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Canada

TOUGH LADIES AND TROUBLEMAKERS: Toronto's public lesbian
community, 1955-1965

by

ELISE ROSE CHENIER

A thesis submitted to the Department of History
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
March, 1995

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Acknowledgements

At the risk of sounding overly dramatic, it was with admirable courage that women came forward to tell their stories about being gay, female and proud in the 1950s and 1960s. To these women, who are identified herein as Arlene, Beth, Denise, Eve, Helen, Ivy, Jan, Jerry, Laura, Lynn, Mary, Norma, Sandy, and Tricia, I am most deeply indebted. Second to the women who inform this study are those who have committed their time and energy to interviewing older gay women. The Lesbians Making History Collective and film makers Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman have generously shared their interview transcripts and tapes with me. I hope that this thesis does their work justice.

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This thesis is dedicated to our lesbigay youth who, without a history of their own, bravely battle against the persistent tides of isolation, fear and loneliness.

I don't go out with boys anymore,
I don't intend to marry.
I just go out with girls I adore,
Wee! I'm a fairy!

-Postwar school yard limerick

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Until the spring of 1990, I was under the erroneous assumption that lesbians lived overseas. Raised on a diet of bad pornography and female erotica, I spent my adolescence believing that I would have to go to France or India if I was ever to experience the forbidden fruit of lesbian love. It wasn't until 1990, at the ripe age of twenty-two, that I realized I wasn't going to have to learn a second language after all: lesbians really are everywhere.¹

This thesis is a study of a group of women whose lives were profoundly altered both by their sexual desire for other women and their willingness to make that desire visible. In the late 1940s Toronto's Tenderloin district, populated by prostitutes, transients, and working class families, became a popular place for gay women to meet². In the early 1950s, the gay crowd moved to a bar on 'the corners' - Elizabeth and Dundas streets. The Continental Hotel beverage room was notoriously filthy, poorly maintained and attracted some of the most unsavory characters. But between 1955 and 1965, it was the most popular social centre for hundreds of gay women.

As newcomers to the bar quickly discovered, the women who frequented the Continental were not just gay, but publicly declared their sexuality in a culture that understood them as sexual deviants and perverts. Out of

acutely restrictive and punitive social and economic conditions, a distinct working class lesbian bar culture emerged to claim its place in a sexually suspicious culture. Postwar 'out' gay women banded together to form a resilient community that successfully defended itself against a state-imposed and socially condoned vision of biological and sexual order which explicitly declared homosexuality as its enemy. Remarkably, not only did a lesbian bar community firmly entrench itself in the downtown Toronto core, but as their presence became increasingly visible, more and more young women converged on 'the corners' at Elizabeth and Dundas Streets in search of women like themselves.

This study is aimed at those lesbians who took the enormous risk of openly challenging the social, economic, and political enforcement of sex and gender roles in postwar Canada. These women constituted a relatively small subgroup of "female homosexuals" who were profoundly aware of their marginalized position and were forced to adapt their lives, and their community, accordingly. In what follows I will illustrate the range of experiences and strategies of survival employed by visible ('out') lesbians in Toronto from 1955 to 1965. These years represent the prime of the Continental crowd's life, the first and second generation of an enduring working class lesbian community in Toronto that could claim for itself a relatively secure home base. By 1965, other bars and clubs began to open up to gay women,

namely The Parkside, The Penthouse, The Music Room and the Melody Room. The structure of Toronto's lesbian bar community underwent significant changes when the social centre shifted away from the Continental. Thus, this study provides an account of the early phase of the development of a public and visible lesbian community in Toronto.

Not all gay women participated in bar culture, nor could all have even known such a culture existed. As we shall see, those who did become members of the bar community (which spanned beyond the Continental to include the Union House, The Municipal and other public social spaces) represent a narrow cross-section of gay women. Therefore, this examination does not attempt to be representative of postwar lesbian life in general, but rather investigates a particular subculture of gay women -- a subculture whose tremendous significance lies in the fact that it openly and forcefully challenged expectations of women's socio-sexual behaviour in the face of acute discrimination, violent opposition and personal sacrifice.

However, lesbian invisibility must remain a central theme of this paper - only within this context can we begin to understand how and why countless women would choose to relinquish the social and economic advantages of remaining invisible and to confront the stares, jeers, and verbal and physical abuse that lay waiting around most every corner. Only by doing so can we appreciate the price women were

forced and willing to pay in exchange for their sexual freedom. Moreover, studying a group of women who stepped outside of the social and moral norms and values of the day puts the construction and regulation of 'normal' female sexuality into sharp relief.

With the exception of Becki Ross's ground breaking study of the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT) in 1989, the field of lesbian history has received little attention in Canada.³ English-language studies of lesbian culture and communities have focused largely on Britain and the United States. The two most influential studies of lesbian history were both produced by American scholars.⁴

Even though early Canadian women's history shows a preoccupation with 'articulate, white, middle class women,'⁵ the same sex support systems and relationships that characterised the world of early to mid twentieth century female professionals has yet to garner significant historical investigation.⁶ This vacuum in Canadian women's history appears even more peculiar given that sexuality has been afforded a privileged place in feminist research. In an effort to bridge the intellectual divide between public and private spheres of human activity, most comprehensive historical studies of Canadian women have paid close attention to sexual relations, including marriage, childbearing and raising, and, more recently, sex crimes.⁷ Why then have same sex relationships between women in Canada

evaded serious historical study?

Lesbianism is notorious for the silences that surround it, as historians are rue to point out.⁸ For example, an urban legend currently in circulation claims that when British Parliamentarians attempted to criminalize sexual activity between women in 1885, Queen Victoria refused to sign the Bill on the grounds that sexual practices between women did not occur.⁹ More accurately, Jeffrey Weeks documents a telling exchange between British Parliamentarians in 1921 when, according to Weeks, the first attempt to bring lesbianism within the scope of the criminal code was received with great apprehension. The proposed bill failed to pass on the grounds that public acknowledgement of such a perversion was likely to increase its popularity.¹⁰ Urban legend or documented debate, the silences surrounding lesbianism have profoundly affected the lives of women for whom erotic desire for their own sex is a primary feature of their 'private' lives. It has also provided fodder for much debate in current lesbian historical scholarship.

Development of a distinct historical account of lesbian women in Canadian social history has thus far failed to materialize in part because of the social, legal, moral and self-imposed silences that have kept female homosexuality cloistered out of public view and off of public records. The resultant scarcity of readily accessible sources combined with the lack of broad-based institutional support for such

projects has doubtless discouraged historians from pursuing such controversial topics.¹¹ But are lesbians truly invisible? Is evidence of lesbian lives utterly irretrievable?

If George Chauncey's experience investigating gay men and gay male culture in early twentieth century New York is any indication, the answer is a resounding no.¹² As early women's historians discovered, excavating the history of a traditionally marginalized group required intensive research methods characterised by a sensitivity to unconventional sources.¹³ Similarly, Chauncey discovered that our ability to see the gay past requires that we look for it in the right places: places, he claims, that are not always immediately apparent to the contemporary historian.¹⁴ The study of Canadian lesbian social history is not only possible, it is also necessary if we hope to develop a truly rounded historiography of women, gender and sexuality in Canada.

The lack of easily accessible sources documenting lesbian lives is not the only obstacle that stands between the ardent researcher and her finished paper. Uncovering lesbian history is further burdened by a wilful denial of the significance of same sex relationships.¹⁵ Rebecca Sisler's biography of Toronto artists Frances Loring and Florence Wyle is perhaps the best Canadian example of this phenomenon. In recounting the lives of the two sculptors who

lived together from 1911 until their deaths - only three weeks apart - in 1968, Sisler carefully draws attention to the early heterosexual affairs of both Florence and Frances, and argues that charges of lesbianism made against the couple were mere innuendo.¹⁶ Similarly, Patricia T. Rooke's cautious analysis of Charlotte Whitton and the same sex support structures enjoyed by early and mid-twentieth century Canadian professional women hypothesized that Whitton's 30 year 'Boston marriage' to partner Margaret Greir was most likely celibate, and therefore not lesbian. Citing Whitton's conservative views on moral and sexual issues, including her outspoken admonishments toward "female delinquency," Rooke argues that it is "improbable that [Whitton] was a sexual non-conformist herself."¹⁷ More recent research has demonstrated that gay and lesbian lives are often plagued with contradictions such as these. Senator McCarthy's assistant during the American homosexual purge, for example, was a homosexual man.¹⁸ Canadian anthropologist Maureen Fitzgerald has also demonstrated that a well-known Canadian doctor wrote an advice column in a popular woman's magazine in which she frequently stressed the importance of marriage, despite her own long-term relationship with a woman.¹⁹ While these stories neither prove nor disprove the claims made by Loring and Wyle's biographer or by Rooke, they do indicate that the defense of the heterosexuality of historical figures is sometimes built on precarious, or

overly defensive ground.

Patricia T. Rooke's reluctance to 'claim' Whitton as a lesbian highlights one of the more contentious debates in the field of lesbian history: how to define and identify a lesbian. Because, as the British Lesbian History Group points out, the stigma of homosexuality remains alive and well among us, and because few women, either hetero- or homosexual, created explicit documentation of their sexual activities, many historians have either blatantly disregarded the intimate relationships between women, or are simply hesitant to define what might have been merely a friendship as a lesbian relationship.²⁰ This has led to some rather heated debates on the topic, upon which Martha Vicinus has bitterly commented that lesbian historical research has been paralysed by "our own literalism, a paucity of sources and what Judith Bennett has called 'definitional uncertainty.'" ²¹

It is precisely the ambiguities and uncertainties that shroud and obscure the historical assessment of women's sexuality that makes the study of post war working class lesbian bar culture so utterly compelling. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, not only were the subjects of this paper unquestionably lesbian, they were one of the first groups of women in North America to participate in a culture in which same sex desire was the definitive feature.²² Still, despite the degree of certainty to which

we can determine the sexual habits of butch and fem bar lesbians, the exploration of post war lesbian bar culture has proven to be an equally intractable project. Ironically, it is not the anti-homosexual climate epitomised by the McCarthy trials that has made this particular period so difficult to approach. Despite widespread efforts to repress, prosecute and therapeutically 'treat' homosexuality, during the 1940s, 50s and 60s very visible lesbian communities flourished in almost every major urban centre across the United States and Canada.²³ That there is a rich and colourful history to be had is beyond dispute. What has been the source of considerable debate is its meaning and significance.

This debate, which is concerned not so much with empirical evidence as it is with the theoretical and ideological assessment of its subjects, has been largely contained within the arena of feminist politics. Although this debate will be more closely scrutinized in chapter five, it is worthwhile to examine the current state of post war Western lesbian history.

Since the beginning of the womens' movement's modern incarnation, butch and fem - two distinctly lesbian gender identities that organized postwar bar life - have been the subject of tremendous criticism.²⁴ Lesbian bar culture of the 1940s, 50s and 60s evolved within the socio-sexual climate of the working class urban bar and public house, and

participants were expected to conform to - or at the very least, respect - a wide range of social conventions that served to sustain the tenuous hold women had on the public space they occupied. For lesbian-feminists, the most problematic of those conventions was the adoption of butch and fem identities, or, as popular feminist critics called it, "role playing."²⁵ Interpreted as an ugly attempt to mimic the most basic western patriarchal unit, the heterosexual couple, pre-feminist lesbian culture was rejected by forward thinking women as fundamentally oppressive, and emblemized the ways in which women unwittingly bought into and were subsequently victimized by patriarchal society. Accordingly, butch-identified lesbians were subjected to the most rigorous critique as their claim to male privilege appeared to perpetuate rather than challenge gender inequality. Rather than embrace pre-civil rights gay communities as part of a lesbian heritage, modern feminists, some of whom had themselves participated in butch and fem bar culture, eschewed bar culture altogether. Throughout the 1970s, while young gay women in search of others like themselves swelled the ranks of the womens' and the gay rights movement, the vibrant butch and fem bar culture of earlier decades fell into a rapid decline.

After more than a decade of activism, the feminist movement had made significant inroads into both the academy and mainstream American and Canadian society with its

educational and political campaign to expose the underbelly of patriarchy where the marginalization, victimization and oppression of women was in plain view. Although hardly a single issue campaign, the North American women's movement had, by the 1980s, become intensely focused on issues surrounding female sexuality, in particular pornography. The organizers of the Barnard Sexuality Conference, for example, were sceptical about the direction of feminist activism, and sought to ameliorate what they felt was an over-emphasis on the dangers associated with women's sexuality within the women's movement. Women's sexuality, they argued, while indeed plagued by the multiple dangers inherent in a sexist and patriarchal society, was also the site of multiple pleasures. Citing the dominance of the anti-pornography movement in North America as an example of the disproportionate attention paid to elements of danger, the committee moved to put together a conference that would "explore the ambiguous and complex relationship between sexual pleasure and danger in women's lives and feminist theory... to expand the analysis of pleasure, and to draw on women's energy to create a movement that speaks as powerfully in favour of sexual pleasure as it does against sexual danger."²⁶ This ambitious directive was the focus of the Scholar and the Feminist IX conference, "Towards a Politics of Sexuality."

They could not have anticipated the response to their

initiative. In the introduction to the collection of essays culled from the conference presentations, Carol S. Vance recounted the response of "anti-pornography feminists" to the announcement of the conference agenda:

[A]nti-pornography feminists made telephone calls to Barnard College officials and trustees, as well as prominent local feminists, complaining that the conference was promoting "anti-feminist" views and had been taken over by "sexual perverts."²⁷

Organizers managed to hold the event as scheduled, but not without a massive protest staged by Women Against Pornography (WAP) outside its doors. WAP members and supporters passed out leaflets to participants and attendees condemning the event as devoted to the "anti-feminist" issues of sado-masochism, pornography and butch-fem roles among lesbians.²⁸

Joan Nestle was just one of many Barnard conference attendees who identified a need to recognize women as sexual actors, not just sexual victims, and her public plea for feminists to reevaluate the dominant interpretation of the butch and fem past helped push feminist scholarship toward developing new theoretical and conceptual tools to examine women's sexuality. Her pioneering text, A Restricted Country, has since made a significant impact on the development of postwar working class lesbian history, and has prompted scholarly interest in postwar lesbian bar culture as well as inspiring a uniquely queer 1950s nostalgia-trip for young lesbian women.²⁹

In historical terms, the 'pleasure/danger' debate launched at the Barnard Conference translated into a restoration of female sexual agency. Christine Stansell's City of Women, published in 1986, was the first historical study that took contemporary debates about pleasure, danger and female sexual autonomy to the archives.³⁰ Kathy Peiss quickly followed Stansell's initiative with Cheap Amusements, an examination of working class sexuality in turn of the century America.³¹ Both these scholarly works not only contributed to the recognition of the complexities of women's sexuality, but also broke new ground by asking the same questions of working class women's experiences.

