes public	23
3.2. The VWL: a counterpublic?	25
3.2.1. A social space: a site of engagement	26
3.2.2. Poetic world-making	33
3.2.3. Counterpublics: a reaction to library neutrality	34
3.2.4. Lending + Membership data	37
Membership	37
Lending	38
Curation	39
3.3. Sites and spaces for counterpublics	40
3.4. Restating the scope of the VWL	42
Chapter 4. Conclusion	45
4.1. Continuing the feminist bookstore movement	45
4.2. Responsibility, limitations and agency of sites of engagement	46
References	49
Appendix A	53

List of Figures

Figure 1: New vs Active Patrons (Members) at the VWL Feb - Oct 2017	38
Figure 2: Books added to the VWL by month Feb - Oct 2017.....	39
Figure 3: Books checked out by top active Patrons (Members) Feb - Oct 2017.....	39
Figure 4: Counterpublics in relation to the dominant public.....	42
Figure 5: Site of conflict between the VWL and GAG	43

List of Acronyms

ALA	American Library Association
DIY	Do It Yourself
DTES	Downtown Eastside
FBN	Feminist Bookstore Newsletter
GAG	Gays Against Gentrification
GWL	Glasgow Women's Library
IBPOC	Indigenous, Black and People of Colour
LHA	Lesbian Herstory Archives
LIS	Library Information Science
NDP	New Democratic Party
SFU	Simon Fraser University
SWERF	Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminist
TERF	Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist
VRRWS	Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
VWB	Vancouver Women's Bookstore
VWL	Vancouver Women's Library
WIND	Women In Distribution
WIP	Women In Print

Glossary

Bookwomen	A term used for women involved in the feminist bookstore movement
Bill C-36 (2014)	A Canadian law that treats prostitution as a form of sexual exploitation that disproportionately impacts women and girls
Counterpublic	A group of people engaged in the same reflexive discourse with explicit conditions of who can participate
Decentralized	Distribution of powers from one central authority to many smaller (usually localized) bodies
Enfranchisement	Being granted the right to vote
Femicide	The killing of a women or girls
Feminist Bookstore Movement	An international network of women's publishers, bookstores, magazines, newsletters and distributors which saw its heyday in the 1970s, 80s and 90s
Gynocriticism	A term coined by Elaine Showalter that refers to centering female culture in literary criticism
Herstory	History viewed from a female or feminist perspective
Poetic World-Making	Creative expression in gestures, vocabulary and tone that shapes the identity of a public
Public	A group of people engaged in the same reflexive discourse
Reflexive Discourse	A relational form of spoken or written communication of a specific topic
Site of Engagement	A space which allows for emotional or intellectual commitments between individuals

Introduction

The project of the Vancouver Women's Library began as an idea to share books written by women amongst friends. Together with another student in 2017, I transformed my artist studio into a makeshift library that first housed a personal collection of approximately 80 books written by women. This experiment of sharing underrepresented texts amongst friends quickly progressed into a large collection, much of it initially donated by friends who also became organizing members. We eventually moved to a storefront space that reverberated across Vancouver and beyond by means of international visits and growing membership rates. The original mission statement reads as follows:

The VWL is a community resource that exclusively carries writing by women authors in a broad array of genres. We encourage intergenerational conversations through the library and believe in continuing the legacy of women-run bookstores, presses and libraries.¹

What united the members to found and participate in the VWL was a shared interest in engaging with one another through women's writing as a way of legitimizing female authors when much of such writing does not have the same canonical standing as their male counterparts. This idea is not new, in fact it surfaced as an intentional renewal of the unique historical relationship between women and books. The organizing structure of a library was chosen, in part, because the VWL wanted to encourage active participation with the collection. The ideal outcome was that this would result in a dedicated readership, constituting a counterpublic of women with a common enthusiasm for women's writing. In turn, what it arguably resulted in was a case study for the dynamics between a site of engagement (the VWL), its constituents (the counterpublic) and "the public" at large. With this report I intend to examine more closely these dynamics, how the counterpublic saw itself in relation to others, and the extent to which a site of engagement can serve or nurture an identified counterpublic. Before getting into the details of how the counterpublic came to be, I will first define the parameters of the terminology. I then contextualize the emergence of the VWL through a historical lens of women's bookstores, publishers and library structuring. The details of the case study are used to draw conclusions regarding the successes (or difficulties) of enacting a counterpublic and whether the physical and ideological set-up of a library carries its own constraints.

¹ "FAQ". The Vancouver Women's Library Website. Accessed October 17, 2017. <https://www.vancouverwomenslibrary.ca/faq/>.

Chapter 1. (Counter-)publics: some definitions

1.1. Defining the creation of a public as publishing

The essence of publishing, and what it entails, is possibly an unanswerable investigation. From early days of Mesopotamian stone tablets, to eBooks, blogs, social media and the current phenomenon of instant publishing through smart phones, it appears absurd to capture a theory of publishing without a social, political or historical context. However, if one thing could be said about most (if not all) instances materializing and circulating ideas, whether via the vehicle of images, text or sound; it's that all rely on a conceptual belief in a reader, a listener, a spectator, or what I argue: a *public*.

The term *public* had not arrived yet until the late 14th Century from the Old French *public*, influenced directly by the Old Latin term *poplicus*: “pertaining to the people”. The term then gained political traction with concepts of “public office,” “public service” and “public sector.” I approach the notion of a *public* as a kind of social imaginary: a conceptual tool that comes into being in relation to texts and their circulation as laid out by Michael Warner in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002). It's a common practice for pollsters and market researchers to tell us what the supposedly “public interest” is, but Warner argues that this apparatus is designed to characterize a social fact independent of any discursive address or dissemination. I continue Warner's understanding of publics by suggesting that the circulation of a text is a deliberate act that results in more than just the buying of books, rather: it is a political strategy that, in its most effective realization, lays the conditions for a reciprocal conversation between strangers. Warner argues that publics cannot exist apart from the discourse that addresses them, and are dependent on the continuing voluntary interaction with texts through time: “It is the way texts circulate, and become the basis for further representation, that convinces us that publics have activity and duration.”² Along similar lines, Matthew Stadler, the co-founder of Publication Studio and trailblazer in demystifying self-publishing, argues that publishing can't rely on the sale of books per se, that publishing is not simply a tool for transmitting information, but beyond

² Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002.

that can reclaim a space of conversation that beckons a public into being.³ This lays the conditions for those excluded from dominant public discourse, particularly the politically and economically disenfranchised, to form their own counterpublics that work to redraw the boundaries of dominant public spheres of discourse. I enter the understanding of *publics* as scenes of self-activity, of historical rather than timeless belonging, and of active participation rather than ascriptive acceptance.

1.2. Publics and Counterpublics

The notion of a counterpublic is most relevant to this report. In order to fully understand the concept, let's first begin by unpacking the requirements for the formation of a public. In his just cited book, Warner distinguishes between three types of publics. First, the most common meaning of public is that of society or people in general. Second, a public can refer to a specific audience or a crowd witnessing itself, bound together by an event or space (such as a theatrical public). Third, and this is the most significant sense in the context of publishing, connotes the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation. Warner goes further yet and lays out several characteristics of this kind of public:

1. **A public is self-organized.** Warner proposes that it is essential for publics to be organized independently of state institutions, law, formal frameworks of citizenship, or pre-existing institutions such as the church.⁴ He argues that there must be faith in the possibility of a self-organized public, otherwise freedom of discourse cannot occur which is at the heart of a discursive public. Without agency, there is no capability of being addressed or of taking action, thus negating any free participation. A public can only produce a sense of belonging and activity if it is self-organized through discourse rather than through an external framework.⁵
2. **A public is a relation among strangers.** What unites a text-based public is the social imaginary of relations between strangers. Strangers, who engage with the same material, belong to the same discursive world. This applies to other notions of the public as well, Warner explains that: "a nation or public

³ Stadler, Matthew. "What Is Publication?" presented at the Richard Hugo House's writer's conference, "Finding Your Audience in the 21st Century," Portland, September 11, 2010. <http://vimeo.com/14888791>.

⁴ Warner, Michael. p.49.

⁵ Ibid. p.50.

or market in which everyone could be known personally would be no nation or public or market at all.”⁶

3. **The address of public speech is both personal and impersonal.** In engaging with published material, as readers or participants we know that it isn't exactly directed at our individual person. Still, we become more-than-strangers in being addressed indirectly. While we recognize ourselves as addressees, we are also part of the strangerhood at which the material is directed. Our partial nonidentity is part of what it means to regard something as belonging to a public, say in the case of a hit bestseller: as a reader there is a sense of being addressed directly, however there are thousands of other readers experiencing the same thing, a necessary realization for the belonging to its public.
4. **A public is constituted through mere attention.** In contrast, a country or even your local bowling team includes its members whether they are awake or asleep, sober or drunk. A text-based, discursive public commences with the moment of attention and ceases to exist when attention is no longer given. This characteristic allows us to understand publics as scenes of self-activity, of historical rather than timeless belonging, and of active participation rather than ascriptive belonging.⁷
5. **A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse.** We should not think of any singular text as de-facto creating a public. Rather, it is the interaction and concentration of texts through time that lead to the formation of publics. This includes disagreement and antagonism over a topic that may result from a difference genre or scene of circulation entirely. A public should be understood, according to Warner, as an ongoing space of encounter for discourse.
6. **Publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation.** Publics have an ongoing life, they may die and then re-emerge. Published material is circulated, and can be recycled or become the basis for further representation, which then connects to dialogue that is yet to come. The quicker this discourse unfolds, the closer a public is to politics.
7. **A public is poetic world-making.** A public discourse necessitates the freedom of creative expression in gestures, vocabulary and tone that helps shape the identity of a public. Essentially, part of belonging to a public is performative, or at least a conscious witnessing of stylized choices. The strangers who belong to your public are less strange if you can trust them to read as you read, and utilize language and expression in the same way you do.⁸

⁶ Ibid. p.55.

⁷ Ibid. p.60.

⁸ Ibid. p.82.

Warner adds a final manifestation of publics, namely the notion of a *counterpublic* which I unpack here a bit deeper. He relies largely on Nancy Fraser's research into oppositional or subaltern publics, where she writes that "members of subordinated social groups — women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians — have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics."⁹ While counterpublics necessitate the same conditions as other publics, one notable difference is that while other publics exist largely through impersonal discourse, counterpublics often lay out conditions for who is being addressed, i.e. who can meaningfully participate in such (counter-)discourse. As a notable example of this, Fraser cites "the late-twentieth-century U.S. feminist subaltern counterpublic, with its variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places."¹⁰ As Warner notes, "the cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one";¹¹ in this case the main publics that dominated social discourses were male, white and heterosexual.

The poetic-expressive character of such a counterpublic, particularly in the design and material choices during the publishing process, often becomes more important as a clear marker of differentiation. Public discourse imposes a field of tensions within which the counterpublic emerges: "counterpublics are spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesies of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely."¹² The historical and temporal quality of a counterpublic is crucial in understanding its impact and significance. Though counterpublics may die, they are constantly re-emerging and continuing the discourse where it left off. This is a testament to the importance of self-organization, spontaneity, independence and the social temporal context as conditions for the existence of counterpublics.

⁹ Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in Calhoun, *Habermans and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011. p.123

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Warner, Michael. p.86.

¹² Ibid. p.88.

1.3. Counterpublics as sites of publishing

If we can assert that counterpublics exist within the self-organized, world-making conditions of a public, then a solid case can be made that counterpublics will be sites for various publishing initiatives — with the differentiation that counterpublics intentionally claim markers of belonging. One example can be found in the emergence of DIY music labels within the punk rock scene and the publishing of alternative music genres. In 1977 the major record labels controlled about 90 percent of the music industry in the United States.¹³ In his research on punk record labels, Alan O'Connor begins by noting that “the alternative to the music industry is to do it yourself. Each generation of punks discovers that it is not difficult to record songs and have them pressed. At this underground level today the recordings are mostly sold by the band at its shows, traded with other small labels and distributed to indie record stores.”¹⁴

In line with Warner's characteristics of a counterpublic, O'Connor describes punk as an ongoing activity or a series of activities that unfolds contextually and temporally. For many punk bands of the 1970s and 1980s, do-it-yourself was not a choice but a necessity. Of course, there exist punk musicians who have found entries into the dominant public of large record labels; however in this case I am interested in the counterpublics of punks that emerged within that field. The punk scene spawned a specific print culture — one which asserted its readers as publishers of their own music newspapers and fanzines.¹⁵ A requirement for belonging to this counterpublic was a dissatisfaction with dominant publics and the willingness to create alternative material through the do-it-yourself attitude. Simon Reynolds writes in his study of the alternative music scenes of this period:

Part of the poignancy of this period of dissident music is in its increasingly out of sync relationship with the broader culture, which was veering to the right [in the late 70s]. Thatcher and Reagan represented a massive backlash against both the counter-cultural sixties and the permissive seventies. Stranded in a kind of internal cultural exile, post-punk tried to build an alternative culture with its own independent infrastructure of labels, distribution and record stores. The need for 'complete control' led to the birth of pioneering independent record labels Rough Trade, Mute, Factory, SST, Cherry Red and Subterranean. The concept of do-it-yourself proliferated like a virus, spawning a pandemic of samizdat culture—bands

¹³ O'Connor, Alan. *Punk Record Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy: The Emergence of DIY*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Lowndes, Sarah. *The DIY Movement in Art, Music and Publishing. Subjugated Knowledges*. Basingstoke: Taylor & Francis, 2016.

releasing their own records, local promoters organizing gigs, musicians' collectives creating spaces where bands could play, small magazines and fanzines taking on the role of an alternative media.¹⁶

Another example of countercultural publishing and the emergence of a counterpublic is the lesbian feminist publication *Amazon Quarterly: A lesbian feminist arts journal*, edited by Laurel Galana and Gina Covina during the 1970s and 80s. It emerged in the Bay Area, in which an entire row of rental units was known as Amazon Acres for its lesbian demographic.¹⁷ At the time, coming out narratives and same-sex love stories dominated lesbian feminist print culture. In order to posit itself as counter to the dominant themes, *Amazon Quarterly* instead focused on new patterns of thought, relation, speech, action and perception. How would a future disentangled from masculinist schema of power and the economic imperatives of capitalism look, sound, taste, smell, feel?¹⁸ In its first issue, the editors assert that “though we define this as a lesbian-feminist magazine, we aren’t interested solely in stories that tell of lesbian love, the problems of being a lesbian, or the joys. Most of us who read this magazine are quite familiar with all that on the personal front. [...] We simply want the best of communication from lesbians who are consciously exploring new patterns in their lives.”¹⁹ In this assertion, the characteristics of the counterpublic become not only lesbian and feminist but utopian, in opposition to the dominant discourse within lesbian communities.