The legacy of these events continues in the development of twentieth century North American lesbian social history, a field which has grown out of the political ferment of feminist and lesbian/gay rights politics. Lillian Faderman's Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, for example, elevates organizations like the Daughters of Bilitis as one of the founders of the early homophile rights movement, and, like many lesbian-feminist-s during the past two decades, minimizes the role bar communities played in enhancing the visibility of lesbians and bisexual women and contributing to the development of a lesbian and feminist politic.³² Conversely, Davis and Kennedy's study of Buffalo's lesbian community provides an examination of working class lesbians that challenges the traditional lesbian-feminist

interpretation of butch fem culture and places their subjects squarely in the centre of a history of progressive gay politics. To accomplish their task, they interpret the actions of the participants in butch and fem bar culture as "strategies of resistance," thus legitimizing their and Nestle's claim that bar culture was a politically meaningful institution and can be regarded as a nascent or inchoate feminist/political movement.

Given the way in which butch and fem culture had been interpreted by modern feminists, it is easy to see why Davis and Kennedy deployed a resistance model of historical analysis in order to reinscribe their subjects in the liberation narrative. However, as authors of the introduction to Gender Conflicts have pointed out, the resistance model of historical analysis tends to "erase the complexity of women's (and men's) lived experiences":

The problem is disguised rather than solved by historians who merely juxtapose descriptions of structures of domination with examples of resistance, a tendency evident in the writings of some working class historians.... If we have learned anything definite from twenty years of women's history, it is that not all agency on the part of the oppressed can be characterised as resistance. Seeing the people we study as subjects does not imply celebrating them as morally pure.³³

It is not my intention to suggest that Davis and Kennedy present their subjects as 'morally pure,' but as I shall argue later, the analytical paradigm deployed in Boots of Leather, Slipper of Gold does not account for the evolution of anti-butch sentiment and class conflict among lesbian

women in the post war era. Nevertheless, Davis and Kennedy's work has provided a useful model for this study of Toronto's post war lesbian bar culture.

This study can best be described as an ethno-history, described by Davis and Kennedy as "a combination of the methodology of ethnography - the intensive study of the culture and identity of a single community - with history - the analysis of the forces that shaped how that community changed over time, using oral history as a primary source."³⁴ A total of sixteen interviews that explore the memories of fifteen women have served as the basis of the source material for this thesis.³⁵ Of the interviews, six were conducted by myself, six by the community-based collective Lesbians Making History (LMH) and two by film makers Aerlyn Weissman and Lynn Fernie. Of the fourteen women, twelve have been assigned pseudonyms. While all informants gave permission for their interviews to be used by historians (and film makers), not all were either asked or were willing to have their real names used, therefore I have only used real names when permission was explicitly stated. For the same reasons, no last names are given.³⁶

All but three of the women who inform this study are or were from the working and/or street classes, although not all came from a working class family background. Street class is used to denote women who shifted between blue- and pink-collar jobs to earning their livelihood from the

underground economy; other prominent features of street class life included homelessness, severe economic instability and periodic incarceration. I have also borrowed the term upwardly-mobile from Davis and Kennedy to describe women who had white and pink-collar jobs where dress and/or moral reputation were considered part of the employee's job performance.³⁷ Because middle class lesbians were divided between those who were willing or interested in participating in lesbian bar culture and those who were unwilling or vehemently opposed to the bar scene, the term upwardly mobile allows us to differentiate between the two groups by denoting those who did frequent lesbian bars.

The women who participated in Toronto's public lesbian community were predominantly anglo-Canadian, and the narrators' ethnicity reflect this trend. The exceptions are Denise, the daughter of Italian immigrants; Helen, a Polish immigrant educated in England; Arlene, who is Jewish but grew up with white, Christian adoptive parents who kept her Jewish heritage a secret; and Jan, a francophone self-described as half-Indian.

Davis and Kennedy have suggested that the development of a visible lesbian community depended upon a large urban population to allow for a reasonable degree of anonymity in order to decrease the risk of detection. The relatively small urban populations of blacks and Native Indians combined with racial tensions and prejudice, they argue,

made postwar lesbian bar culture difficult for women from visible minorities to penetrate.³⁸ Toronto's bar community would seem to share the same characteristics. According to narrators' memories black, native North American and Chinese women were unmistakably present in the back room of the Continental.³⁹ Their participation, however, was minimal, and memorable mostly because racially mixed couples (a feature of The Continental that seems to have been more dominant in the 1950s than the 1960s) was utterly shocking to women first entering the bar.⁴⁰ Attempts to extract the experiences of women from visible minorities from these fifteen narrators' memories have been inadequate, but until more research is done in this area, we are dependent on the limited observations of women thus far interviewed and on the few references to black lesbians in Toronto's yellow press; observations which are filtered through the complex and troublesome web of racial prejudice and the denial of its existence.

When asked, most narrators suggested that all women who participated in Toronto's bar culture, regardless of ethnicity, were treated the same. Mary, however, challenged this and claimed that non-white women "were ignored."⁴¹ As well, Norma recalls being ostracized because she was dating a Native woman. Yet, "Indian Sue," a Native North American, was a well-known and popular participant in Toronto's bar scene.⁴² One of Jerry's closest friends in the bars was a

black woman.⁴³ And in 1956, the Toronto tabloid Hush Free Press ran a front page feature article on a wedding between a butch and fem couple. The accompanying photo (see figure ii) shows Ivy, a white woman, and her bride, Geraldine, a black woman. As we shall see in chapter four, weddings such as Geraldine and Ivy's were large community celebrations, and this one was no exception.⁴⁴ The tabloid coverage suggested that fems came in all colours, the implication being that women from ethnic minorities were not permitted to assume a butch identity, but narrator's memories do not support this statement. In Jo Anne Pratt's 1966 sociological study of Toronto's lesbian bar culture, she recorded an incident that occurred between a white female patron and a black woman who worked the coat check at one of the first gay-owned clubs in Toronto, though she herself made no comments about the ethnic make-up of the gay and lesbian bar crowd, nor about mixed race couples. That some black and native women made a place for themselves in Toronto's postwar lesbian bar culture is a most certain fact. However, the unique forces that must have shaped the lives of these women is an area of research that needs to be explored much further.

More than any other ethnic minority, narrators have commented on the presence of Chinese women, which is likely as much the result of their invisibility in mainstream Canadian society as the actual number of Chinese women in

the Continental.⁴⁵ As we shall see in chapter three, the Continental Hotel was located in the very heart of Chinatown, where women's comings and goings would be duly noted by friends and family in the neighborhood. Moreover, although the Chinese population in Toronto increased rapidly in this period, expanding from 2,879 in 1951 to 6,715 in 1961, it remained a relatively small community.⁴⁶ Even more puzzling, Chinese communities in Canada were, to borrow a phrase from historian Peter Li, married-bachelor societies.⁴⁷ Women made up less than 15 percent of the Chinese population. How is it that Chinese women were able to openly engage in lesbian relationships with anglo-Canadian women right under the noses of their own family and friends?

Until this question is pursued through interviews with senior Chinese Canadians, we can only speculate on some of the factors that may help to explain their presence. According to Richard Thompson, in 1941 42.4% or 992 Chinese women in Canada over the age of 15 were single. In 1951, the percentage of unmarried women over age 15 dropped to 31.8% (1,455); in 1961, it was only 14.2% (2,019).⁴⁸ During these three decades, restrictions against Chinese immigration were relaxed, and Chinese men sponsored their wives and children to immigrate to Canada. Although the actual number of unmarried women increased during this period as a result of the immigration of daughters and other female relations, the

percentage of women who were unmarried dramatically dropped off. Part of the reason why the percentage of unmarried women was so high in 1941 and steadily decreased in the following decades was due to federal attempts to curtail the expansion of the Chinese-Canadian population. Up until 1947, if a Canadian-born Chinese woman married a Chinese alien resident in Canada, she lost her citizenship status.⁴⁹ This regulation would no doubt have discouraged families from arranging marriages for their daughters, as was the custom. It is possible that prohibitions around lesbian relationships were relaxed in the absence of 'normal' heterosexual marriage. That Chinese women appear to have completely disappeared from the lesbian bar scene in the 1960s suggests that as more women immigrated to Canada, and as restrictions around marriage were lifted, lesbian relationships became less tolerated.

In her essay " 'But Women Did Come': Working Chinese Women in the Interwar Years," Donna Nipp reveals that women from the western provinces migrated to Toronto because Ontario was considered to be "less harsh" toward the Chinese:

Unlike the Chinese in British Columbia, the Chinese in Ontario had not been disenfranchised and could enter the professions of law, pharmacy or accounting... British Columbia also refused to admit Chinese women into the health professions.⁵⁰

Migration often meant temporary or permanent separation from one's immediate family, which in turn allowed for an

increase in personal freedom. Nevertheless, the economic and social isolation of the Chinese in Canada meant that its members were largely dependent on the Chinese community for survival. It appears that Chinese women's involvement in lesbian relationships within a predominantly anglo-Canadian bar culture was greeted with some tolerance in the 1950s, and possibly in even earlier decades.⁵¹

Chinese womens' involvement in Toronto's lesbian bar culture defies Davis and Kennedy's anonymity thesis, suggesting that like white, Anglo lesbians, gay women from visible minorities did not share homogeneous experiences, but rather encountered prejudice and hostility in different ways, at different times. The experiences of Toronto's Chinese women in lesbian bar culture is just one area of historical inquiry that warrants further investigation, and serves as a reminder that gay women's experiences in the postwar era were neither unremarkable nor uniform. Until a more concentrated pursuit toward uncovering the experiences of Toronto's Chinese, black and native lesbian women can be undertaken, however, this study will remain limited to documenting the experiences of women for whom racial difference was not identified as a feature of their life experience in the lesbian community.

This thesis is organized into five chapters, each of which explores the unique and sometimes overbearing internal and external forces that helped shape Toronto's postwar

lesbian public community. In chapter two, I examine the post World War Two climate as it related to women and in particular, to lesbians. Key to this discussion will be an examination of the Second World War and its impact on women's social and economic status; the rise of sexology and the place of lesbianism in criminal and psychiatric discourse; the significance of pulp novel publishing and the proliferation of lesbian imagery; and finally, the experiences of women growing up and coming out in this context.

The third chapter examines the experiences of women in their adolescence and early adult years who 'came out' in the 1940s and 1950s, and who eventually made their way to Toronto's urban lesbian subculture. This discussion will include an examination of the way in which sexuality and gender intersected in this period, and its impact on young gay women's self-identity. Following this will be a brief discussion of homosexuality and the Canadian military. For most of the women who inform this study, finding other lesbians was the next logical step in their sexual histories, thus the final section of this chapter begins with a historical overview of the social and moral location of the beverage room and public house in Ontario. Here I will argue that lesbian bar culture evolved out of the desire for gay women to enjoy the company of other women like themselves, a desire that was seriously handicapped by

the sexual and social stigma attached to lesbianism.

Chapter Four presents a study of the formation and social and economic logic of Toronto's lesbian bar culture, for which the findings of Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapvosky Kennedy's study of Buffalo during the same period provide a useful contrast. Here I will demonstrate how the bar community did not exist in a vacuum, but rather had intimate links with Toronto's Chinese population and urban street culture, including prostitution and the illegal drug trade. Consequently, the women who participated in Toronto's lesbian bar culture were most directly affected by the regulatory practices of local and provincial police forces. The combination of these forces, I will argue, profoundly influenced the way in which women experienced and conducted their daily activities.

The fifth and final chapter focuses on class tensions that permeated Toronto's lesbian bar culture throughout this period. In the postwar era, the bar community was split between downtowners and uptowners, two distinct social groups that, I will argue, were separated by both social class and to a significant degree, political ideology. Tracing the roots of the tensions between these groups will allow us to begin to understand, among other things, why so many lesbians have reacted and continue to react with horror to the renewed interest in postwar lesbian bar culture, why what Davis and Kennedy and Joan Nestle regard as a

liberating sexual ideology was for so many perceived as oppressive. Through the testimony provided by narrators, Jo Anne Pratt's revealing 1966 study of lesbian bar culture, and the sexological literature from the period, I will argue that traditional middle class moral values had a profound effect both on the evolution of lesbian identity and community, and on the field of modern lesbian history. I will show how upwardly mobile and middle class women laid the groundwork for the 1970s critique of butch and fem culture. I will also demonstrate that, further to Joan Nestle's claim that butch and fem lesbian culture was feminism in its pre-political stages, sexologists saw the butch lesbian as the dangerous and unfortunate consequence of women's increasing sexual emancipation from men, and in doing so successfully pathologized feminism. In this light, I will suggest that the way we identify evidence of "feminist" agitation has serious class implications that diminish and devalue the contributions working class women make to precipitating social change.

Although Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy's study of Buffalo took fourteen years to complete, they have modestly claimed only to have laid down the foundations of what must be a larger project of uncovering and understanding the North American gay and lesbian past: "we hope that this work will inspire others to look at their own cities and begin to uncover the richness of their local

histories."⁵² Indeed, the work of Joan Nestle and Davis and Kennedy provided the initial inspiration for this project. The narrators provided the rest.

Notes

1. "Lesbians are everywhere" is a popular slogan intended to counter lesbian invisibility and challenge homophobia.

2. I use the terms gay women and lesbian interchangeably. As we shall see in chapter one, pre-1970s lesbians did not call themselves by that name, but instead identified as gay.