As Tirza True Latimer notes in her research on *Amazon Quarterly*, the roster of contributors “altered the frame through which *Amazon*’s public viewed the world. They attracted — and indeed, created — a self-empowering, Amazonian counterpublic.”²⁰ One of the editors, Gina Covina, stresses the demystification of publishing which was essential if their counterpublic were to exercise control over the production (and reproduction) of cultural values. The magazine ran an illustrated tutorial, “How to Make Your Own Magazine,” that mapped out *Amazon*’s production process.²¹ At the heart of *Amazon* was the push for visualizing a lesbian feminist counterpublic that would model forms of social and economic disentanglement from capitalism and patriarchy.²² Interestingly, as Latimer notes: “although *Amazon* operated on a strictly not-for-

¹⁶ Reynolds, Simon. *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984*. S.I.: Faber & Faber, 2009.

¹⁷ Latimer, Tirza True. “Amazon Quarterly: Pre-Zine Print Culture and the Politics of Separatism,” in Schreiber, *Modern Print Activism in the United States*. London: Taylor and Francis, 2016.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Frontiers,” *Amazon* 1:1 (Fall 1972), p.5.

²⁰ Latimer, Tira True.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

profit basis, it was denied official non-profit status because, according to the IRS, the lesbian readership it served could not be defined as ‘the public.’”²³

In both examples, from alternative punk scenes to lesbian feminist utopian imagining, the characteristics that define these movements as counterpublics led to a surge in published material. As is the case with most counterpublics, due to its temporal nature, they develop and merge into other (counter-)publics. In both cases, material that was once defiant of the status-quo became recognized and appreciated through institutional acceptance. This may speak less to the efficacy of counterpublic discourse, and more to the nature of transformative qualities of published material. In any case, it is clear that counterpublics provide a fertile ground for the creative materialization of ideas. The publishing of magazines, books, zines, or even music could not have taken place without a foundation of autonomous, defiant, reflexive and creative relations, i.e. counterpublics. The material conditions of sites and spaces are indivisible from how the conditions of a counterpublic arise historically as well as today, which is what I examine further in the next section.

²³ “What You Can Do to Help Miss Q,” *Amazon* 1:4/2:1 (October 1973), p.13.

Chapter 2. Tracing women's book counterpublics from past to present

2.1. A brief history of the women's bookstore movement

Rather than providing a list of the many women's bookstores that blossomed and of which most eventually closed, I intend to focus on the once thriving culture and communication between women's bookstores that can show how vibrant and impactful this movement was. In order to gain a better understanding of the feminist and women's bookstore movement, it is useful to look at the movement and material published through the *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* (FBN), of which the first edition was published in 1976. This was also the year in which women began forging a public identity around books, specifically marked by the first Women in Print (WIP) gathering in Omaha. It was a gathering of publishers, printers, illustrators, and booksellers that together made up women from eighteen feminist bookstores who talked with each other almost nonstop, hungry for this kind of unprecedented connection.²⁴ As scholar Kristen Hogan notes in *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*:

Bookwomen realized they could pool their skills and information to improve access to transformative feminist materials. In the process of sharing with each other an impressive array of books, pamphlets, magazines, and publisher information, bookwomen together wove new feminist theories for, or ways of understanding, a movement-based information economy.²⁵

In order to maintain the connection and information-sharing between women who had attended WIP, the FBN came into being. The very first issue of the FBN made a point to state its values of information-sharing and communication amongst women in the book industry. The following list is of said values that were drafted during the WIP gathering:

1. We want a feminist bookstore newsletter (this is it!) to share information and to help create a communications network based on cooperation rather than (you guessed it) competition.
2. We envision feminist bookstores as a network of "woman's places" and information centers across the country.

²⁴ Hogan, Kristen. *The Feminist Bookstore Movement Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016. p.33.

²⁵ Ibid.

3. We are committed to developing our politics as well as our service functions.
4. We want to find ways of dealing with the inherent contradiction between being revolutionaries and being in a capitalist business system.
5. We want to develop ways of working together that make us more accountable to our communities and to each other.
6. We are committed to actively support the feminist media and to increase its effectiveness.
7. We intend to work on creating a feminist “books in print” which would include ordering information.²⁶

The newsletter was published five to six times a year, from 1976-2000. Included in the first issue was the beginning of a list of five new women’s groups, which emerged out of the Omaha gathering, intended to share skills and knowledge of what is required for publication. The movement was actively being built. By looking at the types of information published through the FBN, we can see how diverse, connected, devoted and far-reaching women’s bookstore culture was. The FBN enabled previously distinct and separate women’s bookstores to sustain conversations about racial justice and other struggles to prioritize a political movement over capitalist-based information distribution.²⁷ Kristen Hogan discovered in her research on feminist bookstores that these bookwomen had not always or only been small business owners but, rather, had been movement organizers enacting feminist literary activism.²⁸ In researching the many editions of the FBN, Hogan noticed certain overlapping themes: “These newsletters [...] are filled with articles by bookwomen offering each other advice about how to start a new bookstore, talk with each other and with publishers, call each other on racism, find children’s books representing lesbians, hold letter-writing campaigns to get books back in print, and more.”²⁹ She found that these bookwomen, who began as shopkeepers, would suddenly become publishers working behind the scenes.

In order to interrupt a corporate circuit of information sharing that largely benefitted wealthy investors, the FBN would include lists of books previously unknown or under-marketed,

²⁶ “At the 1976 Women in Print Conference,” *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 1.1, October 1976. p.2.

²⁷ Hogan, Kristen. p.35.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

which were regularly stocked by the almost one hundred individual feminist bookstores. Hogan describes this as following:

Rather than promoting books to sell, these lists shared word of books as service for readers looking for information on being in the world as a woman of color, coming out, surviving and ending sexual assault, raising confident and thoughtful children, or otherwise participating in feminist movements. Book lists enabled bookwomen to connect readers with the resources they needed and, in turn, to support authors by connecting books with their readers. Fostering this connection was key to the bookwomen's agreed commitment to 'our politics as well as our service functions' and to 'a communications network based on cooperation rather than (you guessed it) competition.'"³⁰

These lists often enabled feminist bookstores to buy books from female authors or women's presses previously unknown, creating an alternative ecosystem of book buying that would support women's work. Even women's book distributors started emerging, such as Women in Distribution (WIND) in Washington, DC, which offered "central distribution for many many women's small presses."³¹ These connections were brought to light and fostered through the FBN. One of the editors of the FBN, Seajay, would come to realizations about the publishing scene in conflicting with the dominant capitalist values: "Is this a way that the book industry is set up to serve profit oriented stores (that won't give ½ inch worth of shelf space to a book that doesn't sell in three months?) and hence the whole decision as to what gets into print is based on what will sell quickly. . . . and that determines what I get to read."³² In much of her editorial writing, Seajay emphasized the role of the FBN in building a feminist literary counterpublic as a site of discourse to prepare other women in the larger community for action and to share strategies for altering a larger public.³³ The goal of building a counterpublic become more and more imminent, which ultimately lead to feminists lobbying publishers as well as building their own skills and starting small presses. What was written about in the many newsletters was also a reflection of how women interacted within the bookstores, where women began training each other as literary and feminist activists.³⁴ Women's bookstores were not only sites of selling books, rather, they fostered intimate connections and became a lifeline of support for many women. Although many of these bookstores have now been closed for quite some time, and the FBN stopped printing in 2000, it is a remarkable achievement that for a quarter of a century

³⁰ Ibid. p.38.

³¹ Ibid. p.40.

³² "Things You Always Wanted to Know," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 1.3, January 1977. p.12

³³ Hogan, Kristen. p.43.

³⁴ Ibid. p.45.

women managed to conceive of and enact alternative information sharing circuits that still echo in some spaces today.

2.1.1. Women's bookstores in Vancouver today

The short answer to the question of women's bookstores in Vancouver today is that there are none. The longer answer, which I provide here, includes the story of a prominent women's bookstore that has recently seen a significant resurgence of interest. The Vancouver Women's Bookstore (VWB) opened its doors in 1973 on Richards Street. According to *Geist*, a local Canadian literary magazine: "To stock the store, organizers bought books from wholesalers, hand-sold them at women's cultural events and used the proceeds to buy more until they had enough books and journals to line the shelves. The bookstore was also a space for literary readings, workshops and political organizing meetings, and it became a connection point for the international feminist network."³⁵ Three break-ins, a firebombing, and two relocations later, the bookstore closed in 1996.

Today, the project of the VWB has re-emerged through an artistic lens. An artist run centre in Chinatown, named 221a, launched *Rereading Room* in 2016. In acquiring the inaugural catalogue of the VWB, 221a restaged the bookstore's setting by displaying a collection of books, documents, and periodicals selected from the titles of the VWB's nascent years. Public programming during the exhibition included a discussion with Jeannine Mitchell, one of the original founders, as well as readings from *Fireweed* which was a Toronto-based feminist periodical that was sprouted from the same historical moment. A year-and-a-bit later, the second iteration of *Rereading Room* was staged at the Belkin Art Gallery, this time with thirteen invited artists, writers, theorists and researchers who occupied the installation for the duration of the exhibition and worked with and against the inventory by reading, annotating and supplementing the collection to form a dossier of responses.³⁶

The resurgence of interest in the VWB is currently restricted to temporary installments, as the current climate of housing unaffordability is leading to alternative ways of thinking about

³⁵ "Vancouver Women's Bookstore." Geist.com. Accessed April 20, 2018. http://www.geist.com/topics/vancouver_women_s_bookstore/.

³⁶ "Beginning with the Seventies." Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery | Beginning with the Seventies GLUT. Accessed April 20, 2018. <http://belkin.ubc.ca/?id=524>.

reviving such a space. As shown by artist-led initiatives, there is clear interest in a more comprehensive understanding of why such spaces shut down and what it may take to reopen them.

2.1.2. A brief history of women's publishing in Vancouver

At one point in time Vancouver had a budding women's publishing scene, made up of presses, magazines, newspapers, bookstores, and a plethora of independent women's groups. Notably at the center of it all was Press Gang Publishers, established in 1974 as a women-only feminist and anti-capitalist collective. They published their first book in 1976, a collection of essays titled *Women Look at Psychiatry*, edited by Dorothy E. Smith and Sara David. Press Gang was also intimately involved in the publishing of *Makara: The Canadian Magazine by Women for People*, which ran from 1975 to 1978. It was a general interest magazine with a focus on arts and poetry. During the same moment in 1974 a women's newspaper called *Kinesis: News About Women That's Not in the Dailies* was started by Vancouver Status of Women. It was published 10 times a year and featured nation-wide female writers and political influencers, covering topics from lesbian feminism to immigrant and anti-classist voices. The VWB was instrumental in selling and distributing much of the burgeoning writing coming out of the women's movement, as well as acting as a political space for women to gather and create an alternative communications circuit.

What united women during the heyday of women's publishing was a firm belief that books could be revolutionary, that language might be able to remake the world, and that writing matters in a profound way. In 1975, women of the Milan Women's Bookstore wrote that "we want to bring together, in the same place, the creative expression of some women with the will to liberate all women."³⁷ Especially trade fiction became a means for transforming women's politics. Reading was essential in early conceptions of second-wave feminism, intertwined with consciousness-raising circles that intended to draw attention to women's own lives and experiences. Lisa Maria Hogeland has argued that consciousness-raising novels were "the most important forms for feminist writers in the 1970s."³⁸ According to Trysh Travis the surge in women's presses was "an attempt by a group of allied practitioners to create an alternative

³⁷ Cicogna, Patricia and de Lauretis, Teresa. *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

³⁸ Hogeland, Lisa Maria. *Feminism and Its Fictions : The Consciousness-raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

communications circuit — a women-centred network of readers and writers, editors, printers, publishers, distributors, and retailers through whom ideas, objects and practices flowed in a continuous and dynamic loop.”³⁹ Women’s presses were not intended to exist as isolated institutions but facilitate a dialogue of knowledge and production amongst a larger network of women. It was thought that this couldn’t prevail within the already existing structures of communication.

The overarching concern amongst the dominant majority of bookwomen was to facilitate a communications network free from patriarchal and capitalist control. Between March 1968 and August 1973, over 560 new publications produced by feminists appeared in the United States, each one serving as a pillar for the movement.⁴⁰ Renowned literary critic Elaine Showalter argues that the work of feminist criticism “is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories.”⁴¹ She explains further that Gynocriticism “begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture.”⁴² In 1976, Harriet Ellenberger and Catherine Nicholson published the first issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, within which they write that “corporate America controls establishment publishing because control of communications ensures control of politics and industry. Corporate presses exist primarily to kill revolution.”⁴³ The perhaps most radical contribution of feminist bookwomen was the aim of changing the way readers understood feminist literature so that reading became relational — a call to accountability that required action. A complex practice of enacting a feminist ethics of dialogue emerged, a speaking with each other rather than for each other and, throughout, a revising of this knowledge through collective meetings, transnational gatherings and the strategic distribution of women’s writing. Such a set-up speaks directly to Warner’s conditions of reflexive, spontaneous and cause-related counterpublics.

³⁹ Travis, Trysh. “The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications.” Johns Hopkins University Press: *Book History*, Volume 11, 2008, pp. 275-300.

⁴⁰ Adams, Kathryn. “Paper Lesbians: Alternative Publishing and the Politics of Lesbian Representation in the United States, 1950–1990.” Diss. U of Texas at Austin. 1994.

⁴¹ Harker, Jaime, and Konchar Farr, Cecilia . *This Book Is An Action: Feminist Print Culture And Activist Aesthetics*. Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ellenberger, Harriet and Nicholson, Catherine. “Dear Beth” In *Sinister Wisdom* 1, no.1 (1976): pp. 126-129.

2.1.3. Women's publishing in Vancouver and beyond

Fast-forward to 2017 and what remains of the blossoming cultural influence held by women during previous decades is largely found stored away in archives and personal collections. Little evidence remains circulated in public discourse about the complexities and sheer volume of what was a transnational women's network that collected itself around books. Most movement-inspired magazines and periodicals have closed down, and those still in print are either struggling to survive or have taken on mainstream feminist views with little variety, such as *Ms Magazine*, *Bitch* and *Bust*. Resistance to male-dominated modes of production was the *raison d'être* of most women's publishing and readerships during the second wave, according to renowned writer and publisher Ritu Menon. In an essay titled "Dismantling the Master's House," Menon says that "feminist publishing, almost without exception and everywhere in the world, came about as a consequence of the women's movement and acted in solidarity with it."⁴⁴ She argues that feminist publishing as a whole originated as a direct consequence of the women's movement and because feminist publishers enabled the message to gain traction. It was precisely the engagement in women's political struggle by women's publishers that enabled them to keep an ear to the ground and anticipate issues later taken up for publishing.

Today the most visible iterations of the women's movement exist in mainstreamed and largely accepted forms of public discourse in historically male dominated institutions. Such visibility and acceptance of women writers today, who are published through mainstream channels, is in part due to the unparalleled energy and work of the women's movement that enabled women to take up positions of editing, publishing, retailing, binding, designing, reviewing and distributing. The majority of explicitly *feminist* writing today — feminist defined in broad terms and encompassing theoretical work as well as social science, creative writing and general interest — is published by academic, university and trade presses. Publishing on feminist topics has become far less economically risky as publishers connected to larger institutions have acquired greater access to marketing, financial capital and are able to navigate market fluctuations. Largely unacknowledged, however, is the influence of a feminist readership and public consciousness for which autonomous women's groups laid the foundation. The early, long-term investments by feminist publishing intentionally cooperated closely with authors, which created a readership of women where there previously was none. Menon argues that despite

⁴⁴ Menon, Ritu. "Dismantling the Master's House ...: The Predicament of Feminist Publishing and Writing Today." *Australian Feminist Studies* 16, no. 35 (2001): pp. 175-84.

increased visibility of women's writing, such as memoirs and autobiographies of female celebrities and politicians, or the pop culture uptake of authors like Margaret Atwood, feminist publishing as a whole has regressed into conflicting modes of production: "commercial publishing is interested in 'Movement as Market', not movement as resistance."⁴⁵ She quotes Indian feminist scholar Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan who urges us to look carefully at "the assumptions and politics that underpin most institutional [and mainstream] spaces that ultimately direct its purposes towards ends that may actually conflict with feminist ones."⁴⁶

The dilemma that feminists in publishing face is one of engendering autonomy and solidarity with the women's movement on the one hand, while having to survive as an institution on the other. This is not unique to publishers, but is a question that anyone belonging to a counterpublic have had to grapple with during a time of pervasive late capitalism. This conversation is especially relevant to other spaces that cultivate readerships, such as libraries, which have historically been catalysts for women's book counterpublics.

2.2. Libraries and (counter-)publics

Libraries differ significantly from bookstores and publishers in that they provide free access to books, meaning that most commonly they exist as subsets of larger institutions or government bodies that provide funding. Nevertheless, the use of libraries by the women's movement and issues of censorship all help unpack the possible conflicts of operating within an institutional framework. This section begins with the Suffragettes' use of libraries, as well as common core values in librarianship and the ways they play out in practice, and is followed by a brief contemporary feminist analysis of librarianship local to Vancouver.

The book-borrowing system as it exists in most libraries is particularly significant in understanding women's book counterpublics, beginning with the early 20th century Suffragette movement. In 1913, the prominent suffragist campaigner Sylvia Pankhurst opened a shop for the Federation of the Suffragettes in East London.⁴⁷ Part of the shop was a lending library that

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Crawford, Elizabeth. *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*. Routledge, 2001. P.346.

supplied “all the young women in the suffrage movement with the books they could not procure in the ordinary way.”⁴⁸ Elizabeth Crawford details the importance of libraries for Suffragettes:

By furnishing reading rooms and libraries with material that would not be found in most homes, activists broadened women’s knowledge of and interest in issues that affected them, the necessity for enfranchisement being the most powerful.⁴⁹

The 1910s saw a surge of women’s libraries in the UK emerging out of the Suffragette counterpublic. Examples included the Women’s Freedom League, the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, the Bedford Women’s Suffrage Society, the Glasgow and West of Scotland Women’s Suffrage Association, the Bristol Suffrage Society and countless more.⁵⁰ The various catalogues from these libraries made a real impact on the public library system in that they lead to the development of categories such as “Women’s Rights” and “Suffrage.”⁵¹ This is an example of public (municipal) libraries reacting to readership demands and being culturally responsive by expanding their collections.

Today the most visible type of library exists as part of a larger institution, such as university libraries or public (municipal) libraries that aspire to fair and equal access to all. Other iterations of current library structures cater to specialized needs and audiences, such as religious institutions, law firms, and First Nations. Here I talk about traditional public libraries and the way in which earlier counterpublics inevitably influenced the inclusive, liberal values that these established institutions espouse today. Such is the case with the Suffragettes and feminist bookwomen who implemented their own strategies when other institutions were not sufficient. Although each library maintains its own unique organizing strategy, there are overarching values that nearly all libraries seem to share today. According to the American Library Association, this core set of values is as follows:

- Access
- Confidentiality/privacy
- Democracy
- Diversity

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p.343.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.345.

⁵¹ Ibid. p.347.

- Education and lifelong learning
- Intellectual freedom
- Preservation
- The public good
- Professionalism
- Service
- Social responsibility.⁵²

Since World War II librarians have agonized over collection management and selection of materials. This debate originated in the context of government campaign against communist sympathies (largely understood as McCarthyism). “Not Censorship but Selection” is a 1953 article written by Lester Asheim reflecting this historical moment which is still central to the way the ALA understands these issues. In his article Asheim differentiates between censorship and selection by understanding the limits of librarians and the physical space of a library:

To demand that all books be equally accessible is to demand that all books occupy the same place on the same shelf – a physical impossibility. And as soon as we defer to the laws of physics and place each book in a different place, we shall start having some books less accessible than others and shall be – in a sense – discriminating against the least accessible.⁵³

Asheim argues that censorship is an intentional threat against freedom of thought, whereas the librarian’s curated selection of materials actively promotes a multiplicity of viewpoints to promote reading and freedom of expression:

In a sense, perhaps, it could be said that the librarian is interfering with the freedom to read whenever he fails to make some book available. But viewed realistically, the librarian is promoting the freedom to read by making as accessible as possible as many things as he can, and his selection is more likely to be in the direction of stimulating controversy and introducing innovation than in suppressing the new and perpetuating the stereotype.⁵⁴

⁵² "Core Values of Librarianship." Advocacy, Legislation & Issues. May 20, 2017. Accessed May 22, 2018. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues>.

⁵³ "Not Censorship But Selection", American Library Association, May 29, 2007. Accessed July 23, 2018. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/NotCensorshipButSelection>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

What is striking about Asheim's article is that the responsibility and limits of librarians as purveyors of democratic access to information is an ongoing and contentious debate today, indicating the way publics and counterpublics continually relate to each other over time. Taking into account the ALA's values and circulated discussions on collection management, the most relevant discussion to this report is the relationship between the physical space of the library, its cataloguing policies and the social responsibility it has towards its constituents (or publics).

An interesting example of how these issues intersect is the West Bend Challenge Case. For most of 2009, the West Bend Community Memorial Library in Wisconsin was facing controversy over how to handle cataloguing disagreements. It all started when two community members, Jim and Ginny Maziarka, sent a letter to the mayor, the library director and the library board requesting "ex-gay" books to be added to the library's collection. A second communication also listed thirty-seven (eventually eighty-two) books, all featuring lesbian and gay topics that the Maziarkas wished to be moved from the teen to the adult section of the library.⁵⁵ The Maziarkas did not argue for censorship, but rather for the relocation and relabeling of books that were deemed inappropriate for teenagers. They contended that "their request reflects the wishes of most adults in the community since they are almost all taxpayers. In their view, the majority of the community is conservative and would therefore agree with their challenge."⁵⁶

In this case, the Maziarkas identified themselves as constituents of the public that the library serves, and argued that the majority of said public held their cataloguing preferences. Other community members did not agree with the Maziarkas and feared censorship, prompting them to create a counter-group named *West Bend Parents for Free Speech*. A public community hearing was held, and the library board voted to allow the books to remain unlabeled in the young adult section.⁵⁷ Both those challenging the library and those opposing the challenge recognized themselves as members belonging to the (dominant) "public" and petitioned the library to conceive of "the public" as their positioning identified it. This illustrates the dilemma of trying to determine the boundaries of a public, especially in regards to a library, which in most cases, claims to serve a municipal public that is inevitably comprised of opposing opinions. The issue

⁵⁵ Knox, Emily. "'The Books Will Still Be in the Library': Narrow Definitions of Censorship in the Discourse of Challengers." *Library Trends* 62, no. 4 (2014). p.743.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.747.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p.743.

here for libraries and librarians is being culturally responsive to the changing identities of their public(s), while maintaining a physical archive that offers democratic access.

Influenced by the discourses that reverberate between counterpublics, from the Suffragettes to the Maziarkas, libraries are faced with constantly re-evaluating the composition of their constituents. The question of how to best serve (and interact with) library users is an ongoing debate within Library and Information Science (LIS). Central to these debates is how to enact a library's core ideological values in negotiation with institutional priorities. This next section deals with an example of how such a process can lead to conflict.

2.2.1. From ideals to praxis: A Vancouver dilemma

Locally in Vancouver, the issue of who constitutes “the public”, and how to enact core library values in response, is alive and well. Baharak Yousefi, a Director on the Board of the BC Libraries Cooperative, scholar and active community member in Vancouver, is concerned about the divergence of library ideals and the actual praxis. In her chapter, “On the Disparity Between What We Say and What We Do in Libraries,”⁵⁸ she cites an incident during the 2014 Vancouver municipal elections. During this election, Trish Kelly was running as a candidate for a seat on the park board with Vision Vancouver. The breadth of her professional experience was pushed into the background when it surfaced that Kelly had openly talked about the sex life of a single person, as well as masturbation, during a Fringe theatrical performance. Vision Vancouver decided to remove Kelly from the ballot in order to steer attention back towards election issues. During the unfolding of these events, a Kelly supporter contacted the library where Yousefi worked and asked to host a panel discussion with Kelly about democracy, diversity and what it is like to be an Indigenous woman in Canadian politics. Yousefi writes that her workplace decided against hosting such a panel, which was later held at the university (unnamed) but without the support or involvement of the library.⁵⁹ Yousefi notes that this example is not shocking, but rather illustrative of a disconnect between ideological values and the praxis of them. She says that:

⁵⁸ Lew, Shirley, and Baharak Yousefi. “On the Disparity Between What We Say and What We Do in Libraries” in *Feminists among Us: Resistance and Advocacy in Library Leadership*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.46.