3. See 'The House that Jill Built: Lesbian-Feminist Organizing in Toronto, 1976-1980' in Feminist Review, 35(Summer 1990); pp. 75-91. Becki Ross's dissertation is expected to appear in book form through University of Toronto Press in the spring of 1995. To my knowledge, the only other published Canadian lesbian history article is Frances Rooney's 'Finding Edith S. Watson' in Resources for Feminist Research 12: 1983 (26-28). Line Chamberland's sociological paper, 'Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975' in Journal of Homosexuality, 25:3 (1993), pp. 231-269, might also be included in this category. Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson include a brief discussion of lesbianism and lesbians in No Easy Road: Women in Canada 1920s to 1960s (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990); pp. 87-114.

4. See Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

5. See Franca Iacovetta et. al., 'Introduction' in Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); pp. xiv.

6. Although I do not agree with her conclusions, Patricia T. Rooke's "Public Figure, Private Woman: Same Sex Support Structures in the Life of Charlotte Whitton" in the International Journal of Women's Studies (6 1983: 412-428) represents the singular Canadian effort to address this issue.
7. For examples of Canadian women's history that include an analysis of women's sexuality, see Alison Prentice et.al., Canadian Women: A History (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988); Veronica Strong-Boag, New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939 (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988); for an example of recent scholarship that focuses especially on motherhood, see Kathy Arnup, Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). On sex crimes see Karen Dubinsky Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1800-1929 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Carolyn Strange 'Wounded Womanhood and Dead Men: Chivalry and the Trials of Clara Ford and Carrie Davies' in Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) pp. 149-188.
8. On this point, see Sheila Jeffries, "Does It Matter if They Did It?" in Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840-1985, eds. Lesbian History Group (London: The Women's Press, 1989):19-28; and Martha Vicinus, "Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?" in Radical History Review 60:57-75, 1994.
9. Deborah Goleman Wolf, The Lesbian Community (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): p. 29.
10. Jeffrey Weeks, Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain From the Nineteenth Century to the Present (Aylesbury: BPC Hazell Books, 1990);106-7.
11. This is a situation which, fortunately, is rapidly changing. The 1994 inaugural conference of a new Learned Society - the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Studies Association - attests to the surge of interest in the field of lesbian and gay studies across disciplines, as well as to the kind of grass root support that necessarily precedes more concrete institutional changes such as the creation of lesbian and gay studies programs and even the offering of individual courses in this specialized field. Currently there are no such programs in place in Canada, although some universities do offer one or more courses that focus on lesbian and gay, or 'sexuality' issues and themes.

12. George Chauncey, Gay New York (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
13. For a brief discussion of the evolution of Canadian women's social history, see the introduction to Gender Conflicts.
14. Chauncey, Gay New York, p. 10.
15. The Lesbian History Group offer a critique of the historical denial of lesbianism in their introductory essay to Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840-1985, Lesbian History Group, eds. (London: The Women's Press, 1989): 1-18.
16. Rebecca Sisler, The Girls: A Biography of Frances Loring and Florence Wyle (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company Ltd., 1972). For an account of Wyle's affair with Charles Mulligan, see p. 18. For an account of Loring's affair with an unnamed German, see p. 31. Sisler notes that a jealous Laredo Taft, Florence's ex-instructor, successfully prevented Loring and Wyle from obtaining work with a sculptor in New York by informing him that the women were lesbians. Sisler notes, "it was their first brush with this innuendo." p. 21.
17. Patricia T Rooke, "Public Figure, Private Woman: Same Sex Support Structures in the Life of Charlotte Whitton" in International Journal of Women's Studies 6 (1983);412-428. p. 420.
18. See Nicholas von Hoffman's Citizen Cohn (New York: Doubleday, 1988).
19. Maureen Fitzgerald, " 'But there are no sources' and other lies." Panel presentation, Out of the Archives: Canadian Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual History, York University, Toronto, January 16, 1994.
20. See "Introduction" and Sheila Jeffries' "Does it Matter if They Did?" in Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840-1985, edited by the Lesbian History Group (London: The Women's Press, 1989).
21. Martha Vicinus, "Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?" in Radical History Review 60 (1994): 57-75.
22. George Chauncey's Gay New York challenges gay and lesbian historians to reassess our assumptions about the pre-WWII period by demonstrating that a public gay male culture thrived in New York between the two world wars.

Certainly lesbians, and especially black lesbians, were very visible in jazz Harlem, even producing and performing songs with a lesbian theme. It cannot be said with certainty that there were not pockets of gay women who as a group openly displayed their homosexual relationships before WWII. Until further research is conducted, it can only be said that the postwar butch and fem bar communities that existed in Vancouver and Montreal as well as in Toronto were perhaps the largest and most visible up to that point in Canadian history.

23. For a discussion of public lesbian bar communities in the US, see Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 161-167; for similar evidence of lesbian bar communities in Canada, see Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman's documentary film Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives (Toronto: National Film Board, 1992).

24. Joan Nestle's defense of butch and fem lesbian culture appears in "Butch-Femme Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s" in A Restricted Country (New York: Firebrand Books, 1987); pp. 100-109. For feminist critiques of butch and fem "roles," see Sheila Jeffries, "Butch and Fem, Now and Then," in Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History, 1840-1985, edited by Lesbian History Group, London: The Women's Press, 1989 (158-97); Blanche Wiesen Cook, "'Women Alone Stir My Imagination': Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition," in Signs 4.4 (1979): 718-39; and Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in Signs 5.4 (1980): 631-60.

25. See Jeffries, "Butch and Fem: Now and then"; also Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, Lesbian Woman (1972. New York: Bantam Books, 1983).

26. Carol S. Vance, "Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality" in Carol S. Vance, ed., Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality (London: Pandora Press, 1992); 3. See also Mariana Valverde's Sex, Power and Pleasure (Toronto: Women's Press, 1985) and Varda Burstyn's Women Against Censorship (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1985) for similar arguments made by Canadian scholars.

27. Carol S. Vance, ed. 'Introduction.' Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality (London: Pandora Press, 1992); xxi.

28. *ibid.*, xxi.

29. Joan Nestle's anthology, The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader (Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc., 1992) provides an excellent testament to the persistence and revival of butch-fem identities among lesbians.
29. Christine Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860 (New York: Knopf, 1986).
31. Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-century New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).
32. Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); ch. 7 and 8.
33. Karen Dubinsky et al., Introduction to Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History. eds., Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); xvii-xviii.
34. Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold; p. 2.
35. Some of the interviews involved more than one informant, and some of the informants were interviewed more than once.
36. Copies of the six interviews I have conducted have been deposited with the LMH collection. The research interviews conducted by Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman are currently being prepared for deposit with the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives in Toronto.
37. Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, pp. 133-134.
38. Kennedy and Davis argue that women who came from a small ethnic group, such as black gay women in 1940s Buffalo, did not enjoy the level of anonymity available to Anglo-Americans, and therefore the threat of being discovered was dramatically higher. See Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, pp. 42-43.
39. Interview with Norma, March 11, 1992; interview with Jan (LMH) October 19, 1985; interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993; interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992; interview with Beth and Sandy (LMH), January 11, 1987.
40. See especially interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.
41. Interview with Mary, Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman, nd. 198?.

42. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.
43. *ibid.*
44. Interview with Jan (LMH); October 19, 1985. The Ivy that was featured in the Hush article was not the same Ivy interviewed by the author.
45. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993; interview with Denise, April 23, 1993; interview with Norma, March 11, 1992. Although all of these narrators recall seeing Chinese women participating in the lesbian social life at the Continental, none of the four indicated that they were familiar with any Chinese women on a personal level.
46. Richard H. Thompson, Toronto's Chinatown: The Changing Social Organization of an Ethnic Community (New York: AMS Press, 1989); p. 94-95.
47. For a discussion of the marital trends in Chinese-Canadian communities in the twentieth century, see Peter S. Li, The Chinese in Canada (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988); pp. 62-68.
48. Richard Thompson, Toronto's Chinatown: The Changing Social Organization of an Ethnic Community (New York: AMS Press, 1989); p. 66.
49. *ibid.*, 92.
50. Dora Nipp, '"But Women Did Come": Working Chinese Women in the Interwar Years' in Looking into My Sister's Eyes: an Exploration in Women's History. Jean Burnet, ed. (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986); p. 190.
51. It is also possible that the women who went to the Continental were the daughters of Chinese prostitutes brought over to Canada from China at the turn of the century, and therefore held a less respectable position within the community. I do not know of any research, published or unpublished, that tracks the experiences of Chinese prostitutes in Canada, so this can only be speculation.
52. See Davis and Kennedy, 'Introduction' to Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold.

CHAPTER TWO:

EMANCIPATING THE INVISIBLE: Public Discourses about Female Homosexuality in the Mid-Twentieth Century

No one today can really say that there is a lack of opportunity for enlightenment in the matter of sex information. Books, magazines, newspapers, lectures, movies, and the radio - all "scream" it at us. Never before was so much sex information known by so many at so young an age - at least not in our western civilization.¹

According to critics and social commentators of the period, the postwar North American cultural landscape was inundated with 'sex information.' The proliferation of medical studies concerning human sexuality and sex deviancy, federal investigations into sex and criminality, debates concerning the introduction of sex education in the schools, the production of mass produced, readily available and inexpensive lurid pornographic pulp novels, and the sex-obsessed journalism of local tabloid newspapers all highlight the increasing permissiveness around public discussions of explicitly sexual matters.² This chapter will examine some of these materials - namely the lesbian-themed pulp novel and the Toronto tabloid press - and will track the emergence of the butch fem couple as the principal representation of lesbianism in this period. But first, I begin with an examination of the Second World War and the change in both women's status and dominant ideas around the definition of femininity and female sexuality. These events,

I will argue, significantly influenced the construction of the lesbian in postwar North American popular culture.

It is tempting to characterize postwar period as the pinnacle of heterosexual conformism. The economic security enjoyed by the North American middle classes following the Second World War was accompanied by a profound insecurity about sexuality.³ Vigorous efforts to restructure North American social and economic conditions to match those of the prewar decades fostered an increasingly restrictive and exaggerated definition of appropriate sex and gender arrangements. Security, it seemed, was dependent upon the maintenance of a sharp distinction between heterosexual male and female roles, a distinction which had blurred considerably during the war years. Throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s, the social and sexual behaviour of children, youth and adults was scrupulously examined under a moral microscope. The expanding postwar network of state-regulatory institutions, including schools, social services, medical professionals, police agencies and the justice system, reinforced hegemonic ideas about masculinity, femininity and sexuality by sifting out those who failed to comply with the unquestionably narrow definition of normal.

Hegemony, argued Antonio Gramsci, is neither static nor stable, but must constantly reproduce and rearticulate itself.⁴ The large body of feminist historical scholarship documenting the regulation of gender and sexuality across

time and place certainly attests to this claim. Of course, this is not to say that any given historical period, no matter how it is sliced, did not possess its own unique qualities. Indeed, this most certainly was the case with the period under study here. It does, however, allow us to see the North American postwar fetishization of gender difference and heterosexual relations as a logical response to a perceived threat against the status quo. In other words, on the surface, the intensified regulation of deviant sexual practices epitomized by the House of Un-American Activities Committee and in Canada by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's invention of the 'fruit machine,' combined with the cultural celebration of heterosexual stability and the concomitant re-domestication of middle class womanhood has resulted in the postwar era's reputation as intensely repressive and startling undemocratic in its vigour.⁵ More importantly, however, the fervour with which a heterosexual, middle class, and feminine ideal was pursued provides us with an indication of the degree to which such 'traditional' sex and gender configurations were, in fact, unstable.⁶

Ironically, the Second World War is largely responsible for inducing the social and economic changes that radically destabilized familiar gender and family arrangements. Perhaps one of the most profound of these changes was the expansion of acceptable forms of female participation in the paid labour force and in commercialized leisure pursuits.

It was not the actual number of women who participated in the wartime Canadian labour force that facilitated the shift in women's economic and social status - since 1921 female participation in the paid labour force rose at a gradual but steady rate, and continued to do so until the 1950s.⁷ What did change was the types of opportunities made available to women. Courted by the government-sponsored war industries and filling the vacated jobs of enlisted men, between 1939 and 1944 Canadian women were invited to enter traditionally male sectors of service and industry, and received substantially higher wages in return.⁸

Almost every possible concession was made to facilitate women's transition into the labour force. Day care centres in Ontario and Quebec were set up under the Dominion-Provincial Wartime Nurseries Act in order to free up women from child care responsibilities, efforts were made to place women in war plants nearest to their homes, part-time "housewives shifts" were created to accommodate women unable or unwilling to work full time, and significant tax breaks and other economic incentives were offered.⁹

The campaign to recruit women into the workforce was accompanied by a radical shift in official and cultural representations of modern femininity. Army recruitment campaigns and advertisers celebrated women's liberation from the confines of the home. Indeed, women were less restrained; with jobs to go to, more money to spend, and

military uniforms to wear, female independence became respectable. Women's unescorted participation in the world of commercial leisure no longer raised eyebrows. By war's end, women's trousers, modestly constructed with the zipper on the hip, became acceptable casual wear. New opportunities for women may have been packaged in the name of patriotism, but journalists like Lotta Dempsey were quick to embrace women's new found freedom as nothing short of a revolution: reporting on the ceremonial launching of a ship that women workers had helped to build, Dempsey suggested that the event symbolized "the great and final stage of the movement of women into industry... on a complete equality with men."¹⁰

Complete equality may have been a bit of an overstatement, but for working class women, the Second World War offered a taste of what their white, Anglo, middle-class sisters had begun to savour at the turn of the century.¹¹ Unlike the 'female professions' such as social work, education and nursing, war work did not require women to have a post-secondary education. Instead, the Dominion-Provincial War Emergency Training Program happily provided women with the skills they needed to enter non-traditional employments. Nearly half of all full-time participants in pre-employment training were women who were being taught skills normally reserved for men.¹²

Pierson's study of Canadian women during the Second

World War rightfully concludes that, contrary to the declarations of optimists like Lotta Dempsey, the war did not 'liberate' women after all. As quickly as the provincial and federal governments implemented social and economic incentives for women to enter the work force, they took them away. War plants closed down and reconverted to their usual peace time production schedules of course, but day care centre funding dried up, tax breaks for married women were revoked, and pressure was brought to bear on women to leave the work force to make room for the returning soldiers. Moreover, argues Pierson,

The war's light yet disquieting reconstruction of womanhood in the direction of equality with men was scrapped for a full-skirted and redomesticated post-war model, and for more than a decade feminism was once again sacrificed to femininity.¹³

Indeed, hundreds of women were doubtless relieved to give up the double burden of full-time jobs in the paid work force and full-time, single parenting. However, Pierson's somewhat cynical conclusion leaves us to assume that women simply acquiesced in the withdrawal of benefits afforded them during wartime. In fact, this was not entirely true. The organized fight to save war time day nurseries in Toronto, the 1956 implementation of equal pay for equal work legislation and the aggressive tactics deployed by the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs to pressure the government into hiring more women in the civil service suggest that many Canadian women were

willing to challenge gender discrimination and demand more emancipation.¹⁴ However, a fair assessment of the long-term impact of the Second World War on women requires that we look beyond traditional forms of organized feminist political activity. Only by doing so can begin to account for the radical impact the war had on gay women's lives.