We routinely make decisions that oppose our declared values. We decline opportunities to host forums on democracy and citizen engagement. We choose library vendors that do not align with our stated goals and principles. We claim intellectual freedom as a core value, but silence professional dissent within our own ranks.⁶⁰

She goes on to critique the judgment of deciding not to host the panel with Trish Kelly, focusing on the common excuse of libraries needing to exemplify neutrality and non-political ideals:

We often relied on the language of neutrality to explain and justify our decisions. In the Trish Kelly incident, for example, we were keen to maintain neutrality and hosting her at our library would have signaled a non-neutral, political stance. This pursuit of neutrality in libraries has, in the past, provided an effective strategy to silence dissent and to secure consent from marginalized groups.⁶¹

Clearly, librarians who work within parent institutions, such as universities, have to cope with sources of frustration. While libraries and individual librarians may want to engage in controversial issues, such as the Trish Kelly panel, negotiating the practical terms with governing bodies frequently leads to compromises that leave ideological goals behind. Cecily Walker, a librarian at the Vancouver Public Library, concurs that:

There's been a lot of talk online about diversity in library and information science and it's great but all we're basically doing is trying... to fit people into a system that was not designed for them, that was basically set up for them to fail. And is that fair, or should we be looking at a way to radically redevelop the system so that it's equitable to everybody no matter what you bring to the table. It's not a liability, it's a strength, and that can only help us be better.⁶²

Unease is felt amongst librarians in Vancouver, partly because of the institutional structures that hold them in place, but also because of how differing counterpublics identify themselves as a dominant municipal public in need to be served. In the Trish Kelly case, the library decided against hosting a public panel, which happened anyway due to demand. In doing so, the library inadvertently made a case that hosting a panel would mean endorsing it, and it did not want to endorse Trish Kelly. This reasoning, if made consistently, could easily lead to the notion that cataloguing texts equals their endorsement. In the social media world, users are now commonly using the phrase “retweet not endorsement” or “sharing not endorsing” as a way to signal a kind

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.92.

⁶¹ Ibid. p.96.

⁶² Yelton, Andromeda. “Episode 1 - Cecily Walker”. *Open Paren*. Podcast audio, October 13, 2015, <http://openparen.club/episode-1-cecily-walker>.

of opposition to the content while still wanting to share the issue at hand. It seems infeasible for libraries to issue such a statement for each individual item they carry.

Underlying the decision not to host Trish Kelly is the idea that a physical space, such as an archive or a collection, can be identified with the political decision making of its staff and constituents. In examining the case study of the Vancouver Women's Library, I consider to what extent a space can be identified as a member of its own counterpublic, and how this changes the role of the library.

Chapter 3. Case study: the Vancouver Women's Library

3.1. Publishing a movement: the private becomes public

The task of feminism is overwhelmingly linked to bringing feminist issues into the dominant public discourse, with the realization that the spheres of the public and the private are social constructs shaped by political power. Both Sally Cole and Lynne Phillips have collected their ethnographic research in *Contesting Publics* (2013) and argue that to conceive of the public as a uniform, stable, politically consensual “sphere” is not only theoretically inadequate but also politically misleading.⁶³ They challenge the idea that the public is somehow “out there”: a bounded object of study with a discernible point of entry by a neutral observer. Cole and Phillips demonstrate that “when a dominant, masculinist public sphere views conjugal abuse as ‘domestic’ or as ‘private’ and presents no options for women to present grievances, a parallel public sphere, such as the national advice column, assists individual women to navigate the power which shapes their lives.”⁶⁴ The well-known feminist outcry “The Personal Is Political” has been an essential part of the emancipatory narrative of contesting the public sphere and what issues are worthy of public concern. Publics make a difference to whether and how women’s poverty, sexual rights or femicide are addressed as issues of common interest. Based on the experience and viewpoint of women, feminist politics have continuously recognized that the relationship of two — say the dominant husband and wife relationship — is a “society”, is a public relationship, and is regulated by the state: not as an exempt sphere of personal liberty, but as a political structuring of the personal.⁶⁵

The public/private divide is central to any feminist analysis of women’s lives, as women still struggle to participate in a public life that historically benefits men first. Various iterations of the Women’s Liberation Movement, particularly the second wave which exploded in the first half of the 1970s, can be described as documenting women’s existence in the public sphere through the writing and publishing of books, magazines and periodicals, and through the institutions that enable their distribution. Many of these texts served as the primary inspiration for women for

⁶³ Phillips, Cole, and Cole, Sally Cooper. *Contesting Publics: Feminism, Activism, Ethnography*. London: Pluto Press, 2013.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Kappeler, Susanne. “Liberals, Libertarianism, and the Liberal Arts Establishment” In *Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism*, edited by Dorchen E.H. Lendholt and Janice G. Raymond. Oxford, 1990.

reading about — and engaging in — their own experiences. The importance of women’s writing can be seen enacted in a number of protagonists from the feminist novels of the 1970s and 80s, such as Margaret Atwood’s *Lady Oracle* (1976) or Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982), both of which books feature a female protagonist and her relationship to writing. Literary critic Rita Felski argues that:

The feminist novel focuses upon areas of personal experience which women are perceived to share in common beyond their cultural, political, and class differences. The feminist public sphere exemplifies a re-politicization of culture which seeks to relate literature and art to the specific experiences and interests of an explicitly gendered community.⁶⁶

Women’s writing and feminist literary criticism inevitably spills into the way women interact and understand each other in their day-to-day lives. The feminist bookstore movement engendered an infrastructure of a decentralized collectivity, leading to a network of women’s presses and bookstores. Such an infrastructure allowed women to find each other through reading and writing, despite their differences, acknowledging what unites them and supporting a shared vision of community through literary narratives. In *Consciousness and Authenticity: Toward a Feminist Aesthetic* (1975), Marcia Holly writes that:

Feminist criticism represents the repudiation of previous formulations about women. It has emerged from a radical perspective about literature and sex roles, and is a tentative beginning in the development of a feminist literary aesthetic — one that is fundamentally at odds with masculinist value standards, measuring literature against an understanding of authentic female life.⁶⁷

It's clear that strong influential connections exist between sites of engagement, particularly in the case of feminist book collections, and the counterpublics that use them. The question remains to what extent a physical space can cause or control a counterpublic, which I examine further in the next section.

⁶⁶ Felski, Rita. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Harvard University Press, 1989. p.167.

⁶⁷ Holly, Marcia. "Consciousness and Authenticity: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic" In *Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory*, edited by Donovan Josephine, 38-47. University Press of Kentucky, 1989. p.46.

3.2. The VWL: a counterpublic?

The Vancouver Women's Library (VWL) emerged in early 2017 as an idea before it was even named. When a few friends and I set the idea in motion, it immediately gained traction and uncovered a significant number of local and international women who had been pining for such a space to open. Previous strangers, who had independently developed a shared understanding of women's relationship to books and writing, discovered that they were part of a larger reviving of (what looked and felt like) a women's counterpublic. In order to disseminate whether the VWL meets the conditions of a (counter-)public, I revisit Michael Warner's set of characteristics in order to contextualize the momentum behind and against the VWL.

The word "feminist" or "feminism" is widely accepted and encouraged in academic and public libraries, but there are limits as to how meaningfully feminist values can be enacted in the slow paced bureaucracy of institutional organization. As library institutions start naming those feminist values, there is an inevitable pushback by those who identify themselves as feminists if their own feminist values are not named by the institutions who claim to represent them. Similar to the origins of the feminist bookstore movement, a growing urge for information-sharing amongst soon-to-be members of the VWL began to surface as a way of responding to, what many felt, was lacking in the most common denominator of feminism.

In 2017, setting the idea of a women-centric library in motion, we converted my 100 ft² weaving studio at The Bakery (1670 Franklin Street) into a collection of women's writing in. Together with another student, I managed to gather about 80 books of women's writing from my own personal collection and from close friends. We built shelves out of cinderblocks and 2x4s and used my grandfather's computer to sign women up for membership through the free online cataloguing software Libib.

Soon it wasn't just us two students anymore: our group grew and the library received international interest in the opening of a women's library, including requests from women who heard about the project and wanted to start their own localized chapters. What had previously been an unnamed, private longing of women who independently had come across the history of women's bookstores and spaces, was now suddenly a way for strangers to relate to each other through the emergence of a women's library. The markers "women" and "library" called the attention of those who identified in some capacity as users of the service which the VWL sought to provide. It became clear that the idea of sharing books written by women amongst women was

not isolated to our group of friends, but was something many feminists felt was lacking in their own communities. The momentum behind our experiment was unexpected and spontaneous. Little did anyone know how small in actuality we were; however, this didn't prevent us from opening our doors and officially welcoming women to borrow our books and spend time in our tiny space. What can be said in relation to Michael Warner's definition of a public, is that the increasing number of constituents interested in the VWL were (spontaneously) self-organized, at first being an experiment between friends which then unexpectedly developed into an organized network of women. The gap of women-centered bookstores and libraries was understood independently by those who previously had been strangers and who found each other through the opening of the VWL. Women who showed interest in participating in this newly emerged space were personally and impersonally invested in the history of women's bookstores, which lead to a resurfacing of an old discourse, and called their attention through the name itself.

3.2.1. A social space: a site of engagement

The VWL was not just a physical site of engagement between women, it also evolved into a discursive space involving participants from Vancouver and beyond. It began when the VWL, on its opening night, met with fierce, persistent and even violent protest by about two dozen people who did not see themselves as represented in the project. The group was loosely organized under the acronym GAG: Gays Against Gentrification. Before getting into the details, let me make clear from the start that I wear two hats. My first hat is that of an active participant in the dispute who as a co-founder of the VWL has a close knowledge of, and sympathy for, its side of the story. The other hat I wear makes me a scholar, the author of this Report, who tries to present a balanced, fair and objective account about what really went on.

In now wearing that second hat, I address three questions in particular that need brief but precise documentation. The first is: did the pushback around the time of the opening of the VWL come from a decentralized network or more specifically from a counterpublic under the acronym GAG? In other words, is it justified to categorize GAG as counterpublic in opposition to the VWL? The second question addresses the initial location of the VWL and to what extent the neighbourhood was not merely a geographical space but also a socio-political one, the coordinates of which contributed to contentiousness. This question merges with a third one,

namely was GAG justified in using the acronyms SWERF and TERF⁶⁸ to describe the founders and members of the VWL?

As to the first question of the extent to which GAG was implicated in the protests and the circulation of the open letter during the VWL's opening, I want to draw proper attention to GAG's clarification in an online Facebook post, detailing their role, or rather their denial of having played a role:

Concerning our recent published note, we were forwarded this letter by a decentralized group of individuals who wrote it collectively. They did not identify themselves as any specific body or organisation and requested another party publish the note. It was suggested that the note be copied by other facebook groups who were in solidarity with the demands, and be distributed widely. GAG decided to publish it because we agreed that the concerns outlined in the letter aligned with our own views around these issues.^{69 70}

The open letter may indeed have been written by a decentralized group of individuals. Yet GAG would seem to have been all the same a core element of a counterpublic. GAG writes that “the protest that occurred outside the opening of the Vancouver Women's Library was not an action organized by GAG.”⁷¹ This is a fair point to make. Yet participants in the outside demonstration as well as in the disruption that occurred inside where the main instances of vandalism and physical aggression took place, did not hide their GAG allegiance. Moreover, the grouping and organizing of the anti-VWL counterpublic was done publicly through the medium of GAG's Facebook page. Therefore, in spite of the pushback from GAG, it is difficult to see how they would not meet the conditions of counterpublic, justifying the use of their acronym in describing the opposition to the VWL.

Let us now turn to the second question, the context of the VWL's initial location. For several months before the VWL was launched, the space was my personal weaving studio. It was situated in The Bakery, a gallery and grouping of independent artist studios run by a female artist

⁶⁸ SWERF stands for Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminist, TERF stands for Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist

⁶⁹ “A response to the response to the response to The Vancouver Women's Library”. Gays Against Gentrification's Facebook page, accessed Aug. 1, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/gag-gays-against-gentrification/response-to-the-response-to-the-response-to-the-vancouver-womens-library/381088575593620/>.

⁷⁰ Perhaps one also needs to add that the core group of protesters who were at the initial disruption of the VWL have been seen recurrently at other protests of expensive coffee shops around the Downtown Eastside (DTES)

⁷¹ See reference 68.

with Indigenous roots. Its address is Franklin Street, notoriously known as “the strip” on which predominantly men can be seen purchasing predominantly women and girls, disproportionately Indigenous, for sexual interaction. Much criticism was directed at the VWL for this choice of location, given that the VWL was deemed “anti-sex work” and “anti-trans”, and thus supposedly misplaced in an area fraught with poverty, racism, sexism, and also gentrification. The VWL was accused of adopting the same political stance as a local women’s shelter, the Vancouver Rape Relief and Women’s Shelter (VRRWS), which provides a 24-hour rape crisis line and shelters women and children escaping male violence, often women in prostitution who want to exit the trade. The shelter’s stance on prostitution supports the criminalization of johns (sex-buyers) and the decriminalization of prostituted women:

We provide assistance to women who are currently being prostituted, women who are trying to escape prostitution, and women who have been trafficked into prostitution. The kinds of front line support that VRRWS provides to women and girls in prostitution include crisis line support, transitional housing, accompanying women to the police, and helping them find immediate relief when faced with a situation of violence.⁷²

GAG argued that because of brief instances of unaffiliated volunteered labour by members of the VWL for VRRWS, the VWL had taken a stance on Bill C-36 (2014) and was crypto-affiliated with the policies put forth by VRRWS. One can understand why GAG was suspicious that VWL and the VRRWS were somehow linked, yet this simply was not factual. The VWL had no specific stance on either Bill C-36 nor any formal connection with VRRWS. The VWL however did provide an array of relevant reading material in its initial collection of only 100 books.

Moreover, the VWL was keen to receive suggestions for how to expand its modest beginnings. The “suggestion” function on the VWL’s website, which could be used to anonymously submit titles for future ordering and which was active before the protest, had not been used by the time the open letter was circulated. Once again, in fairness, GAG did state that “we are currently compiling a comprehensive list of suggestions that we will share” but then they added that this would only happen “when the other demands are met”.⁷³ Those demands included the stepping-down of the second co-founder and a restructuring of the VWL’s board of directors,

⁷² "Rape Relief's Work with Women in Prostitution." Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter (blog). Accessed August 1, 2018. <https://www.rapere reliefshelter.bc.ca/learn/resources/rape-reliefs-work-women-prostitution>.

⁷³ “A response to The Vancouver Women’s Library”. Gays Against Gentrification’s Facebook page, accessed June 18, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/gag-gays-against-gentrification/response-to-vancouver-womens-library/379623995740078/>.

which did not exist. This should indicate to the careful observer that those who wrote the open letter had no factual understanding of how the VWL was structured previous to the protest. The list of suggestions for books to include was never received. Rather, they doubled down with the further claim that the VWL “enact[s] violence on sex workers by working to deny their access to resources and support. They work alongside the colonial government to pass bills that do direct violence to sex workers, such as, Bill C-36.”⁷⁴ Not mentioned was that the VWL, being located on the Franklin strip, carried material and first-hand accounts written by women who had experience being prostituted in the DTES. This literature included a recent study by Melissa Farley and Jacqueline Lynne, who conducted brief, structured interviews with 100 prostituting women and children from the DTES, Franklin strip and Broadway/Fraser area.⁷⁵ It seems a non-sequitur to accuse a free, independent library with a meagre collection of 100 books of enacting “violence against sex workers” when what it really does is provide literature on the empirical, front-line evidence suggesting that men who buy sex cause the demand for women to experience sexual violence on a daily basis.

Most central to the demands detailed in the open letter was that “the library needs to have a policy of not featuring titles that are written by non-trans women and non-sex workers that dehumanize, speak over and advocate harm towards trans women and sex workers.”⁷⁶ GAG claimed that the following list of books from the VWL’s original catalogue engendered violence and should be removed:

- *Admission Accomplished* — Jill Johnston
- *Against Sadomasochism* — Robin R. Linden, Darlene R. Pagano, Diana E. Russell, Susan Leigh Star

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ The following conclusion was formulated from this study:

Fifty-two percent of our interviewees were women from Canada’s First Nations, a significant over-representation of this group of people, compared to their representation in the population of Vancouver generally (1.7– 7 percent).

Ninety-five percent of our interviewees said that they wanted to escape prostitution, while at the same time also telling us that they did not feel that they had other options for survival. If we consider ‘consent to prostitution’ as indicating that these women had viable economic alternatives in their lives, then they certainly did not consent to prostitution, in that meaning of the word.

Farley, Melissa, and Jacqueline Lynne. "Prostitution in Vancouver: Pimping Women and the Colonization of First Nations." *In Not For Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography*. Spinifex, 2004. p.121.

⁷⁶ See reference 72.

- *Amazon Odyssey: Collection of Writings* — Ti-Grace Atkinson
- *Buddhism after Patriarchy* — Rita M. Gross
- *The Female Man* — Joana Russ
- *Female Sexual Slavery* — Kathleen Barry [sic]
- *Feminism Unmodified* — Catharine A. Mackinnon
- *First Buddhist Women: Poems and Stories of Awakening* — Susan Murcott
- *Gyn/Ecology* — Mary Daly
- *The Idea of Prostitution* — Sheila Jeffreys
- *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of the Global Sex Trade* — Sheila Jeffreys
- *Intercourse* — Andrea Dworkin
- *The Lesbian Heresy* — Sheila Jeffreys
- *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* — Geraldine Brooks
- *Not a Choice, Not a Job: Exposing the Myths about Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade* — Janice Raymond
- *Not for Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography* — Adrienne Rich
- *Of Women Born* – Adrienne Rich
- *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* — Andrea Dworkin
- *Radical Acceptance* — Tara Brach
- *The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism* — Janice Raymond
- *Women As Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle over Women's Freedom* — Janice Raymond⁷⁷

In immediate response to the publishing of GAG's banned book list, an anonymous counter-petition made the case for keeping said titles on the shelves which gained nearly 3,000 signatures. The petition reads (in part):

These works — written by renowned women authors who have a long history of engaging in critical analysis against the oppression of women as a class — focus on female exploitation, male supremacy, violence against women, reproductive

⁷⁷ Ibid.

freedom, lesbian identity, women's health and buddhist mindfulness. As a matter of principle and in defense of freedom of speech and thought, no library should ever ban any books under any circumstance — especially ones written by and for women at the VWL. As fascism takes deeper root throughout the world, it is more important than ever that any attempt to silence women in their struggle for liberation is resisted by all, at every moment. We urge the Progressive Librarians Association to publicly support the VWL as they reject these draconian demands and choose to keep these books on their shelves.⁷⁸

The claim that “ongoing violence against trans women, sex workers, and IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour) [was] perpetuated by one of the main organizers”⁷⁹ was never substantiated in the open letter or through anonymous whistleblowing. A further claim by GAG was that “organizers refuse public conversations, won’t engage with those who are directly impacted, and refuse to speak to the violence they have enacted with the VWL and organizing outside of it.”⁸⁰ The online video of the disruption at the VWL’s opening night clearly shows an opposite version of events, during which protesters can be seen hurling insults and speaking over VWL members attempting to engage.⁸¹ Also, no instances of alleged violence were cited or detailed, which made it difficult for the VWL to meaningfully engage.

Let us now turn to the third point of contention. Shortly after the initial protest, the outside of The Bakery was spray painted overnight with the slogans “Class War”, “No TERFs No SWERFs” and “This Space H8s Women”. The sentiment expressed and the language used were similar if not directly related to GAG’s online campaign against the VWL. GAG did not comment on the graffiti; they neither took responsibility nor did they condemn it.

GAG also claimed in the original open letter that the VWL is “complicit in the deaths of trans women.”⁸² While still in the initial Franklin location, then NDP candidate Morgane Oger, who identifies as a trans woman, visited the VWL and donated books about trans issues and written by trans women. Oger again visited the new location on Kingsway and again donated books. All donated material was accepted and shelved in the LGBTQ section, as well as featured in the VWL’s window displays and circulated on its various social media channels. Books by

⁷⁸ Anonymous. "Protect Feminist Books at Vancouver Women's Library" Change.org. February 4, 2017. Accessed October 17, 2017. <https://www.change.org/p/protect-feminist-books-at-vancouver-women-s-library>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Transactivists Harass Feminists at the Vancouver Womens Library Launch." YouTube. February 08, 2017. Accessed August 02, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ4sbNVkJnM>.

⁸² See reference 72.

Amber Dawn, Leslie Feinberg, Ivan Coyote, Melissa Gira Grant and Zena Sharman were requested through our website and subsequently ordered by the VWL and made available. The VWL developed close ties with Indigenous activist and educator Fay Blaney, raised money for Indigenous sex trade survivor Bridget Perrier, sold merchandise made by local Indigenous activist Audrey Siegl with all proceeds going to her, and began a comprehensive collection of multilingual texts as well as made way for more women of color to take on leadership roles. The VWL explicitly stated in its original mandate that “self-identified women are welcome”, however the counterpublic behind GAG felt that “the moniker ‘self-identified’ is used by cis women as a move to innocence from their complicity in violence against trans women. It is used to mark trans women as ‘Other’ and centre themselves again as victims of patriarchy.”⁸³ A proper discussion of trans theory – from Jan Morris at Oxford, via more recently Joan Roughgarden at Stanford, to today’s Aaron Devor at the University of Victoria – although desirable, would carry me beyond the scope of this Report, both in terms of topic and word limit. That being said, the VWL did eventually carry an array of writing on trans theory, gender theory and opposing views on the sex industry, some of it donated and much of it newly ordered.

The controversy that surrounded the VWL reverberated across the city and beyond by means of social media and word of mouth. Videos and pictures of the protest went viral amongst feminist communities. In expressions of solidarity, money started pouring into our Paypal account. Within three weeks after the initial opening and protest, we received over CAD \$26,000 in donations. The VWL received a handwritten card of encouragement from Margaret Atwood, as well as a visit of support from *Journeywoman* author Kate Braid. Several hundred books were donated by women as a sign of support, including a 400 book donation from two independent women in Seattle who had collected a lifetime of lesbian pulp fiction. We also received hundreds of old out-of-print feminist magazines and newspapers from the original founders of the Vancouver Women’s Bookstore.

The unexpected pushback by GAG and its associates that stunned the VWL and its participants appeared engendered by an opposing counterpublic. The strong-arm tactics were not conducive to a discourse with the possibility of resulting in common ground, even though at the level of individual “cross-party” relationships, attempts at interchange were made, but without success. However, the discourse of this social space spread widely as other feminist groups were suddenly expected to take a stance and issue statements about the VWL. The opening of the

⁸³ Ibid.

VWL was met with both support and outrage within feminist communities that took place outside of the space itself. The emergence of a reflexive, social discourse emboldened the growing number of constituents behind the VWL and galvanized its members to eventually move the physical collection into a bigger and more accessible space at 1255 Kingsway Street during the month of March 2017.⁸⁴ The conflict slowed down after the initial opening week and GAG, for the most part, ceased its public pushback once the VWL inhabited its new location. For a timeline of events during February 2017 from the VWL's perspective, see Appendix A.

3.2.2. Poetic world-making

As to Michael Warner's point that a public is poetic world-making, it may be useful to look at the ways in which the VWL engaged its members outside of borrowing and reading books. Warner asserts that creative expression in gestures, vocabulary and tone helps shape the identity of a public. This most notably took place in the attempts by the VWL to create a readership around the physical collection.

Our first public event was held at the SFU Harbour Centre in downtown Vancouver in May 2017. We invited independent scholar, historian and author Max Dashu to speak about what she knows best: women's history and in particular the history of witch hunts. She presented her new book *Witches and Pagans* which sold out almost immediately. Over 110 people came to the lecture, mostly women, many of whom signed up for a membership at the VWL to continue to delve into women's histories. This lecture aided in setting the tone of what happens in the library, namely the circulation of women's writing, by emphasizing historical feminist scholarship.

In order to further engage women around books, the VWL initiated a series of film screenings that showcased women and cinema. The film program included Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman*, Freida Lee Mock's *Anita Hill: Speaking Truth to Power*, and Holly Morris' *The Babushkas of Chernobyl*. Other reoccurring events included writing workshops around grief

⁸⁴ The VWL closed its doors on August 1st, 2018. A public statement on the website states that "There are many factors which have contributed to our decision." Additionally, a book sale was held "to pay off some of [their] debts--specifically pertaining to rent and utilities." All in all, the VWL was open and active for 19 months.

"Public Statement Regarding the Closure of the Vancouver Women's Library." The Vancouver Women's Library Website. Accessed August 15, 2018. <https://www.vancouverwomenslibrary.ca/public-statement-of-closure/>

and loss, flash tattoo events, and providing a space for local women's groups to hold discussions, significantly The Asian Women Coalition to End Prostitution (AWCEP). The most heavily attended events were workshops for women's hormonal health, facilitated by a local doula and nutrition experts.

Tone and creative expression were essential components in drawing the attention of those who may not use the book borrowing services on a daily basis, but saw themselves still as part of the library's constituents. The overarching goal was to give a life to the collection, to contextualize our titles and to set the tone of reading books differently. The physical space of the library allowed for spontaneous and subversive ideas about how to interact with the written texts. For example, during the two-part weaving and stitching workshop in July 2017 called *Subversive Stitch*, we listened to texts from our archive on the historical connections between women and textile arts while facilitating the actual tutorial. The aim was to create an understanding of women's written work by embodying theory and history into the present, thereby emboldening a group of women who may not necessarily be avid readers to begin with, but who leave having signed up for a membership and a renewed interest in feminist literacy.

3.2.3. Counterpublics: a reaction to library neutrality

While publics exist most commonly as impersonal discourse, according to Warner's reading of Nancy Fraser, *counterpublics* often lay out conditions for who is being addressed. At the heart of the VWL is the creation of library services specifically for women, affirming in its name that men are excluded from participating. This is in contrast to most public libraries, which serve municipal or institutional populations, often in conjunction with government policies. Public libraries in Canada are established on a provincial level by legislation that lays out the governance structure, while funding sources vary widely across the country.