The Second World War is widely regarded as a watershed in North American gay and lesbian history. Allan Berube's study of gay men and women in World War II, John D'Emilio's examination of homosexuality and gay communities in America from 1940 to 1970, and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis' investigation of Buffalo's lesbian community agree that the dramatic events precipitated by North America's entry into the Second World War facilitated the formation of unique gay and lesbian subcultures across the continent.¹⁵ Although the military offered women and men alike a unique opportunity to explore and develop same-sex relationships, in Toronto, as in Buffalo, it was the integration of civilian women into blue collar labour industries rather than the homosocial environment of military life that facilitated the formation of public lesbian communities.¹⁶

The increased social and economic status enjoyed by working women, however, fostered a national anxiety attack that sought relief through the hyperfeminization of the white, middle class woman.¹⁷ That women's sexual freedom was

intimately tied to economic freedom was a point not missed by critics of working women. The challenge they posed to the re-construction of femininity and femaleness along prewar lines, which in its 'natural' form precluded exclusive heterosexual desire, elicited considerable anxiety around what was fearfully and disdainfully called the masculinization of women.¹⁸ Using language reminiscent of turn-of-the-century anti-feminist rhetoric, American sexologist Frank Caprio argued:

The modern generation [of women]...has tended to favour muscle development with less attention paid to cosmetics, greater emphasis on careers and less on domestic activities, such as cooking, sewing, etc.

The popularity of masculine tailored clothes is further evidence of a defeminization trend. Women's addiction to smoking may be considered a form of "psychic masculinity."¹⁹

Concerns over women and femininity were not, of course, unique to the postwar era. Feminist scholarship has revealed a long history of the social, moral and legal regulation of acceptable female behaviour in Canada and elsewhere. Old arguments against women's emancipation were simply reformulated within the dominant discourse of the period: sexology, according to Janice Irvine, was the science that would yield cultural authority over issues of sex and gender in the post war era.²⁰

Donna Penn has argued that in the postwar period, lesbianism was widely interpreted as a problem of gender identification, not of sex object choice.²¹ But as Carroll

Smith-Rosenberg's study of gender in Victorian America reveals, sex experts reified gender inversion as homosexuality as early as the turn of the century; postwar sexologists like Frank Caprio and George Henry simply expanded upon and popularized these earlier medical ideas.²² What was new however was the tightening of the conceptual links between female liberation, gender non-conformism and lesbianism. According to Caprio, lesbianism was the natural by-product of women's emancipation:

It is believed by some that women are becoming rapidly defeminized as a result of their overt desire for emancipation, and that this "psychic masculinization" of modern woman contributes to frigidity. Many contend that women are modifying their position in the world; that in innumerable ways their status has changed legally, economically, politically, and socially during the past century. The process is still going on and we should not be surprised if it spreads to the sexual sphere.

Some sexologists fear that this defeminization trend may seriously affect the sexual happiness of modern women. They claim it will more than likely influence the susceptibility of many to a homosexual way of thinking and living.²³

Women with an overt desire for emancipation, according to Caprio, suffer from a "masculinity-complex." Through psychoanalysis, such women could "voluntarily renounce the desire for masculinity, reverting to their original role of woman."²⁴

Caprio did not pull his theory out of thin air. From his therapy sessions with homosexual and bisexual women, Caprio saw that women were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with

their "original role". His roster of suffering women included one who adamantly refused to give up college for her fiancée, and another who "hesitates" to have intercourse with her boyfriend because she feared becoming pregnant and worried that "maybe Jack is just out for a good time...."²⁵

In the postwar era, many women, including lesbians, bisexuals and heterosexuals, were fully conscious of the sexual double standard. Inspired by Dr. Alfred Kinsey's studies of sexual behaviour among American men and women, for example, University of Western Ontario's Dr. William Mann conducted a survey of premarital sex and sexual attitudes among students.²⁶ His findings, reproduced in part in a 1966 Maclean's magazine article, showed that 36% of the female respondents and 15% of the male respondents believed that Canada's moral code was hypocritical.²⁷ For Caprio however, the double standard was the natural consequence of men's and women's proper roles. A woman's desire for equality, and especially sexual equality, was therefore treated as a mental disorder. For example, after having been "successfully" treated for "trauma" following a single sexual encounter with another woman, one of his patients protested:

I still feel incensed and outraged that a woman's sex life must be dictated and directed by the public while a man is allowed perfect and complete freedom in this respect.²⁸

Caprio treated this woman's complaints as further evidence of her 'strong anti-male feelings,' feelings that

characterized both active and latent homosexuality in women:

Neurotic masculinity in women may give rise to promiscuity (an unconscious repudiation of femininity - a desire to enjoy the same sexual freedom of the male sex). ... through psychoanalysis a woman can achieve such an awareness and voluntarily renounce the wish for masculinity, preferring instead the role of a woman, thus strengthening such feminine qualities as warmth, understanding, love and tenderness.²⁹

In a revealing article published in Hush Free Press, a journalist took up Caprio's claims to warn readers that the lesbian population was rapidly expanding. Sexual discontent was cited as the primary reason why ordinary housewives were committing heterosexual mutiny and swelling the ranks of urban lesbian gangs. According to the author, men are obvious and admitted failures at meeting women's needs of warmth, understanding, love and tenderness. Lesbianism, he argued, was the logical alternative for disenchanted women. In fact, men's failure to fulfil their wives was regarded as so pervasive that the author could claim "the only thing that keeps 90 percent of the women from switching to their own sex is the fact that [women] need men in order to produce babies." The solution offered was not therapeutic intervention, as medical experts like Frank Caprio would have prescribed, but for husbands to become better lovers.³⁰

The real or perceived notion that most men were unable or unwilling to meet women's sexual needs was not the only obstacle between a woman and her sexual fulfilment. As

Caprio's patients suggested, strict moral codes that prohibited women in the postwar era from engaging in premarital sex in conjunction with the criminalization of birth control methods, the physical dangers of procuring an abortion, the stigma attached to single motherhood and the threat of contracting venereal disease made sex outside of marriage dangerous and unappealing. Three of the narrators who inform this study, all of whom were heterosexual and became lesbians 'by seduction,' all cited the absence of the threat of pregnancy and VD as incentives to be receptive to lesbian advances.³¹ For Denise, who was on the verge of getting married when she began her first lesbian relationship at the age of twenty-four, lesbianism was a positive alternative to marriage and children, neither of which were appealing to her.

For many or even most women - particularly for those committed to the gay life - a sexual preference for women may not have been something they felt they had any control over, but to actively and openly pursue other lesbian women was, to borrow a phrase from Joan Nestle, a conscious act of sexual courage.³² Gay women carved out sexual territory for themselves, capitalizing on its pleasures as well as suffering extreme consequences. Caprio, however, robbed lesbians of agency and argued that the "renunciation of womanhood is unconscious and can sometimes be traced to early childhood."³³ Women who chose to pursue other women

were cast as victims, not actors.

Caprio's ideas were as influential as women's discontent was real. In her 1964 study of gay women in Toronto, Jo Anne Pratt also concluded that lesbians were "dissatisf[ied] with their female role:"

Many of these subjects exhibit a preference for masculine roles. They wish to possess masculine attributes, to behave like a man, and to do things men ordinarily do. They reject authority, rules, law enforcement, order and discipline.³⁴

In fact, butches frequently cited their unequal status as a primary motivating factor for the adoption of butch identity. In 1966 a Toronto lesbian published an article, titled "What is a Downtown Butch?" in that city's first gay magazine:

A butch is nature's way of saying that she has almost given up on the human race but is trying one last-ditch stand. A butch can smoke like a fiend, eat like a horse, act like a jackass and love like a man.

She is a piece of skin stretched over a rebellion. A war on two legs. She is called trouble because she hits at the most unexpected times, in the most unexpected places, and leaves everything a wreck behind her.

She is a confused situation to be cuddled, fed, liquored, and loved at all times: a boy forever, a policeman's nemesis, the offspring of our times, the scourge of a nation. Every one moulded is a taunt that woman can equal man.³⁵

Butches, it seemed, threatened to reveal not only that the emperor wore no clothes, but that he was in fact a she.

Cloaked in the rhetoric of medical and sexological discourse, Caprio's anti-feminist analysis was able to reassert the legitimacy of the "natural" gender order. As

such, his model of lesbian sexuality was widely influential, and not surprisingly appeared in the 1966 Chatelaine article "What Turns Women to Lesbianism." Here journalist Renate Wilson quotes a well-known Canadian expert on sexual deviation, sociologist Dr. J. Mohr, who explained that "the butch type wants 'not to be a woman' and is in rebellion against the social indignities of women; she sees her mother's way of life as undesirable, as lacking in respect and independence."³⁶ For sexologists and sociologists such as Dr. Mohr and Frank Caprio, women's frustration with a woman's proper role was interpreted as a medical crisis, not a political or social one: virtually any woman who felt reticent toward the feminine ideal was in danger of being labelled a latent or true homosexual. In the 1950s and 60s, a discontent with 'the social indignities of women' - or as we now call it, feminism - was reformulated as a pathological condition. The 'lavender menace' it would seem, preceded second wave feminism by at least fifteen years.³⁷

Human sexuality became one of the most prominent social and political issues into which much of North America's postwar anxiety was channelled. Discussions around sexual behaviour took many forms, but by far the most pervasive in Canada was the media-generated and institutionally supported hysteria around sexual deviation. As early as 1947, the Canadian news media began to wage a campaign to raise public awareness about sex crimes against children. It was a

campaign that would last a full decade, and would have a significant impact on popular notions of sexual behaviour. That the topic of sex was finally out in the open was a welcome and necessary change, according to journalist J.D. Ketchum:

The genuine alarm caused by a series of recent sex crimes against children in various parts of the country has had one valuable result: people are now talking about the treatment of sex offenders as well as their detection and punishment.³⁸

So many people were talking that in 1948 the federal government passed Criminal Sexual Psychopath legislation in response to a national outcry over 'moral' (meaning sexual) offences against children.³⁹ Criticisms of the new legislation followed almost immediately after its implementation, and by 1954 Prime Minister Diefenbaker bowed to public pressure for more effective criminal reform measures. A Royal Commission was struck which, in its four year life-span, consulted with psychiatrists, police officials, social workers and lawyers across the nation to discuss the topic of sex deviation.⁴⁰

In Toronto the news media was the main channel through which information regarding sexual deviation flowed, and local psychiatrists were more than happy to lift the shroud of ignorance surrounding human sexuality by providing journalists with their professional expertise. Media accounts of rampant and uncontrollable sexual deviancy coalesced around female child molestation by male

pedophiles, but the scope eventually broadened to include all sexual activities practised outside of the heterosexual, monogamous, same-generation norm.⁴¹ Throughout the 1950s Canadian psychiatrists played a key role in influencing both state regulation and public opinion regarding sexual practices. And while many psychiatrists and medical health professionals argued in favour of decriminalizing homosexual acts, they continued to uphold the notion that same-sex sex was abnormal and unnatural. University of Toronto Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Special Lecturer in Medical Jurisprudence Dr Kenneth Gray illustrated this explicitly in Saturday Night magazine:

Sexual deviancy is the term used by psychiatrists to describe abnormal sexual conduct, that is to say, an act performed for sexual gratification other than sexual intercourse with an adult of the opposite sex.⁴²

It is no surprise therefore that homosexuality topped Gray's list of "principle types of sexual deviation," followed by exhibitionism, fetishism, transvestism, voyeurism, sadism and pedophilia.

It would be erroneous, however, to suggest that the cultural shift toward an expansion of legitimate public discourse around sexuality translated into an increased acceptance of sexual practices outside of the monogamous, same-generation, (and same-race) heterosexual norm. As postwar scholars such as Elaine Tyler May and John D'Emilio have noted, the postwar era is notable for its sexually

conservative qualities.

That the focus of the post war hysteria around sexual deviation in Ontario was primarily aimed at the dangers of uncontrolled male sexuality amplified public awareness of male homosexuality yet it failed to garner little, if any, public discussion of lesbianism. In fact, homosexuality almost exclusively signified gay men, and when gay women were of concern, the term lesbian was employed.⁴³ During the cross country tour of the Royal Commission on the Criminal Law relating to the Criminal Sexual Psychopath, a federal investigation into sex crimes and the law, the topic of lesbianism came up only once during the hearings. Dr. J. N. Senn, a Hamilton-based psychiatrist, told the Commissioners:

It would appear that the female homosexual conducts herself in such a way that she never comes to public attention and generally is only recognized as such when some psychiatric difficulty results, such as a panic resulting from the separation from the partners. In the male homosexual the actions are much more easily recognized and therefore charges are much more frequently laid. I frankly don't know the way to alter this situation and as a matter of fact I don't know whether any alteration is necessary, but I do think the fact is worthy of note.⁴⁴

The failure to give lesbians the attention they deserved was considered by sexologists working in the field of female homosexuality an unfortunate and even irresponsible oversight. But because, as the above quote suggests, lesbians appeared to be the cause of few social problems outside of their own; consequently lesbianism received little play in Canadian official discourse.⁴⁵

Dr. Senn's remarks to the Commission do however reveal something of the lived experience of many postwar gay women. Because women's gay relationships were, by necessity, most often hidden from families and other traditional support systems such as religious organizations and social services, gay women who suffered from emotional traumas such as a relationship breakup had few places to get the kind of support they needed.⁴⁶ Tricia, who worked for a brief period as a psychiatric nurse at Toronto's Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital, remembers an incident such as the one described by Dr. Senn. A lesbian patient was admitted for severe depression after her relationship of twenty years ended. The presence of a lesbian patient, she recalled, was greeted with nervousness and discomfort:

I noticed how differently the doctors related to her: they were willing to have her discharged rather quickly in a semi-suicidal state, whereas other people who were heterosexual going through divorce and anxiety, whatever, they would be making sure they were okay.⁴⁷

Senn's, and the Commission's, ambivalence toward female homosexuality highlights the silences that have both plagued and graced lesbianism. The absence of a public lesbian culture and discourse left gay women vulnerable and helpless against otherwise 'normal' life crises.