It's largely accepted that acquisition policies at public libraries are not driven by the personal opinions of librarians, but rather that they strive to provide as wide a variety of material as possible, including unpopular or controversial material. Such values of toleration and variety have their beginnings in modern liberalism, initially introduced by the Romantics who saw cultural variety in itself as a good thing.⁸⁵ According to Isaiah Berlin, renowned social-political theorist and writer, the core liberal characteristic is empathy. Berlin argues that empathy enables

⁸⁵ Ignatieff, Michael. *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*. Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2006. p.341.

one's capacity to be open, receptive and unafraid of opinions that are alien to one's own.⁸⁶ Underlying Berlin's commitment towards liberalism is the assumption that human beings are inevitably conflicted with one another, necessitating a deep moral pluralism. According to Berlin's assessment of pluralism, our fundamental values and beliefs are in a condition of irreconcilable conflict.⁸⁷ In other words: "The conflict between values is not the symptom of a defective constitution but is inseparable from human life."⁸⁸ In order to mitigate conflict, Berlin suggests a kind of "equilibrium, necessarily unstable, [...] to promote the maximum practicable degree of sympathy and understanding, never likely to be complete."⁸⁹ This idea of accepting and tolerating a plurality of ideas is the groundwork on which libraries build values such as intellectual freedom, diversity and access.

However, the implementation of a pluralist, liberal society (or institution) is not without problems. To propel a pluralist society with varying persuasions, the liberal solution necessitates a degree of tolerance towards those opinions one doesn't agree with. To put this idea into perspective, Wendy Brown notes in *Tolerating Aversion* that only recently "has tolerance become an emblem of Western civilization, an emblem that identified the West exclusively with modernity, and with liberal democracy in particular, while also disavowing the West's savagely intolerant history."⁹⁰ Isaiah Berlin may ask how we could not afford to be tolerant in the face of hundreds of different creeds and backgrounds (i.e. conflict in ideology). Brown argues that underlying liberalism is the presupposition that we are all likely to hate and kill one another. She points out that this leads to the conception of citizenship as individualized, passive and isolated, with people barely able to contain their aversion of each other.⁹¹ According to Lisa H. Schwartzman, liberals tend to think that a framework of tolerance is neutral.⁹² She challenges this by noting that the liberal methodology has always carried along with it key patriarchal

⁸⁶ Ibid. p.375.

⁸⁷ Smith, Steven B. "The Tragic Liberalism of Isaiah Berlin." In *Modernity and Its Discontents*, Chapter 013. Yale University Press, 2018. p.276.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p.277.

⁸⁹ Berlin, Isaiah. "The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West" in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy. Princeton University Press, 1990. p.47.

⁹⁰ Brown, Wendy. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. p.37.

⁹¹ McAfee, Noëlle. "Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire. By Wendy Brown." *Constellations* 15, no. 3, 2008. p.473.

⁹² Brennan, Samantha. "Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique (review)." *Hypatia* 23, no.1. 2008. p.220.

assumptions. For instance, the right to privacy is used to defend women's reproductive freedoms while also shielding the family from moral scrutiny, when women experience domestic violence and unfair labor distribution.

The ideal of neutrality, i.e. the equal tolerance of all conflicting positions, is ingrained in the way libraries are upheld and valued as liberal institutions. Underlying the value of library *neutrality* is the assumption that the physical space of a library must not take sides if there are two or more opposing viewpoints. In general, libraries assert they give equal importance to every piece of material. American librarian Joseph Good says the following of library neutrality:

One is left not with an argument for an idea, but merely the quasi-religious certainty that the idea must be advocated for the public good. If this is what a librarian is reduced to — airing arguments merely because they exist in opposition to popular, moral, or ethical ideas — then the librarian is indeed peddling a set of hollow wares: ideas denuded of any moral or intellectual consequence.⁹³

The Vancouver Women's Library asserts itself as an alternative to the myth of neutrality by intentionally excluding any texts written by men. It is explicitly a service for women, by women, about women. The reasoning comes from a feminist analysis of the distribution of power, because as feminists well know, "neutrality" is simply another word for the male status quo. American educator and socialist Myles Horton says that neutrality is "a code word for the existing system. It has nothing to do with anything but agreeing to what is and will always be— that's what neutrality is. Neutrality is just following the crowd. Neutrality is just being what the system asks us to be."⁹⁴ By only carrying material produced by women, we explicitly countered library neutrality, or rather: we countered the service that a public library cannot provide women with. Such a service includes access to borrow rare writing by women that isn't on mainstream reading lists as well as discontinued books from public libraries that have been deemed "outdated" and removed. It also includes access to out-of-print feminist periodicals, pamphlets and magazines.

Most importantly, the VWL provides a space for women to realize the full breadth of women's accomplishments and lives without having to arduously search hundreds of databases. If a woman is interested in reading science fiction by Ursula K. Le Guin or a memoir by Gloria Steinem, she may very well find it at her public library and be satisfied with that service. But

⁹³ Lewis, Alison M. *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian*. Duluth, Minn.: Library Juice Press, 2008.

⁹⁴ Horton, Myles. *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*. Temple University Press, 1990.

what's missing at the public library is a *women's* public. What's missing is an encouragement for women to not just read the canonical male texts, but to engage with texts written by women on the same topic that are not recognized within the dominant discourse. And so, within the name of the VWL, it is clear that the space and its users were part of a *counterpublic*, rather than a public, which has clear guidelines of who can meaningfully participate in the discourse surrounding its site of engagement.

3.2.4. Lending + Membership data

The data presented here ranges from the official opening of the VWL, 3rd February 2017, to the time at which I began writing this Report, approximately the end of October 2017, covering about 8 months. This data shows the extent to which the counterpublic grew in its initial phase. By looking at the growth of membership, the rate of lending books and the most popular books in our catalogue, it is possible to get a sense of the character or “personality” of the counterpublic behind the VWL. The overall trends of the VWL's constituent's behaviour is a useful tool in grounding a socially reflexive discourse by looking at the underlying activity within the physical space.

Membership

In total, the VWL has signed up 368 members, all women. As a matter of record, it should be added that debates about gender theory did not accompany the VWL's membership recruitment. The top three most active members have taken out 15 books (Figure 3), while the average lending activity from each user has been 2.8 books since opening. Out of the 368 members, 161 have been actively taking out and returning books. February 2017 was the highest rate of signing up new members (a total of 67), while the average rate since then has been 45 new membership signups per month (Figure 1). Of those, the average rate of active members (active meaning they take out and return books) was 30 per month.

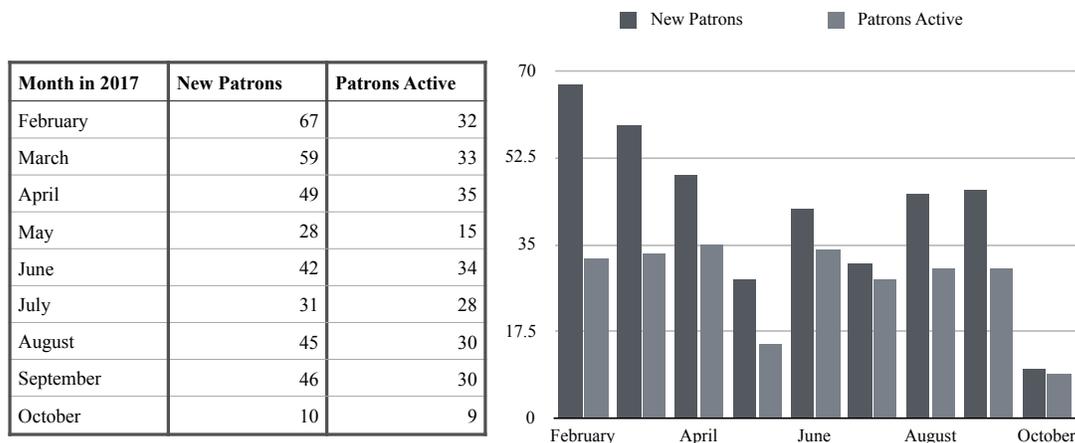


Figure 1: New vs Active Patrons (Members) at the VWL Feb - Oct 2017

Lending

As of October 2017, a total of 1793 books (all written by women) have been added to the catalogue since starting the project. This does not include rare out of print material and feminist ephemera, such as magazines or pamphlets, which are currently unavailable to be borrowed outside of the library. The average addition of new titles per month is 163 (Figure 2), mostly acquired through donations from members and the larger community. A total of 459 books have been checked out in total, averaging 55 books checked out per month, the busiest month having been June 2017 with 65 checked out books. The top five most popular books (each checked up to 5 times) are in the following order: *Heartbreak* by Andrea Dworkin (2002), *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur (2014), *Seventh Heaven* by Alice Hoffman (1990), *Not a Choice, Not a Job* by Janice Raymond (2013) and *Right Wing Women* by Andrea Dworkin (1983). What's notable here is that both Andrea Dworkin and Janice Raymond are featured on the protest list of authors and books to be banned from the library. Clearly, there is a hunger to read these authors, even as a possible result of them facing a ban. However, arguably both Dworkin and Raymond are vilified, often deemed "outdated" in liberal (public) institutions, whose priorities do not include making these texts available for women. Although these books may be nestled in various collections across different institutions, many of the VWL's users had not previously heard of or come across them. The fact that these titles were features on a banned book list, specifically relating to the VWL, meant that they were given a new life by means of a negative characterization. One may conclude from this that the VWL's members wanted to find out for themselves by reading these "banned" texts.

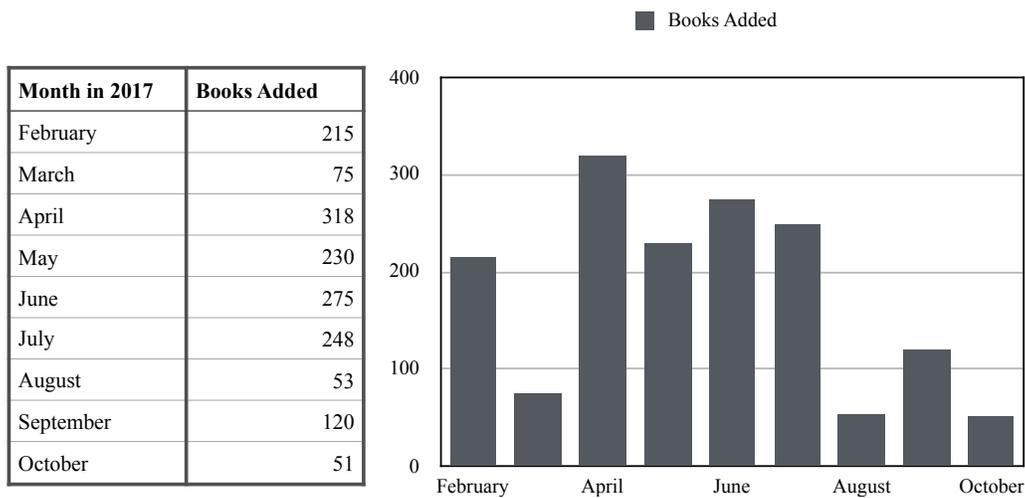


Figure 2: Books added to the VWL by month Feb - Oct 2017

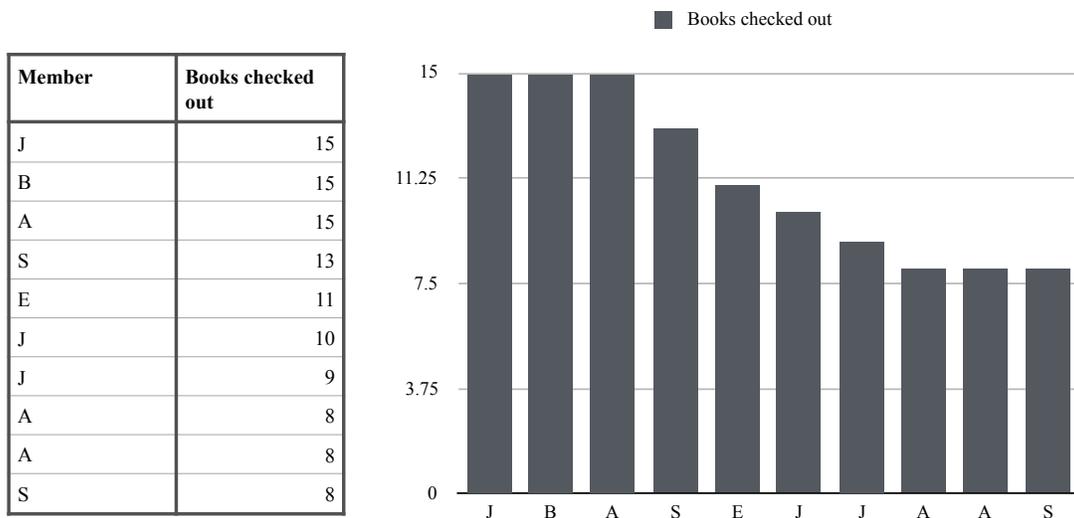


Figure 3: Books checked out by top active Patrons (Members) Feb - Oct 2017

Curation

The various categories of genre at the VWL start with general interest categories such as fiction, memoirs, poetry, philosophy, history, and more. In connection with our mission to provide a library service specifically for women, we started curating categories that are specific to women’s experiences, such as: sexual violence, gendered racism, lesbian fiction, lesbian parenting, women and animals, and women and ecology/science. The main purpose in this exercise of genre-expansion is to show the various ways in which women’s writing is lumped into general

categories of either “feminism”, “gender”, “nature” or “LGBTQ”, which isn’t necessarily inaccurate. However, by creating categories specific to women the VWL is re-imagining the positioning of books in order to broaden our understanding of the breadth of women’s writing and how certain genres have emerged specifically out of the women’s liberation movement, such as sexual violence for instance. A local example of specialized classification is the Brian Deer classification system used by X̱wi7x̱wa Library at the University of British Columbia, which was developed by Kahnawake librarian Brian Deer for the National Indian Brotherhood in the 1970s. This system arranges First Nations geographically and refers to them using their own names, rather than alphabetically by their European names, with the explicit intent to reject dominant cataloging practices that exclude Indigenous knowledge.⁹⁵

3.3. Sites and spaces for counterpublics

The VWL is not isolated in being a space that gathers constituents of a counterpublic. We intentionally positioned ourselves within the tradition of information sharing amongst women. What has arguably made such spaces appealing to women is their ability to foster relationships amongst previous strangers and to make our lives known to each other. Often women’s bookstores have acted as refuges, such as was the case for Kit Quan who found solace in the San Francisco bookstore *Old Wives’ Tales*, here described by Kristen Hogan:

In 1977, Kit Quan was preparing to run away from home, to escape what she would later recognize as domestic violence, and to search for a place for her lesbian feminist identity. At a young lesbians’ picnic in Dolores Park, she struck up a conversation with a young woman who turned out to be Seajay’s foster daughter. *Old Wives’ Tales* sounded promising, and Quan, then fifteen, said she was sixteen when she went in to ask for a job. Seajay and Wallace hired her on the spot. By 1978, Quan had run away from home. Having keys to the bookstore meant that “in a way, the bookstore was a shelter, too,” where she would sometimes go at night by herself. Feminist bookstore collective and staff members had unique access to these spaces. This immersion or hoped-for refuge in the bookstores intensified the personal relationships and affective learning and teaching along the way.⁹⁶

Other examples of such spaces are the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) in New York and The Glasgow Women’s Library (GWL) in Scotland. The LHA began as a newsletter in 1975 and opened a physical space that same year. Their mission was to turn “shame into a sense of cherished history, to change the meaning of history to include every woman who had the courage

⁹⁵ Lin, Brian. "Library a Gem in Aboriginal Scholarship". *UBC Reports*: 7. 2004.

⁹⁶ Hogan, Kristen. p.45.

to touch another woman, whether for a night or a lifetime.”⁹⁷ One of the founders, Joan Nestle, said the archive’s purpose is “to change deprivation into cultural plenitude.”⁹⁸ Their mission statement emphasizes the importance of an archival practice, which is contrasted against male historians who did not identify lesbian history as belonging to its public: “The process of gathering [records of lesbian lives and activities] will uncover and collect our herstory denied to us previously by patriarchal historians in the interests of the culture which they serve.”⁹⁹ The LHA, by its very name, positions itself as an antidote to male-dominated archival practices and clearly serves a counterpublic that is identified within its mission statement. The space is still up and running today and can be found in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

Around the same time that the LHA found their permanent brick and mortar location, the Glasgow Women’s Library opened its doors in 1991. Part of their mission is to “break down barriers to learning and participation for women so that they become fully active citizens, develop skills and knowledge, engender self-confidence and equip themselves to pass on their experience to benefit their families and broader communities.”¹⁰⁰ Since opening, they have expanded into a permanent location and have become established as an information resource about and for women in Glasgow. They began printing a quarterly newsletter in 1996 and are now connected with dozens of sister organizations across the globe, such as Atria in Amsterdam which is home to the International Archives for the Women’s Movement. Both the LHA and the GWL have been through periods of economic downturns, feminist backlashes and waves of political turmoil, and have still managed to thrive by nurturing counterpublics of intergenerational women around archival access to women’s work.

⁹⁷ The Lesbian Herstory Archives. "A Brief History." Accessed October 17, 2017. <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history.html>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Glasgow Women’s Library. "GWL Aims and Objectives." Accessed October 17, 2017. <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/about-us/our-values/gwl-aims-and-objectives/>.

3.4. Restating the scope of the VWL

The case study of the VWL is an example of the fragile interplay between a physical space and its constituents. The protest against the VWL shows the way (counter-)publics can converge and misidentify themselves. Whether the VWL wanted it or not, GAG was part of its counterpublic. To illustrate the relationship between both groups, I use the following illustration as a base within which discursive conflict happens (Figure 4):

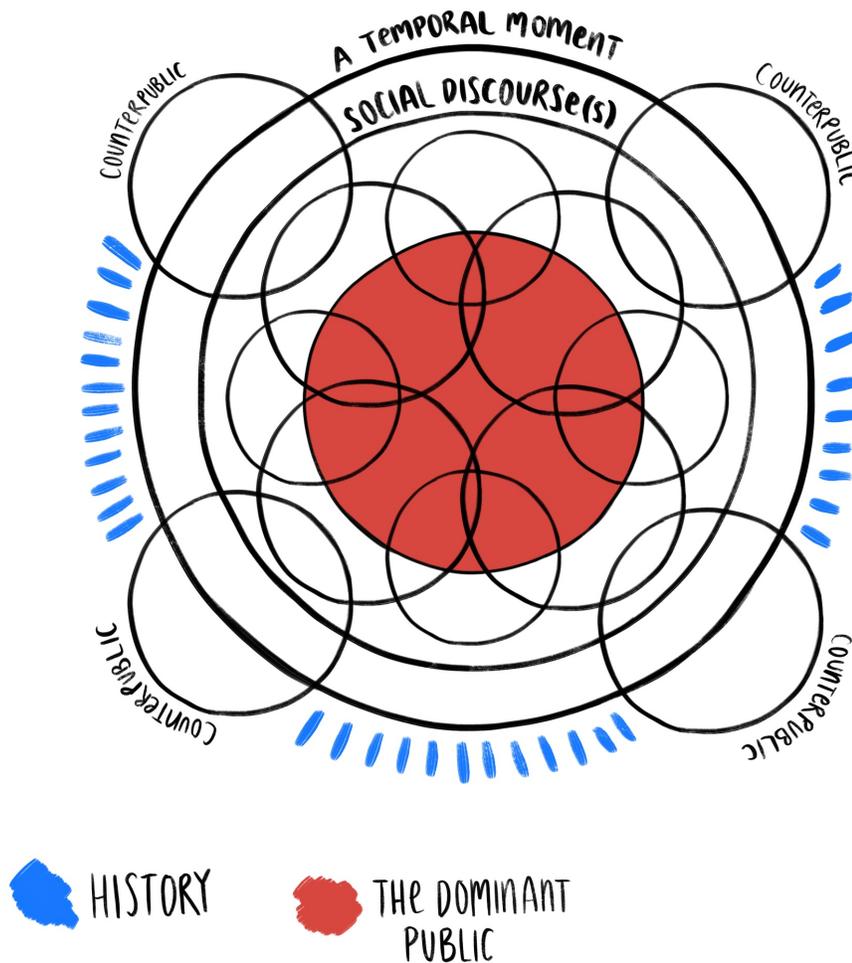


Figure 4: Counterpublics in relation to the dominant public

Figure 4 illustrates the discursive spaces in which conflicts can occur between counterpublics, in relation to a dominant social public. A counterpublic goes beyond the binds of a temporal moment, as it is a continuation of previous historical discourses. It also overlaps with various groupings of the dominant public, which are the social spaces in which conflict is most

likely to occur. Figure 4 also shows that there can be multiple groupings of counterpublics and dominant publics in the same temporal moment, resulting in multiple possible conflicts at the same time.

Arguably, the VWL positioned itself as a counterpublic in relation to the dominant discursive public, the composition of which is shown in Figure 4. The VWL's worldview was that GAG constructed itself as a minority voice which was actively attempting to undermine the counterpublic that the VWL set out to create. In contrast, the counterpublic behind GAG may have seen itself as the "correct" feminist counterpublic that had different aspirations for the VWL, though smaller in the number of its constituents. The issue with publics and counterpublics is that each of these worldviews holds is perceived respectively as the "true" or "right" view. The attempt to manage any one of these counterpublics would be fruitless if we are to agree with Michael Warner's definitions of publics and counterpublics. Counterpublics, by necessity, are fluid and independent of any coercion. What is a more overarching account of the dynamics between both parties is that their respective discourses overlap. The confusion and tension took place in this overlap (Figure 5):

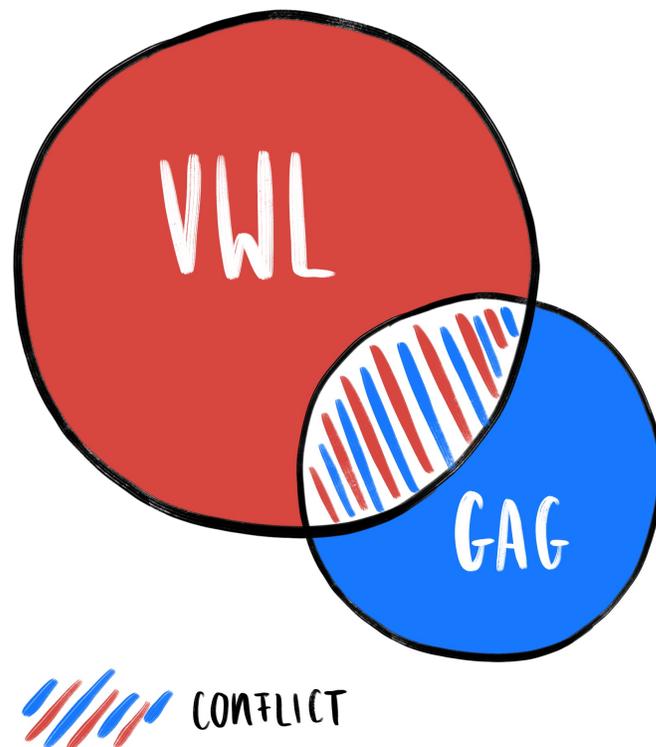


Figure 5: Site of conflict between the VWL and GAG

What the two opposing positions have in common is that both saw the physical manifestation of the VWL, i.e. the books and the material, as the essence or origin of its counterpublic. Within this mutual misconception, namely that the VWL is the authority of the counterpublic, is where the disruption took place. In practical terms the VWL is a physical space, a collection of books catalogued and sorted on shelves. What can be said with more accuracy is that the VWL *emerged* out of a counterpublic, one that has a historical temporality and is being recirculated (Figure 4). In other words: the discourse that shaped and identified its counterpublic happened socially, outside of any controlled physical space. GAG attempted to regulate the VWL's counterpublic by demanding a different organizational structure and a specific cataloguing politic. Even if this had been followed through, it's questionable whether the counterpublic would have moulded itself to such policies. In accordance with Warner, counterpublics are self-organized and ungovernable.

Take the example of a public or university library. With the exception of those who are invested in Library Information Science, a regular user does not typically think of the politics of cataloguing, or who ordered the books and why. However, if we're to visit a friend's home and look through their bookshelves, we see their collection of books as a manifestation of their values and interests. In the same vein, GAG saw the VWL collection as a manifestation of its values and interests, when in reality, "it" was a physical collection and the dispute of ideology was between individual people. To re-state the scope of the VWL is to acknowledge the social interactions that made up the varying counterpublics participating in the discourse. Significantly, we should think of this reflexive discourse as ontologically separate from the sites that engage them. This is not to say that sites of engagement and counterpublics are not relational or politically linked. However, the important thing here to realize is that the discourse of a true counterpublic cannot arise nor be controlled through a physical space, as the dynamics of this case study have shown.