In the postwar era, real-life cross-dressing gay women on the street may have given lesbianism the public face that continues to colour the queer imagination of mainstream North American culture, but small pockets of urban lesbian

subcultures were not nearly as accessible or visible to the general public as were pulp novels. According to Bonnie Zimmerman, more lesbian novels were published in the United States during the 1950s and early 1960s than at any other time in history.⁴⁸ Although largely written by men for a male audience, the lesbian pulp novel played a key role in helping women understand their own sexuality, as well as exercising considerable influence on lesbian communities.⁴⁹ Originally conceived of as an inexpensive way to distribute and sell reprint copies of classic novels, by the 1940s paperback publishing houses began to churn out original work. While this trend "expanded the market for potboilers," notes Kate Adams,

it also allowed controversial or marginal texts to come into print. Few hardcover houses would have touched the lesbian romances of Ann Bannon, Paula Christian, Valerie Taylor, and others in the 1950s, yet Fawcett Gold Medal published these authors in paperback from 1957 to 1962, thereby helping to create what has been called the "golden age" of lesbian pulp fiction, a phenomenon which in turn helped establish that lesbian culture existed outside of Greenwich village.⁵⁰

Because of their widespread availability, risque cover art, and racy content, numerous pulp novels became the subject of federal investigations in both Canada and the U.S.⁵¹ And in both cases, Tereska Torres's autobiographical wartime novel Women's Barracks was included on the list of objectionable material. One of the first of the mass-produced lesbian-themed pulps published in that era, it attracted the special attention of censorship and morality advocates on both sides

of the border.

In March 1952, the Ottawa local police force laid charges the National News Company, a distributor of paperbacks and magazines, for having obscene material in its possession for the purpose of distribution.⁵² Women's Barracks, a narrative account of a female French soldiers' observations of the mostly sexual adventures of her fellow army chums, was included among the four novels and seven "girlie" magazines under investigation. Lesbianism is only one of the many controversial sexual themes explored Torres's novel, but it was the only one that both American and Canadian investigators centred out for scrutiny.⁵³

In her analysis of the National News trial, Mary Louise Adams revealed that the novel was subjected to an obscenity test that "assumed the potential of reading material to 'deprave and corrupt' as well as the fact that there existed persons whose minds were 'open' to influence."⁵⁴ Crown Attorney Raoul Mercier argued that exposure to such immorality had the potential to induce young, impressionable women to experiment with lesbianism. The trial excerpt below is taken from an exchange between Mercier and defense witness Doctor John Bakless of New York University:

Mercier: ...wouldn't a little girl who is not maybe a French woman in the same barracks, but who is in convent or in a boarding school reaching the puberty age, does not know anything about these things, reads this passage from this book, wouldn't you say they would be willing to indulge in this practice to see if it is as described?'

A: I have read that book through, and I wouldn't

want to be near a lesbian. Don't forget what happens...

Q: And you do not think they would be tempted to try lesbianism?

A: No, sir, there is disaster there too plainly, and it is only with sympathy and regret that you can read it...⁵⁵

Plain disaster was a common feature of most lesbian pulp novels published in this period. According to Zimmerman, novels like Women's Barracks depicted lesbians as "tragic, maimed creatures trapped in a world of alcohol, violence, and meaningless sex. The plots either doomed them to a cycle of unhappy love affairs or redeemed them through heterosexual marriage..."⁵⁶ The claim that the novel would discourage women away from lesbianism failed to convince Judge A.G. McDougall, but a guilty verdict did not put an end to the importation of other lesbian-themed novels. In Toronto, American pulp novels - including reprints of 'classics' such as Radclyffe Hall's 1928 novel The Well of Loneliness - were distributed by the De Luxe Book Company. According to one of the narrators, the pulps were only sold in a few variety and book stores.⁵⁷ In order to expand their sales base, De Luxe took out advertisements in the local tabloids throughout this period. Often times when one of their titles became subjected to obscenity charges, De Luxe publicized rather than suppressed that information in their advertising. In the realm of sex scandal, negative media attention was more likely to boost rather than depress sales, as one New York police official regretfully pointed

out.⁵⁸

But Crown Attorney Raoul Mercier was right. Reading about lesbians *could* entice women to experiment with a kind of sexual pleasure that they might never had heard of before.⁵⁹ Although most studies of female homosexuality in this period relied on the visible lesbian population for their research data, the published work of sexologists had little direct impact on working class gay women.⁶⁰ Instead, sexological theories were transmitted to gay women through the narrative conventions of the pulp novel, perhaps the most prolific source of lesbian imagery and information in this period.

In Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives, a documentary feature film produced in Canada, directors Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman feature interviews with gay women who talked about their experiences in Canada during the 1950s and 60s.⁶¹ One of their subjects, Reva Hutkin, recounted her young adult relationship with an unnamed friend who used to loan her lesbian-themed pulp fiction novels:

I got involved with a friend... and she had come across all these lesbian novels and she said, 'I'd like you to read this book, it's a great book.' And then she gave me one, and then another, and then another. By now I was sort of getting hooked on stories and at some point she sort of confessed, 'Well, I think I like that.' And I totally freaked out and said, 'Oh no, not like that!' whatever that was because it was all kind of a new experience to me but eventually I sort of thought that maybe I'm like that too. Ultimately we got it together and I just left my husband and

uh, sort of took on a new life.⁶²

By sharing novels that depicted women in intimate sexual relationships with one another, Reva's girlfriend was able to introduce her to a kind of sexual intimacy previously unimagined by Reva, creating the possibility for them to explore a homosexual relationship together. Clearly the novel did not "make" Reva a lesbian, but it did provide a useful - and in this particular instance effective - tool for her girlfriend to broach a difficult and potentially hazardous subject. Likewise, for Reva pulp novels made the idea of lesbianism become more familiar and conceivable.

Pulp novels may have propelled some women toward sexual experimentation and even a shift in one's sexual orientation, but for the majority of the narrators included in this study, the pulps were something they discovered through other lesbians.⁶³ Mary, for example, recalls her first lover recommending she read Diana, one of the more favoured books because of its uncommonly empathetic characterization of lesbians.⁶⁴ Most stories, pulp novelist Ann Bannon explained, were characterized by the notoriously tragic endings that editors at Fawcett Gold Medal insisted upon in order to evade the censor's sharpened scissors.⁶⁵ But even those were devoured by gay women, with the caveat that "we all knew that it was bullshit that they'd end up with men. We all knew they'd end up with women [in real life]."⁶⁶

Indeed, reading against the grain was a practice mastered by many gay women, but the heavy-handed editorial mandate against happy endings could also deter women from engaging in homosexual sex and entering into intimate lesbian relationships. For at least two years Denise, a mature and educated middle class business woman, resisted becoming attached to any one partner because she did not want to "end up tragically," as was the case with most of the lesbian protagonists she read about.⁶⁷ The impact the pulps had on Reva and Denise suggest that there lay a kernel of truth in the arguments put forward by both Crown attorney Raoul Mercier and the defense attorney's for the National News Company: lesbian pulp novels could both facilitate and deter women from pursuing lesbian relationships.

Postwar pornographers also produced lesbian imagery in the 1950s and 1960s. As a young girl growing up in Toronto's suburbs during the early 1950s, Jerry recalls getting copies of imported porn magazines from a school chum. When asked how much of the content was lesbian, she responded "enough -- enough to know what I wanted. Enough to know what I was."⁶⁸ Representation of lesbians in postwar popular culture was a central part of most gay women's lives. The American lesbian journal, The Ladder, included serious reviews of the pulps.⁶⁹ Yet as eagerly as women sought out such novels, most were highly critical of the fatalistic conclusions of doomed desire, and were more optimistic about their own search

for emotional and erotic happiness. Whether it was pulp fiction or porn, representations of lesbian desire and sexual practices functioned as a vital resource through and against which women formed and reaffirmed their sexual and social identities.

In Toronto, the other significant source of news and information on lesbians and lesbianism was the yellow press. Described by Ross Higgins and Line Chamberland as "the least respectable type of publication, one which resorts to the most outrageous kind of sensationalism to sell papers," the tabloids, or the yellow press, hold a special place in lesbian and gay history. They were an invaluable source of information for both gays and lesbians of the time, and as one of the few existing forms of written documentation on lesbian lives, for historians.⁷⁰ Unlike Canada's mainstream news media, which framed its limited discussions of homosexuality within the context of sex crimes, the yellow newspapers offered a steady dose of lesbian reportage.⁷¹

Higgins and Chamberland's study of Montreal tabloids reveal there was little difference between the papers produced in that city and those in Toronto.⁷² Based on an analysis of the advertisements and the lonely hearts club pages, it appears that both the Toronto and Montreal weeklies were read by women and men, and its audience was largely working class. For example, products featured in the back page advertising feature ranged from hygienic products

for women, and a variety of fiction and nonfiction books sold and distributed through the mail by the De Luxe Book Company in Toronto. Throughout the newspaper were advertisements for local taverns, restaurants, hotels and nightclubs located in the downtown core, in close proximity to the tenderloin district and Cabbagetown, a working class neighbourhood. "Jeanne's Lonely Hearts Club," a regular feature in Hush, ran personal ads placed by both men and women seeking companionship, marriage and, occasionally, pen pals.

The lesbian content in Hush Free Press appeared in three forms: articles reprinted from American sources, feature stories on local lesbian activity and, primarily although not exclusively in the weekly gossip columns, reports from the Toronto women's court where lesbians were a near constant presence. When articles were authored by Hush writers, the tone was consistently tongue-in-cheek, with the occasional hint of moral outrage and condemnation. Lesbians were part of a greater theme of transgressive behaviour that ran through the newspaper's reportage. Rarely were women's sexual practices highlighted, though. Instead, Hush writers ridiculed what they interpreted as failed attempts to pass as men, substantiating American historian Donna Penn's claim that gender identity as opposed to sexual practice figured centrally in the construction of meaning of and about lesbian lives in post war America.⁷³

Although the predominant theme of sexually transgressive behaviour had a potentially broad appeal, Hush journalists were clearly writing for a primarily working class audience. The failings of the middle and upper classes to abide by their own moral codes were gleefully pointed out, and class discrimination was loudly protested - even when lesbians were the victims. For example, in a story about Virginia Sinclair Mdvani, the daughter of California oil millionaire Harry Sinclair, it was reported that Virginia's husband, Georgian Prince David Mdvani, filed an "alienation of affections suit" against his wife. His suit charged that "Virginia Kent Catherwood, daughter of the late radio tycoon Atwater Kent... 'wilfully, wrongfully and maliciously' gained the affections of his wife... that Mrs. Catherwood 'did persuade and lure Virginia Sinclair Mdvani to carry on an unlawful, unnatural, immoral and scandalous conduct' with her." According to the report, Virginia Sinclair Mdvani had left her conjugal home for Catherwood's Arizona digs. Hush's journalist wryly concluded "It appears [sic] that the upper crust and the Tenderloin are separated only by an imaginary line."⁷⁴

Closer to home, Hush's February 8, 1959 issue reported the arrest of 66 year-old Toronto socialite Elizabeth Anderson who pleaded guilty to "dealing in prostitution and supplying girls for 'friends' for the past five years."⁷⁵ Reported to have had connections to Toronto's exclusive

Granite Club, Hush wrote that "one of her relatives was mayor of 'a community,' others were 'very successful' and her counsel was one of the city's most prominent lawyers." Despite Anderson's admission of guilt, she was given a suspended sentence with two years probation. Ordinarily, this type of report stood on its own as yet another sex scandal, but the following week it too was mobilized to decry class inequality in the Canadian justice system. Only a few days following the incident with Ms. Anderson, a working-class woman was incarcerated after having her home raided by the police and was found playing poker with a group of men to whom she had sold a few bottles of beer and shots of hard liquor. She had taken in a total sum of \$13. During the raid one of the officers also discovered two women in a bedroom having sex together, and subsequently charged them with gross indecency. Like their hostess, they too were sentenced to serve time in prison for their crime. The article, titled "Cadi Who Freed Socialite Madam 'Tosses Book' at Female Lovers" defends the sexual activities between the two women as "hurting no one's morals but their own and [they] engaged in a sexual act which is not unknown in the most exclusive girls' schools." The writer concluded by arguing "[p]erhaps if he [the judge] made the punishment fit the crime and not the social standing, people would have a much different view of today's justice system."⁷⁶ At the very least, these examples suggest that sexuality, and in

particular homosexuality, could be mobilized to explore a range of issues other than concerns around sexual morality. More specifically, they demonstrate how categories of class could sometimes transcend other differences, including gender and sexuality.

If the stories about Virginia Sinclair Mdvani and Elizabeth Anderson helped solidify a class consciousness among the general readership, they played an equally important role for gay women, not the least of which was in helping isolated gay women find the downtown lesbian community. The Continental Hotel ran regular ads in the Toronto tabloids and although the ad itself offered no indication of the type of clientele it served, Hush writers frequently identified it as the favoured hangout for "members of the Lesbian colony."⁷⁷ Even the personal ads were used by gay and bisexual men and women in search of sexual adventure with new partners. Two of the narrators that inform this study met people this way.⁷⁸ Higgins and Chamberland found that men sometimes used these columns to find gay partners by taking out an advertisement in search of 'roommates.' Gay appropriation of a heterosexual resource such as lonely hearts' columns was carefully ensconced in oblique terms, and demanded that the reader be able to 'read' them correctly. In the ad Mary answered, for example, the advertiser sought a female companion to go on a "wizard trip."⁷⁹ It is unclear whether or not Mary 'knew' that a

wizard trip was a reference to lesbian sex (if indeed it was), or if simply a woman advertising to meet another woman was enough to allow for some speculation. Never the less, it does indicate how vital a subculture's argot is insofar as it allows people to safely identify one. Further research on the lonely hearts and similar 'personal' pages of both the tabloids and the mainstream press will add yet another dimension to our understanding of how lesbians and gays found ways to meet and socialize, as well as make sexual contact with one another.

Obscure coded messages buried in the back pages of Hush and other print media may have served as an important means to connect potential sex partners and lovers, but far more obvious - especially to the casual reader - was the coverage the yellow press gave to lesbian issues and events. At least once a year Hush printed a feature article on the local lesbian community, referred to as the lesbian "colony," "gang" and "cult." In addition, the gossip column "Toronto Breeze Around" served up weekly reports of individual lesbian's lives by recounting recent events and personal details about prostitutes and butch and fem lesbians, two female identities that were not always discreet. This information was culled from the daily goings-on during sessions of Toronto's Women's Court where women charged with minor offences appeared. Occasionally such stories would merit a full, half or quarter page article, and less

frequently a front page feature article.

Robert Champagne has argued that the primary goal of the editors of Hush and Justice Weekly was to sell papers.⁸⁰ Their uniqueness in the media marketplace was that they explored taboo subjects the mainstream media avoided. And unlike American pulp novelists and their publishers, they were relatively free from the constraints of demonstrating a moral value in order to escape censorship and public protest. The standard of journalistic accountability was questionable; in Hush for instance, articles were generally unaccompanied by a by-line. Often times Hush would reprint articles from other sources, including America's first gay periodical, One. For this reason, the range of attitudes expressed in stories with a homosexual subject matter varied dramatically from moral condemnation to 'objective' scientific study to amusing and absurd reports of local lesbian life.

Articles written by Hush staff, which were the most frequent, tended toward the latter category. In Ed. Walker's "Toronto Breeze Around," for example, regular references were made to "she-males," or "butches." Although the sexual orientation of their subjects was rarely explicitly stated, regular readers of the paper would be able to immediately identify such women as specialized sexual subjects otherwise known as members of Toronto's lesbian cult. In both Hush and Justice Weekly, lesbians were predominantly represented by

the butch or mannish women. Like effeminate gay men (often referred to as "the lavender set"), representations of butch lesbians emphasised their gender non-conformity over their sexual practices. Consequently, fems - or feminine-looking women - received cursory attention. If the butch was the king of the bar, she was too of the tabloids. The yellow press, in other words, reproduced and reinforced the butch as a 'true' or authentic lesbian.

Tabloid coverage of the goings-on in the lesbian community and in the women's court were avidly read by the gay women who often either were the topic or person under discussion, or who recognized those who were. But the tabloids were also undeniably dangerous, a quality of which the journalists themselves were well aware. In Hush's first, most intimate story about Toronto's lesbian community, the reporter noted that most gay women assume aliases or nicknames "out of deference to their families" and will "shy away from photographers" to avoid being publicly identified.⁸¹ However, when the journalists gained their information from the courts, they did not hesitate to print women's names, first and last. None of the women that inform this study were ever exposed to their family and employers this way, but most of them did not hide their homosexuality, either. The tabloids may have told women where they could find other lesbians, but they also threatened to expose them if they dared to go.

Up until the mid-1960s, public discourses around lesbianism occurred in highly specialized formats, and even then, bemoaned lesbian expert Frank Caprio, North Americans failed to fully appreciate the full scope of the "problem" of female homosexuality. Nevertheless, Caprio persevered in his study of lesbianism, and, within the context of the prevailing cultural anxieties surrounding the expansion of women's socio-sexual and economic freedom, created a psychoanalytic model for the lesbian that persists to the present day.

Despite the expansion of legitimate public discourses around sexuality however, most gay women continued to grow up in isolation and ignorance. With virtually no visible role models by which to fashion their image of themselves, and even fewer sources of legitimation, growing up gay in the post war era was often a treacherous experience. But, as we shall see in the next chapter, it was not always without its moments of youthful bliss.

Notes

1. National Archives of Canada. Kenneth H. Rogers, Ph.D, 'Interim Report of the Committee on the Sex Offender' Canadian Penal Association, June 1948; 23. RG 33/131 Acc 83-84/253 v2.
2. See Mary Louise Adams, 'The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Construction of Heterosexuality,' unpublished Ph.D dissertation (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1994); and Gary Kinsman, The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada (Black Rose Books: Montreal, 1987).
3. See Elaine Tyler May's Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
4. Denis Forgacs, ed. An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988).
5. On the House of Un-American Activities, see John D'Emilio's "The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America" in Passion and Power: Sexuality in History, eds. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989): p. 226-240. For a similar study concerning Cold War Canada, see Gary Kinsman, The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada (Black Rose Books: Montreal, 1987): chapter 8; also Daniel J. Robinson and David Kimmel, 'The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada' in The Canadian Historical Review, LXXV: 3 (September 1993): 319-345.
6. The recent publication of Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994) represents a new body of scholarship which challenges the myth of female conformism and acquiescence to the postwar feminine ideal.
7. Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities, Decade of Promise: An Assessment of Canadian Women's Status in Education, Training and Employment, 1976-1985 (Toronto: Avebury Research, 1986), p. 61. Cited in Alison Prentice, et.al., Canadian Women: A History (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988); p. 422.
8. On the creation of new job opportunities for women during the Second World War, see Alison Prentice, et.al., Canadian Women: A History (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988); p. 298.

9. Ruth Roach Pierson, "They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986) p. 29-30, 48-49.

10. Lotta Dempsey, "Women Working on Ships and Aircraft," Mayfair, June 1943, p. 74. Cited in Pierson, "They're Still Women After All", p. 131. See also "Beauty dresses in overalls to help..." Saturday Night Magazine, 55: 117 May 11, 1940.

11. To my knowledge, there are no published Canadian studies indicating how the war impacted on opportunities for women from ethnic minorities. Certainly none of the recruitment posters nor any of the photos essays in the media depicted women from visible minorities, but we certainly cannot conclude from this evidence that the war did not open up new opportunities for women from visible ethnic minorities. Unfortunately, the inclusion of non-anglo Canadians in most aspects of Canadian history has been sorely neglected. This is an important area of investigation that demands further research in order for us to gain a better understanding of the impact of the Second World War in Canada.

12. Prentice et al., Canadian Women: A History (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988). The authors make the point that gender inequities were built into these 'training programs': "Government training programs were shorter for women than for men, and most women only received two to six weeks' instruction. Women who entered directly into industry without such training were often expected to acquire the skills they would need during their first shift. Consequently there was little opportunity for them to secure the specialized training that would ensure long-term employment or upward mobility." p. 300.

13. Pierson, "They're Still Women After All," p. 220.

14. See Susan Prentice, "Workers, Mothers, Reds: Toronto's Postwar Daycare Fight" in Studies in Political Economy, 30: (Autumn 1989) 115-141.

15. See Allan Berube, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two (New York: Plume, 1990); John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community (New York: Routledge, 1993).

16. For Buffalo, see Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, p. 31.

17. Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era, chapter 4.

18. For a discussion of how the postwar construction of female sexuality was contingent upon the assumption of heterosexuality, see Donna Penn, "The Meanings of Lesbianism in Post-War America," in Gender and History, 1991: (3)2.

19. Frank Caprio, Female Homosexuality: a Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism (New York: The Citadel Press, 1954): p. 133.

20. Janice Irvine, Disorders of Desire: Sex and Gender in Modern American Sexology (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); p. 2. Sexology was an clearly an American-dominated field, however similar 'scientific' attitudes were none the less propagated by Canadian professionals. For example, The Canadian Medical Association claimed that women who suffered from pre-menstrual stress were considered to be "resent[ful of] their femininity and to envy men..." Specialists in obstetrics and gynaecology were advised to determine "the extent to which their patients accepted themselves as women." Deborah Findlay, "Professional Interests in Medicine's Construction of Women's Reproductive Health," a paper presented to the Canadian Sociology and anthropology Association, Winnipeg, 1986, cited in Canadian Women: A History, Alison Prentice, et.al. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988) p. 309-310.

21. Donna Penn, "The Meanings of Lesbianism In Postwar America," p. 201.

22. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 272.

23. Frank Caprio, Variations in Sexual Behaviour, p. 161. [my emphasis]

24. *ibid.*, p. 161. Caprio recommended two or three sessions of analytic psychotherapy a week, "covering a period of a year or more as the case requires." p. 312.

25. Caprio, Female Homosexuality: a Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism, p. 200, 213.

26. See Alfred Kinsey's Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male (Philadelphia: W.B Saunders Company, 1948) and Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female (Philadelphia: W.B Saunders Company, 1953). For a discussion of the impact of Alfred Kinsey's work, see Regina Markell Morantz, "The Scientist as

- Sex Crusader: Alfred C. Kinsey and American Culture" in Procreation or Pleasure: Sexual Attitudes in American History, Dr. Thomas L. Altherr, ed. (Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1983): 145-166.
27. "Sex on the campus: what Mann's survey revealed" in Macleans 79:22-24 01:1966.
28. Caprio, Variations in Sexual Behaviour, p. 177.
29. *ibid.*, p. 177.
30. "Housewives, Schoolgirls, Call Girls - Lesbian Population" in Hush Free Press, January 19, 1963; p. 3.
31. Interview with Denise, April 23, 1993; interview with Eve, March 6, 1993; interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993. Caprio developed a popular theory which claimed that "the homosexual component lies dormant in every woman" and therefore all women are in danger of "fall[ing] prey to seduction by the experienced lesbian." Caprio, The Female Homosexual, p. 77, 137, 139-140.
32. Joan Nestle, A Restricted Country, pp. 100-109.
33. Caprio, The Female Homosexual, p. 168.
34. Pratt, 30, 31.
35. Anonymous, "What is a Downtown Butch?" Two, #6, 1965; p. 2.
36. Renate Wilson, "What turns women to lesbianism?" in Chatelaine (October 1966); p. 134.
37. The "lavendar menace" is a phrase that was used by the founder of the National Organization of Women (NOW), Betty Friedan, to describe the presence of lesbians within the North American women's movement in the 1970s. See Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): p. 212.
38. J.D. Ketchum, "Prude is Father to the Pervert," in Maclean's Magazine, 15 January, 1948; p. 9.
39. See Gary Kinsman, "The Sexual Regulation of Family Relations: The 'Public' Construction of Sexual Danger in Canada," unpublished paper, 1995.

40. The Royal Commission on the Criminal Law Relating to the Criminal Sexual Psychopath interviewed 106 witnesses in total. Royal Commission on the Criminal Law Relating to the Criminal Sexual Psychopath (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1958); pp. 133-135.
41. See Kinsman, The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada (Black Rose Books: Montreal, 1987): chapter 8.
42. Dr Kenneth Gray, "Sexual Deviation: Problems and Treatment" in Saturday Night Magazine (November 26, 1955); p. 9.
43. For example, Justice Weekly often ran stories and reports about homosexuals, but in this period the subject matter that appeared under that heading pertained exclusively to males. Likewise, when Sydney Katz wrote the first feature article on homosexuality for a mainstream Canadian magazine, titled "The Homosexual Next Door," he explained "[i]n these articles I will principally be concerned with the male homosexual. Lesbians are less obtrusive, less discriminated against and raise fewer social problems." Maclean's, 22 February 1964; p. 11. Conversely, Renate Wilson's article on female homosexuality in Chatelaine magazine was titled "What turns a women to lesbianism?" Chatelaine, October 1966; pp. 33+. Even as medical experts and sexologists began to use the term homosexuality to describe the sexual activities of both sexes, discussions of lesbianism were distinguished from the inherent male assumption by adding 'female,' as in 'female homosexuality.' See especially Caprio's Female Homosexuality: a Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism.
44. National Archives of Canada. Dr. J. N. Senn, reporting to the Royal Commission on the Criminal Law Relating to the Criminal Sexual Psychopath. RG 33/131 Acc 83-84/253 v2.
45. Donna Penn, "The Meanings of Lesbianism in Post-War America," p. 197.
46. In the film Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives (dirs. Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman) Jeanne Healy talks about having a breakdown after her first relationship because "in those days [1948] there was no one to talk to, no one to tell because it was such a no-no." (Toronto: National Film Board, 1992.)
47. Interview with Tricia (LMH), September 21, 1986.
48. Bonnie Zimmerman, The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969-1989 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990); p. 9.

49. Mary, for example, recalled that English cars were popular among gay women in Toronto because they were often vehicles driven by lesbian protagonists in pulp novels. Interview with Mary, Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Wiessman, n.d. 198?.

50. Kate Adams, "Making the World Safe for the Missionary position: Images of the Lesbian in Post-World War II America" in Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 1990): p. 259.

51. For a discussion of the 1952 U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, see Kenneth C. Davis' Two-Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America (Boston: Houghton, 1984) esp. chapter 8.

52. For a full discussion of the Women's Barracks obscenity trial in Canada, see Mary Louise Adams, "The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Construction of Heterosexuality." Unpublished Ph.D diss., Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1994: pp. 320-329. All of the information included here on this trial is taken from the above text.

53. Part of the explanation for why both the Canadian and American government centred out Women's Barracks may be because it was one of the first of the pulps to discuss lesbianism. However, no doubt both governments were conscious of the fact that less than ten years earlier they were actively encouraging women to enter the armed service, the very backdrop of Torres's novel. Women's Barracks confirmed the very fears Canadians had concerning sexual danger and immoral influence enlisted women were bound to experience in the service. For a full discussion of the trend toward censoring pulp novels in the United States, including Torres's novel, see Kenneth C. Davis, Two-Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America: pp. 216-247.

54. Adams, "The Trouble With Normal," p. 322.

55. The Queen vs. National News Company Limited, 8 October, 1952. Archives of Ontario, RG 4-32, 1953, #830; p. 64. Cited in Adams, "Trouble With Normal," p. 324-325.

56. Zimmerman, The Safe Sea of Women, p. 9. In the film Forbidden Love, well-known postwar lesbian novelist Ann Bannon reported that paperback houses insisted on such characterizations in order to defend the moral value of the books. Other ways the paperback publishing industry responded to persistent efforts to censor pulp novels

included desensualizing the cover art. See Davis, Two-Bit Culture, p. 242.