Chapter 4. Conclusion

4.1. Continuing the feminist bookstore movement

The 1990s saw an increasing corporatization of the publishing industry, which led some feminists to consider chain bookstores as a feminist tool to increase visibility and advocacy of feminist books. In looking back on this shift, it is more accurate to say that this line of thought was an optimistic fantasy that market demand for feminist and lesbian literature would ensure its availability at chain bookstores, which it did not.¹⁰¹ Instead, chain bookstores would stock “accessible” feminist books as a business strategy, not as a lasting commitment to the political movement. Hogan explains that:

Chain bookstores were not interested in movement reading practices, but their prices lulled many feminists into forgetting that feminist bookstores were never just bookstores. The Feminist Bookstore Network, too, contributed to this forgetting as they began to use market-based language to urge readers to activist buying.¹⁰²

By the late 1990s, feminist bookstores were shifting their ideals to attempts at influencing mainstream publishing by taking on the identity of smart independent booksellers — a new emphasis on professionalism which erased the public memory of feminist bookstores as sites for movement-based activism. Ultimately, the shift of attention toward market-based concerns would not sustain the feminist bookstore movement. This decade saw the closure of more than a third of feminist bookstores in the United States and Canada.¹⁰³

However, what the feminist bookstore movement can teach us is that the seemingly utopian counterpublic of interconnecting lesbian ethics, racial justice work and feminism was not just possible, it managed to thrive and survive for a significant period of time. Perhaps what can be said about both the feminist bookstore movement and the VWL is that there is a temporal fragility attached to their existence. There is a certain set of circumstances, historical and social, that lead to the emergence of a counterpublic. It takes another set of circumstances and strategy to sustain a counterpublic. If we conceive of each feminist bookstore as being its own counterpublic

¹⁰¹ Hogan, Kristen. p.163

¹⁰² Ibid. p.167.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.177.

within local contexts, the advantage of the movement came from hundreds of similar scenarios existing simultaneously, while momentum and effort led to interconnectivity which in turn resulted in a much more powerful, international counterpublic. It's not to say that this counterpublic disappeared at the end of the 1990s, when most feminist bookstores had closed their doors. In some cases, it may have died off in the literal death of older activists. In other cases, the burdens and barriers of feminist activism would result in women deciding to step down. However, because of the kinship between feminism and publishing, the counterpublic continued to live on. At times, it would be static, hidden away in irretrievable archives. Then, uncovered by a younger generation of feminists, it would be revived through the discovery of previously hidden publications.

The VWL became not just its own counterpublic as an alternative to book communities in 2017, it also intentionally was a continuation of feminist book culture as it had previously existed. As such, counterpublics become ideological spaces to revisit and re-enact under a different set of circumstances. The circularity of counterpublics could be seen as a strength, continually refining and reworking the tactics in regards to successful implementation. No matter how long the VWL keeps its doors open, its counterpublic lives externally from any physical space, and may be continually revived as we saw happening during the revolutionary 1970s and 1980s.

4.2. Responsibility, limitations and agency of sites of engagement

What the case study of the VWL shows is that a delicate interplay exists between counterpublics — how they identify themselves — and their sites of engagement. This is especially applicable to women whose history of liberation has centered around feminist literacy and spaces that sell or archive textual material.

In the beginning, the VWL was simply a creative project between friends to share amongst each other hard-to-find feminist writings. It then turned into something much bigger than anyone had anticipated, partly because of the unexpected disruption within the constituents of its counterpublic. The VWL positioned itself as a counterpublic to the dominant feminist praxis, as well as to the dominant library network. What drives women to sign up for memberships at the VWL is not simply the access to the widest possible variety of women's writing, but also the framework of engagement between women. What Lisa Hogeland calls *feminist literacy* is a

relational exercise that brings the words off the page and into the world of exchange, which is how Michael Warner frames the reflexive discourse of counterpublics. Much of the inspiration for this project came from looking at the heyday of feminist book communities, not just those that gathered around theory but especially fiction, to see what lessons could be learned. Historian Bonnie Zimmerman writes that “novels can show us as we were, as we are, and as we would like to be. This is a potent combination for a group whose very existence has been either suppressed or distorted.”¹⁰⁴ We saw the VWL as a metaphorical novel in itself: imagining relationships between women and creating an environment in which such a counterpublic could emerge. In reality, however, the VWL was simply a site of engagement of which the counterpublic had existed all along. The anatomy of a library for women includes a system for repeatedly sharing the same books, a space and an opportunity to engage in the text with other women, and channels to share suggestions for further reading. But what can be said with certainty is that, as a library, the VWL did not have ultimate control over how the reflexive discourse took place, nor over who could participate in it.

The spontaneous, cause-related support between women writers and publishers of earlier days is precisely what the VWL aimed to re-awaken with its emphasis on alternative public circuits of information sharing. Fostering relationships between women from all walks of life necessitated a continuation and re-imagining of previously envisioned circuits that were largely paused and are now re-emerging as continued counterpublics. The takeaway from the VWL case study is threefold. Firstly, the VWL managed to gather its constituents under the shared belief that there is an inconsistency in mainstream feminism and in libraries that espouse “feminist values” when they do so without a political investment in women’s liberation. Secondly, the urgency felt for a women’s library stems from a historical counterpublic that gathered in feminist bookstores and archives, and is now being re-circulated through social discourse. The women’s movement has historically grown around a shared engagement with, sometimes disagreement about, women’s writing, and that this is a unique history within which feminist counterpublics have been nurtured. Thirdly, although the VWL made attempts to create, nurture and move its counterpublic in a certain direction, ultimately such efforts prove ineffective in the way counterpublics identify themselves. While the VWL *does* have control over its cataloguing and event policies, it *cannot* control the way in which this may alienate (or invite) the constituents of a counterpublic, and how these issues play out in their respective social discourses. If anything,

¹⁰⁴ Zimmerman, Bonnie. *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1969-1989*. Boston, Mass.: Beachon Press, 1990.

this teaches a useful lesson in the limitations of a site of engagement, such as a women's library. While the site itself provides opportunities to reveal a counterpublic, this counterpublic's origin and creation lie outside the bounds of what a library has agency over.

References

- Anonymous. "Protect Feminist Books at Vancouver Women's Library" Change.org. February 4, 2017. Accessed October 17, 2017. <https://www.change.org/p/protect-feminist-books-at-vancouver-women-s-library>.
- "A response to The Vancouver Women's Library". Gays Against Gentrification's Facebook page, accessed June 18, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/gag-gays-against-gentrification/response-to-vancouver-womens-library/379623995740078/>.
- "A response to the response to the response to The Vancouver Women's Library". Gays Against Gentrification's Facebook page, accessed Aug. 1, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/gag-gays-against-gentrification/response-to-the-response-to-the-response-to-the-vancouver-womens-library/381088575593620/>
- "At the 1976 Women in Print Conference," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 1.1. October 1976.
- "Core Values of Librarianship." Advocacy, Legislation & Issues. May 20, 2017. Accessed May 22, 2018. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues>.
- "FAQ". The Vancouver Women's Library Website. Accessed October 17, 2017. <https://www.vancouverwomenslibrary.ca/faq/>.
- "Frontiers," *Amazon* 1:1. Fall 1972.
- "Not Censorship But Selection", American Library Association, May 29, 2007. Accessed July 23, 2018. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/NotCensorshipButSelection>.
- "Public Statement Regarding the Closure of the Vancouver Women's Library." The Vancouver Women's Library Website. Accessed August 15, 2018. <https://www.vancouverwomenslibrary.ca/public-statement-of-closure/>
- "Rape Relief's Work with Women in Prostitution." Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter (blog). Accessed August 1, 2018. <https://www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca/learn/resources/rape-reliefs-work-women-prostitution>.
- "Things You Always Wanted to Know," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 1.3. January 1977.
- "Vancouver Women's Bookstore." Geist.com. Accessed April 20, 2018. http://www.geist.com/topics/vancouver_women_s_bookstore/.
- "What You Can Do to Help Miss Q," *Amazon* 1:4/2:1. October 1973.
- Adams, Kathryn. "Paper Lesbians: Alternative Publishing and the Politics of Lesbian Representation in the United States, 1950–1990." Diss. U of Texas at Austin. 1994.

- Berlin, Isaiah. "The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West" in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy. Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Brennan, Samantha. "Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique (review)." *Hypatia* 23, no.1. 2008.
- Brown, Wendy. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Cicogna, Patricia and de Lauretis, Teresa. *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Crawford, Elizabeth. *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*. Routledge, 2001.
- Ellenberger, Harriet and Nicholson, Catherine. "Dear Beth" In *Sinister Wisdom* 1, no.1. 1976.
- Farley, Melissa, and Jacqueline Lynne. "Prostitution in Vancouver: Pimping Women and the Colonization of First Nations." In *Not For Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography*. Spinifex, 2004.
- Felski, Rita. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in Calhoun, *Habermans and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011.
- Glasgow Women's Library. "GWL Aims and Objectives." Accessed October 17, 2017. <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/about-us/our-values/gwl-aims-and-objectives/>.
- Harker, Jaime, and Konchar Farr, Cecilia . *This Book Is An Action: Feminist Print Culture And Activist Aesthetics*. Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016.
- Hogan, Kristen. *The Feminist Bookstore Movement Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Hogeland, Lisa Maria. *Feminism and Its Fictions : The Consciousness-raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.
- Holly, Marcia. "Consciousness and Authenticity: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic" In *Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory*, edited by Donovan Josephine, 38-47. University Press of Kentucky, 1989.
- Horton, Myles. *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*. Temple University Press, 1990.
- Ignatieff, Michael. *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*. Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2006.

- Kappeler, Susanne. "Liberals, Libertarianism, and the Liberal Arts Establishment" In *Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism*, edited by Dorchen E.H. Lendholt and Janice G. Raymond. Oxford, 1990.
- Knox, Emily. "'The Books Will Still Be in the Library': Narrow Definitions of Censorship in the Discourse of Challengers." *Library Trends* 62, no. 4. 2014.
- Latimer, Tirza True. "Amazon Quarterly: Pre-Zine Print Culture and the Politics of Separatism," in Schreiber, *Modern Print Activism in the United States*. London: Taylor and Francis, 2016.
- Lew, Shirley, and Baharak Yousefi. *Feminists among Us: Resistance and Advocacy in Library Leadership*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017.
- Lewis, Alison M. *Questioning Library Neutrality : Essays from Progressive Librarian*. Duluth, Minn.: Library Juice Press, 2008.
- Lin, Brian. "Library a Gem in Aboriginal Scholarship". *UBC Reports*: 7. 2004.
- Lowndes, Sarah. *The DIY Movement in Art, Music and Publishing. Subjugated Knowledges*. Basingstoke: Taylor & Francis, 2016.
- McAfee, Noëlle. "Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire. By Wendy Brown." *Constellations* 15, no. 3, 2008.
- Menon, Ritu. "Dismantling the Master's House ...: The Predicament of Feminist Publishing and Writing Today." *Australian Feminist Studies* 16, no. 35. 2001.
- OConnor, Alan. *Punk Record Labels and the Struggle for Autonomy: The Emergence of DIY*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008.
- Phillips, Cole, and Cole, Sally Cooper. *Contesting Publics : Feminism, Activism, Ethnography*. London: Pluto Press, 2013.
- Smith, Steven B. "The Tragic Liberalism of Isaiah Berlin." In *Modernity and Its Discontents*, Chapter 013. Yale University Press, 2018.
- Stadler, Matthew. "What Is Publication?" presented at the Richard Hugo House's writer's conference, "Finding Your Audience in the 21st Century," Portland, September 11, 2010. <http://vimeo.com/14888791>.
- Reynolds, Simon. *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984*. S.l.: Faber & Faber, 2009.
- Rossi, Peter H. Discussion in *Library Quarterly*, 31:4. 1961.
- The Lesbian Herstory Archives. "A Brief History." Accessed October 17, 2017. <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history.html>.

Travis, Trysh. "The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications." Johns Hopkins University Press: *Book History*, Volume 11, 2008.

Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002.

Yelton, Andromeda. "Episode 1 - Cecily Walker". *Open Paren*. Podcast audio, October 13, 2015, <http://openparen.club/episode-1-cecily-walker>.

Zimmerman, Bonnie. *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1969-1989*. Boston, Mass.: Beachon Press, 1990.

Appendix A

Feb 3, 2017	VWL Opening in The Bakery	Initial collection of 100 books	No previous communication from GAG or other individuals	VWL website already has a function to anonymously submit book suggestions for order - at this point not yet used
↓	Open Letter shared by GAG	Public online open letter published on GAG's Facebook page	Open letter lists demands and books to be removed from the VWL's collection	
↓	Outside Protest	Individuals associated with previous GAG protests, seen recurrently in the DTES, are heard outside The Bakery protesting	Approximately 25-30 people gather outside with signs, barricade the only entrance, prevent women from attending/entering	
↓	Indoor Vandalism	Disruption of event, protesters distribute open letter, list of demands and list of books to be removed	Protesters smoke inside, pour red wine on books deemed "violent", pull fire alarm, tear down poster of Valerie Solanas, steal cartons of wine	Police called, protesters scatter chanting "cop sympathizer" at the VWL attendees
↓	Outside Graffiti	Outside of The Bakery spray painted with "Class War", "No TERFs No SWERFs" and "This Space H8s Women"	The VWL's outdoor sign is stolen	Morgane Oger visits to donate books and denounces protest tactics
↓	Petition	Online petition signed by nearly 3,000 people encouraging the VWL to keep books on the shelves	Support pours in locally and internationally, CAD \$20,000 donated within first two weeks without prompting	
↓	Response to the Response shared by GAG	GAG clarifies online that the protest was not organized by them		
Mar 1, 2017	New Space	The VWL moves to its new space at 1255 Kingsway Street in the Cedar Cottage neighbourhood	Website function for suggesting titles is actively being used: books by Amber Dawn, Leslie Feinberg, Zena Sharman ordered	Morgane Oger visits for a second time and donates more books about trans topics and gender variance, which the VWL immediately shelves and catalogues

Figure A1: Timeline of Protest/Controversy from the VWL's point of view Feb – Mar 2017