57. Interview with Norma, March 11, 1992.

58. Davis, Two-Bit Culture, p. 225.

59. It was not uncommon for women and girls to have had no knowledge of female homosexuality in this era. One of the Crown witnesses, Ms. Finlayson, claimed she had known nothing about lesbianism before reading Women's Barracks. The Queen v. National News Company Limited, 8 October 1952. Archives of Ontario, RG 4-32, 1953, #830. Cited in Adams, "The Trouble with Normal," p. 328. See also at the beginning of this chapter, Interview with Beth; LMH, January 11, 1987 and later in this chapter Interview with Laura; LMH, September 26, 1985, Interview with Tricia; LMH, September 21, 1986.

60. Frank Caprio's studies, for example, reveal an intimate knowledge of working class bar culture, and his analysis of female homosexuality is greatly determined by the butch and the fem lesbian. See Female Homosexuality: a Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism, and Variations in Sexual Behaviour.

61. Fernie and Weissman, Forbidden Love.

62. Reva Hutkin in Fernie and Weissman's Forbidden Love.

63. Part of the reason for this can be explained by the fact that most of the narrators were already involved in the downtown bar community during the 'golden age' period defined by Bonnie Zimmerman.

64. Gail Wilhelm, Diana: a strange autobiography (New York: Citadel Press, 1946). Other favoured (and favourable) novels included Gale Wilhelm's We Too Are Drifting (New York: Random House, 1935) and Claire Morgan [Patricia Highsmith]'s The Price of Salt (Tallahassee, Fla.: Niad, 1984). Interview with Laura, Jan and Mary; LMH, October 19, 1985. Note that all of these novels were originally published before 1950.

65. Ann Bannon in Fernie and Weissman's Forbidden Love.

66. Interview with Laura (LMH), September 26, 1985.

67. Interview with Denise, April 23, 1993.

68. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.

69. See Bonnie Zimmerman, The Safe Sea of Women, p. 9.

70. In Canada, the mainstream press gave little attention to issues of homosexuality before the mid-1960s, with the exception of discussions around criminal sexual behaviour. The first feature articles to appear in mainstream journalism include Renate Wilson's "What turns a woman to lesbianism?" in Chatelaine, October 1966, p. 33+ ; and Sydney Katz's "The Homosexual Next Door" in Maclean's, 7 March 1964, pp. 10+. For an example of a discussion of homosexuality within the context of sexual deviation and criminalized sexual practices, see Kenneth Gray's "Sexual Deviation: Problems and Treatment," in Saturday Night, 26 November, 1955: p. 9-10.

71. Ross Higgins and Line Chamberland, "Mixed Messages: Gays and Lesbians in Montreal Yellow Papers" in Ian McKay, ed. The Challenge of Modernity: A Reader on Post-Confederation Canada (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992): 424. The tabloids offer an opportunity to examine how lesbians were depicted in the yellow press while at the same time provides documentation of specific events that occurred within the lesbian community and to the women who participated in the gay life's street culture. In this thesis, I employ the tabloids for both these purposes. In this chapter, I look primarily at issues of textual representation in the yellow press, and in later chapters discuss some of the events that occurred as they were reported therein.

72. Three Toronto tabloids existed during this period: Hush, Free Press, Justice Weekly and Flash! For this study, I have examined Hush from 1955 to 1965, and a small sample of issues of Justice Weekly.

73. Penn, 'The Meanings of Lesbianism in Post-War America,' p. 192.

74. Hush, December 12, 1959; p. 8.

75. *ibid.*, February 8, 1962; p. 4.

76. *ibid.*, February 17, 1962; p. 7.

77. *ibid.*, Feb 23, 1957, p. 4.

78. Interview with Laura (LMH), September 25, 1985; interview with Mary, Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman, nd. 198?.

79. Interview with Mary (LMH), October 19, 1985.

80. One of Toronto's first homosexual rights activist who published a series of articles in the tabloid Justice Weekly in 1954 reported to historian Robert Champagne "[Editor

Philip] Daniels was motivated to publish the series by nothing more or less than the idea that it would sell copies of Justice Weekly. I sort of fed him that idea, I said, "There are thousands of gay people in Toronto and they would probably be interested in those articles. Who knows? Maybe your circulation and newsstand sales will increase. His old eyes lit up..." Robert Champagne, "Interview With Jim Egan" in Ian McKay, ed. The Challenge of Modernity: A Reader on Post-Confederation Canada (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992): 434.

81. "Freak Wedding Bridegroom is a Girl!" in Hush, February 23, 1957; p. 5.

CHAPTER THREE:**Becoming "Normal": Growing Up Gay in the 1950s and 1960s**

From the time I was in high school, I always had these terrible [crushes on women] - I had no idea. I didn't even know the word homosexual or lesbian... And I finally found out what a lesbian was at the age of twenty-seven.¹

Despite the increased public awareness of sexual perversion, or "deviancy," in the postwar era, the isolation that has characterized the lesbian and gay past continued to be a significant - if somewhat lessened - feature of postwar gay and lesbian lives. This chapter examines this peculiar contradiction by turning to the experiences of gay women who grappled with their homosexual identities in this period. Through women's accounts of their own lives we will be able to see how they came to understand themselves as lesbians, and eventually to participate in Toronto's public lesbian community. In order to gain a better understanding of this experience, I will examine some of the key internal and external conditions that had an impact upon the formation of and participation in public lesbian communities in this era, focusing specifically on the Toronto community.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the existence of the "female homosexual" remained a well-kept secret, particularly from children and youth. However, not everyone favoured maintaining the sexual silences that left North American adolescents in the lurch.² The threat of sexual danger that,

by all mainstream media accounts, seemed to lurk around most every corner provided the impetus for renewed efforts to introduce sex education in the classrooms and living rooms across Canada.³ Unlike the push for increased sexual freedom espoused by some radical civil rights activists in the late 1960s however, postwar proponents of sex education regarded sexual knowledge as a prophylactic against sexual danger and moral corruption. For example, in his article "Prude is Father to the Pervert," journalist J.D. Ketchum argued that the less young people knew about sex, the more likely they were to become sex "perverts."⁴ Ketchum's views were echoed by parents and educators as well as the modern moral reformers - social workers - throughout the 1950s. Many expressed considerable concern over the normal development of adolescents, particularly around sexuality, and claimed that ignorance regarding what constituted normal sexuality left young people vulnerable to the advances of sex deviants. As compelling as such arguments may have been, the drive to introduce sex education in Toronto schools failed.⁵ Instead, teenage sexuality, and particularly adolescent female sexuality, was obliquely contained within a hyper-genderized construction of male and female relations.

Sex and sexuality remained an unspeakable topic between adults and children throughout this period, a condition especially agonizing for the adolescent homosexual. Models of heterosexuality, its expression and its lived experience,

abounded, but there was little context for the articulation of same-sex desire. The near absence of a social, medical or even criminal context for young gay women is a particularly striking childhood memory for many gay women who grew up during and after the Second World War. Tricia, who was in high school during the 1950s and later went on to become one of Toronto's first lesbian gay rights activists recalls:

In the 50s I was basically in school. I had no awareness about being a lesbian at all, or any idea of what that was, and no recollection whatsoever of any kind of visible role models. Certainly people didn't come to the schools talking about homosexuality, and there weren't articles in the newspaper. I can remember just basically titterings around school... I went to an all-girls' school: Thursday' was "girl's day" right? something or other, whatever that was supposed to mean; but none of us seemed to know very much about what that really was. And Grade thirteen Latin, somehow the Island of Lesbos kept coming up, and there'd be some sort of tittering there, none of which I understood or knew what it was about. At the same time I was falling in love with women all the time. I didn't know what that was, either. I had a different crush every year, on some older nun or other. I think for me it was just basically like a void: there was nothing to connect to, nothing to sort that out or figure out what those feelings were.⁶

Laura, a middle class woman who dedicated much of her life to teaching high school and advocating social justice issues from the Canadian political left remembers:

I had crushes on students and on everybody, you know, I'd been having crushes ever since I was a little kid on girls, but I never did anything about it, never even knew what it was, I was so stupid! God, you can be so stupid! You know, you don't realize what these tremendous passions that you'd get into [are]. I didn't know what I was. I didn't even know women could -- I knew it could happen with men, but I didn't know about women.⁷

Laura and Tricia's feelings of isolation were not unique. Even women who engaged in lesbian sex during adolescence experienced acute feelings of aloneness and anxiety about their future as a result of their sexual attraction to women.

Helen, who as a teenager attended a Catholic convent where sexually intimate relationships were accepted as normal amongst her peers, did not 'grow out of it'; she recalls the anguish of watching her friends graduate into heterosexual marriages, all the while knowing that she was not and could not be like them. Like Beth and Tricia, she too felt isolated and alone until she discovered a name for herself.⁸

Conversely, the absence of prohibitions around close female relationships and even intimacy between girls and women meant that some lesbians were able to explore, albeit to a very limited degree, their emotional and sexual attractions to other women. As early as 1902 American sexologists issued warnings against the dangers of female friendships, arguing that when young girls are thrown together their mutual affections are bound to progress beyond fond kisses and satisfying embraces to the point of "direct contact, and in the course of their fondling they resort to cunni-linguistic practices... After this the normal sex act fails to satisfy [them]."⁹ The stigmatization of close and intimate relationships between girls was

revived following the Second World War, but evidence suggests that there remained a considerably high level of tolerance and acceptance of adolescent girls' crushes even then. For example, Helen describes the atmosphere at the convent she attended in the mid-1940s:

the nuns were very smart, I mean this was not your kind of proverbial convent, they knew very well that girls were going to get crushes on each other and it was considered, I mean nobody said anything, so there was no, it didn't become taboo in any sort of bad way, it was sort of giggly, but that's all... there was lots of feelings and stuff going around, I mean you can believe the kind of [activities that went on], you know...the copies of poems, people copying out Keats...¹⁰

All-female environments such as boarding schools offered an ideal setting for young women to explore sexually and emotionally intimate feelings for and relationships with other women, even though these same settings often functioned as a training ground for future heterosexual marriages. Norma recalls being a student at Branksome Hall, an exclusive private girls school in Toronto. As part of the social program, the school arranged for boys from a nearby private school to come for dances. Although she recalls the dances as being "very dull," she fondly remembers the lessons they were given in preparation for the event. Girls were paired up together and taught the steps. For Norma, the lessons allowed her to experience a physical closeness with other girls that was far more satisfying, and thrilling, than the *real* dances could ever hope to be. Such childhood experiences allowed women like Norma to, at an early age,

develop a strong sense of their sexual identity, a crucial process that might enable have them to endure social and familial pressures to marry.

With high tuition fees, boarding schools like Branksome Hall catered primarily to the upper classes. Convents like the one Helen attended, however, were accessible to working and middle class Catholic girls. For the most part non-Catholic girls from working and middle class families did not have the same opportunities to socialize in all-female environments - with the exception of church organizations and social groups such as the Girl Guides. Jerry, as a young girl from a working class family in Ottawa, joined one such organization. While a member of the Girl's Auxiliary of the local Anglican church, Jerry took part in the organization and production of a play. Selected to play a male lead (no doubt because of her boyish looks and her willingness to accept the part), she was required to kiss the female lead on stage. In this instance, not only were Jerry's obvious sex and gender transgressions deemed acceptable, but were orchestrated and directed by a respected church member - the minister's wife. Although hardly a sanctioning of lesbianism, it seems highly unlikely that in the sexually sanitized child environments of today, either cross dressing or two girls kissing on stage would be encouraged, let alone condoned.¹¹

While many young gay girls had neither the words nor

the knowledge to describe or account for their exclusive attraction to women, most did have the intuitive sense not to speak openly about their feelings for other girls or women. Only recently have North Americans begun to realize the profound and horrible consequences sexual silences can have on gay and lesbian youth.¹² The dire consequences of the silences surrounding homosexuality were no less real in the postwar era than they are today. Arlene, who grew up in the 1950s, recounts the events surrounding her first sexual relationship:

[A]t [age] nine I had a best girlfriend I'd been going to school with since kindergarten. We were going to matinee movies and things like this, and we just got this brain wave to try to do love scenes ourselves. We did know -- whatever we did, nobody could find us out. I don't know why we knew this, it was just: whatever we do, nobody can find this out. And at [age] ten and a half, [her] mother walked into the bedroom -- I went home and tried to kill myself. I took all my mother's sleeping pills. I panicked. I went absolutely -- I don't know why I panicked, just that -- her mother freaked out so badly that I thought, Oh well, I'm better off dead.¹³

Women who knew they were gay at an early age, or who simply experimented with sex play with their girlfriends, were vulnerable to the kind of emotionally and physically painful experiences such as that experienced by Arlene.

Jan is an exceptional person in many ways, and her forthright queries about her own sexual desire are proof in point. At the age of fourteen, she boldly approached her mother, hopeful that she might be able to provide some answers:

I told my mother, I said, "How come I don't have the, I don't have the feeling, when I kiss a guy, like I have a feeling when --- I like to kiss girls." My mother said "When you get married you'll grow out of that. All women go through that. You're just attracted to women, you'll grow out that when you're married."¹⁴

Notably, neither Jan nor her mother expressed concern about her attraction to women, but rather identified the problem as a failure to be attracted to men. Although her mother's dismissive response would hardly alleviate a young girl's confusion and frustration about her sexuality, it did validate her same sex desire as normal for a young girl, and demonstrates that sexological sanctions against intimate relationships among young girls were neither quickly absorbed nor readily accepted. In this instance, Jan's mother maintained earlier ideas about adolescent female attachments that considered them harmless, and even natural.¹⁵

Same sex desire was not the only way some women experienced feelings of profound difference and social anxiety. Women and young girls who refused to conform to the feminine ideal were held responsible for the erosion of sex and gender relations in postwar America. The postwar popularization of Freudian ideas around the significance of childhood in the development of the human psyche fuelled the postwar obsession with normal heterosexual development, resulting in the close scrutiny of the behaviour of young girls and women. "For most teenage girls," claim the authors

of Canadian Women: A History, "being a cheerleader [in the 1950s] was considered a more appropriate achievement than excelling in sports."¹⁶ Similarly, being a tomboy was less acceptable in the 1950s than it had been in the 1940s.¹⁷

Given the tenor of the times, it is hardly surprising that many butch-identified gay women were first aware of feeling different when they demonstrated a preference for what were defined as male activities over prescribed female activities. Family conflicts over clothing style were common-place among butch-identified informants, and ultimately laid the foundation for the development of their sexual identity. For example, when asked at what point she began to realize she was different, Norma said: "When my family tried to get me out of my brother's clothes! I had a tantrum every time they tried to put me in a dress."¹⁸

Not only families posted a watch over their daughter's style of clothing and dress. So too did school officials.

Lynn recalls:

I was fairly naive in those days because I had never realized what a lesbian really was. I never knew anything about butch and dyke, nothing like that. I would not wear skirts. I got detention after detention in school, notes sent home. I would wear jeans and in those days, it wasn't like today where you just wear what you want. I just flatly refused [to wear a skirt]. My hair was always short. I used to carry other girls' books just like the guys, you know. The whole bit.¹⁹

A preference for pants may appear to be a mild transgression of gender boundaries but rigid expectations toward the feminine ideal meant close scrutiny of women's 'adaptation'

to their traditional role. Refusing to wear a dress was more than simply offensive to postwar social and moral sensibilities; it was a red flag that alerted parents and educators to a much more serious behavioural and developmental disorder that later became more closely linked with lesbianism.

The US army, as American historian Allan Berube has argued, can take a good deal of credit for giving shape to the intense anti-homosexual climate that characterized post World War II North America.²⁰ During the Second World War it was an institution very much concerned with the sexual practices of its members, and went to great lengths to eliminate gays and lesbians from the ranks. Although a similar study of the Canadian military and homosexuality during this period has yet to be done, Gary Kinsman's pioneering text, The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada, demonstrates that anti-homosexual attitudes and policies were sewn into the fabric of Canadian military life as well.²¹ Norma, who attended Toronto's prestigious Branksome Hall, joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in 1948. She recalls there being quite a number of lesbians among her peers and superiors in the Air Force, but describes her time there as "absolutely horrible." She credits herself for being "too smart to get interested in anybody on the base":

I got out of the Air Force with an honourable discharge, let's put it that way. I wasn't kicked

out.

Q: Are you saying that had you been involved with anyone you would have been kicked out?

A: Very easily. There was a lot of prejudice there, a hell of a lot, [but] it didn't affect me.

According to the Norms, the only way for gays and lesbians to survive in the military was to "play it straight."

Otherwise, they risked being "drummed out." One did not have to be caught having sex; merely a suspicion or accusation that one was a lesbian was enough for the army to "politically get rid of you:"

Everybody [thought to be a lesbian] gets a dishonourable discharge. Or, you got a discharge on medical grounds if you were that way. Under medical grounds comes a lot of things and if you were gay, you were nuts anyways so that's perfectly medical grounds for a discharge.

Norma claims that the military's efforts to root out lesbians was "sometimes very subtle and sometimes it was very blatant."²² Her experiences are supported by Kinsman's findings which showed that the Canadian military did not differentiate between a medical discharge and a discharge for homosexuality, as was the case in the United States.²³

For Jerry's father, an RCAF man himself, the connection between cross dressing, Jerry's obvious preference for female friends, and homosexuality was one he would not have to wait for popular culture to make for him. Upon finding his 14 year old daughter's stash of a pair of jeans, some t-shirts and a pair of boots in the garage, he set them on fire in the back yard. When Jerry was seen holding hands with another girl in the army base's recreation centre at

the age of 14, she remembers:

My father said to me, "you're going to see the padre [RCAF minister]." And I said, "why?" And he said, "You're just going to him." And then when I got in front of [the padre] he turned around and said to me, "Jerry, do you know what a lesbian is?" I said, "no."... and my father had me to several doctors and he said to me, "Do you know what a lesbian is?" I said, "no."²⁴

Undoubtedly not all women with a penchant for cross dressing were or became lesbians. Conversely, not all women who were or became lesbians cross-dressed. However, the force with which clothing signified both biological gender and sexuality in the postwar era made it a potent symbol of women's erotic autonomy.²⁵

Over the course of the 1950s, argues Donna Penn, "lesbianism came to be viewed less and less as a condition in which women choose other women as sexual objects than as an inversion of gender identity among women."²⁶ So pervasive was this image of the lesbian that most tomboyish and cross-dressing women and young girls found out about lesbians by meeting one, or by being accused of being one. Arlene, for example, was committed to the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital by her mother at the age of sixteen for reasons that were related more to her 'uncontrollability' than her lesbianism, although it is likely that her sexual preference for women contributed to her mother's decision to seek psychiatric intervention.²⁷ Ironically, it was in this treatment setting that Arlene realized she was "normal":

[My mother] locked me up. Which was in a way the

best thing she ever did, because I finally found out what a lesbian was! I mean, I'm locked up in a mental hospital, I've got all these lesbians around me, and it was like -- Heaven! Oh my God! I'm normal!²⁸

Arlene's reaction to her first lesbian community is strikingly similar to the experiences of many other women whose feelings of abnormality or difference lessened when they discovered a name for themselves and an awareness of other gay women. As we shall see, even if women learned about other lesbians through sexological studies that labelled them as deviant, or through pulp novels that promised them a life of absolute despair and social contempt, the relief of finding out they were not alone on the planet buffered the negative message such texts delivered.

Not all women who participated in postwar bar culture embarked on the journey for self-recognition. Some, like Eve and Ivy, came to 'the gay life' almost by accident. Both Eve and Ivy were active heterosexuals; Eve was separated from her husband and children and living independently in Toronto and Ivy was a housewife and mother of three small children. Eve met a group of gay women in Fran's restaurant where she worked as a waitress. Invited to join their social circle, she quickly became socially acquainted with both her regulars and the gay bar scene. Free from the threat of pregnancy, Eve explains, she was happy to develop long-term erotic relationships with other women. Similarly, Ivy was

invited out by Linda, her neighbour's sister, who, unbeknownst to her, was gay. They went for a movie and afterward Linda took Ivy to Turk's, a short-lived club that gay women also frequented. Soon afterward Ivy traded in her middle class suburban home for 'the gay life.' For Eve, the sojourn into lesbian bar culture lasted five years. For Ivy, it lasted a lifetime.²⁹

In spite of the powerful sway of social and moral convention and the medical and psychiatric discourse on appropriate sex and gender roles, many gay women in the 1950s and 1960s only felt abnormal when they were without a language to describe themselves and the knowledge that there existed other women like them. That they described themselves as gay women instead of lesbians attests to the unilateral rejection of the discourse of deviancy; for these 'out' women, the term lesbian connoted perversion. Defining themselves as gay enabled them to assert their legitimacy on their own terms.

Finding a name - and an explanation - for one's homosexual desire might have helped alleviate a young woman's anxieties about her own sexual and emotional desires, but it also implied that she was not the only one to harbour such feelings. Finding other gay women could be as difficult, or as easy, as it was to come to terms with one's sexuality. While for many women in this period the idea of openly socializing with other lesbians was simply

beyond the pale, for others, finding the lesbians was spectacular adventure.

During the Canadian postwar era, the only visible lesbian communities to be found were in major urban centres, and even then usually in the least respectable public houses and taverns.³⁰ In the following section I will discuss the internal and external moral, social and economic forces that helped shape Toronto's lesbian bar culture.

Until recently, patronizing a gay bar posed an enormous personal risk for both men and women, regardless of class. Following American political sentiment, government officials maintained that homosexuals posed a security risk; susceptible to blackmail, they could not be trusted to maintain federal secrets. In their study of homosexuals in Cold War Canada, Daniel J. Robinson and David Kimmel found the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) worked closely with the Department of National Defence (DND) to investigate and eliminate hundreds of gay and lesbian Canadian civil servants from government positions, many of whom had no access to issues of national security.³¹ By the late 1960s, the RCMP had amassed roughly 9,000 files concerning homosexuals, only one third of whom were government employees.

Robinson and Kimmel suggest that official investigation into homosexuality was almost exclusively concerned with gay men. However, of the fifteen narrators that inform this

study, two have reported that they are the unlucky recipients of such distinctions. Laura, who was actively involved in the Canadian political left in the 1940s and 1950s, was subject to investigation as a result of her political and sexual relationships. In the early 1950s, Laura was married to a man employed by the Department of National Defense (DND). Both she and her husband were involved in the effort to prevent the deaths of the Rosenbergs, an American couple who were accused of espionage by the United States government, as well as being active members of local and international communist organizations. In the mid-1940s, Laura fell deeply in love with Shirley, an American woman who was also married to a man with communist links. Although both women were married, they shared a sexually and emotionally intimate relationship for almost a full decade. According to Laura, Shirley's husband avenged his wife's affair by informing either the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) or the infamous House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), the government body that was responsible for the purge of thousands of American homosexuals from civil and military services. Shirley escaped to Canada, where her presence attracted the attention of the RCMP. Meanwhile, Laura's husband was fired from his job at the DND as a result of his communist sympathies. Shortly after Shirley's arrival, Laura was informed by the RCMP that if she did not send Shirley away,

she would lose her teaching job, as well as custody of her two children. After ten years, Laura and Shirley's relationship came to an abrupt end. Shirley moved to Texas and eventually fell in love with another woman.³²

Laura's experience with the RCMP and DND highlights the way in which the cold war hysteria over communism and national security victimized homosexuals, but Arlene's experience demonstrated how far-reaching the campaign actually was. Arlene worked mainly in blue and pink collar jobs, and like many other women who participated in Toronto's lesbian bar culture, was involved in petty crimes. In the 1970s, Arlene applied for a pardon from her criminal record, and through this process discovered that she was classified as a national security risk, and her request for a pardon was promptly denied. Unable to understand why, she applied to see her file:

Freedom of information came up, and I got my file, which wasn't worth the paper it was written on, because three-quarters of it was deleted. And under the deletion it said: National Security Risk.

Arlene phoned a Toronto journalist known for his advocacy of citizen's rights and asked him investigate further for her.

...he said, okay, I've got a friend, [a] connection at the RCMP. And I said to my lawyer at the time: "Don't tell [him] I'm gay." And I didn't. And within an hour after I talked to [the journalist] he got back to me and said, "Since when does [being] a lesbian have to do with B&E [breaking and entering]?" I said, "I didn't think that was a predisposition of gay women. I thought it was more of a criminal disposition." He says, "Well, I'm telling you, the first thing the RCMP

handed me was, you're gay."³³

Security risk or not, both gay men and women were constantly vulnerable to exposure as sex deviants, and those employed in the private sector were in no way immune from the threat of sudden job loss. Toronto's tabloid press did not hesitate to expose and identify lesbians and gays in their pages.

Justice Weekly reported in a 1951 gossip column:

SIMPSON'S might do well to investigate the goings-on of one of their WOMEN EXECUTIVES who not only has been making a fool of herself but also took along with her - for a WHOLE NIGHT - a girl of 19 working under her, introducing her and her boyfriend as a married couple. This young girl and her boyfriend, and the SIMPSON'S EXECUTIVE and her friend spent a night in the latter's house - the women SLEEPING TOGETHER and the same applying to the men - but nevertheless the woman's HUBBY did not know where she was all night nor did the young girls mother... Incidentally the SIMPSON'S EXECUTIVE is in her forties, certainly old enough to know better.³⁴

Justice Weekly's 'outing' tactics confirmed the worst fears of every lesbian who dared to express her sexual desire. Exposure almost certainly meant termination of employment, not to mention untold consequences on one's social and family life.

While many women would not have dared to venture into known gay public spaces for fear of being discovered a homosexual, those who did were acutely aware of the risks involved and exercised extreme caution about disclosing personal information. Laura, a high school teacher, remembered:

If you were gay you lost your family, you lost

your job -- I was in a profession. I risked my job as well as my life every time I went down there.³⁵

Because exposing women as lesbians to their employers and families could be tremendously damaging, it also functioned as a powerful tool for revenge:

Jan: When we used to work we would tell nobody where we worked. (Laura: You bet your life.) Lots of people wouldn't tell because they were scared, because there was rats in there would phone up, they'd get mad at you and phone up [your work and say] 'Oh, you know you got so-and-so, she's a lesbian working there!' and the boss would call you up and say, 'I'm sorry, I gotta let you go,' or something. We knew what it was for.

Mary: I know girls that when their family found out [that they were gay] they completely disowned them.

Beth: [The 'posh' girls] were people who work, they were people maybe like myself who worked in offices, but they were afraid to be seen, even coming out of the Continental... obviously I was willing to take the risk... these other people were not willing to take that risk.³⁶

Jo Anne Pratt's informants stressed fear associated with the presence and interference of authorities (police) as one of the main deterrents from visiting lesbian hang-outs, particularly public houses and, in the 1960s, gay-owned clubs.³⁷ Denise was one such woman unwilling to take such risks: for her, discretion was and continues to be a golden rule. The daughter of Italian immigrants, Denise felt an enormous responsibility to maintain a good reputation in her local community where her parents' fruit store had a well-established clientele. But Denise also placed a high premium on the middle class lifestyle her parents'

successful business enabled her to achieve. She avoided places like The Continental not only because of the risk of being discovered, she said, but also because she preferred the company of people of her own class.³⁸

The threat of losing one's family and means of support may have been the most effective deterrent to participation in the public world of bar culture, but it was not the only one. Entrance into a North American post war lesbian bar, the Continental included, was marked by an unexpected and unique culture. From the 1950s through to the end of the 60s, lesbian bar culture was organized around fem and butch socio-sexual identities. Evidence of a North American butch-fem lesbian culture precedes the postwar years by at least half a century. According to Davis and Kennedy's study of nearby Buffalo, however, butch and fem identities became increasingly polarized and rigid in the 1950s.³⁹ Although little research has been done in Canada in the pre-WWII period, certainly the rigidity of the butch-fem dyad overwhelmed some Toronto women entering the bar circuit for the first time.

In 1955, Ivy, a 22 year-old homemaker and mother of three living in suburban Toronto, asked her husband for permission to go out to a movie with the next door neighbour's sister. Ivy was not aware her date, Linda, hoped to take her to a small club frequented by gay women afterward. Linda suggested they stop for a beer, and Ivy

replied, "I don't drink." Linda reassured her that she could just have a Coke, and proceeded to escort her through Chinatown toward a small club called Turks. Ivy described the visual effect inside the club:

I walked in and I see all these guys sitting there, [Linda] went in to talk to them and this one guy he says to me [in a deep voice]

"Are you with Rocky?"

And I [meekly] said, "Oh no, no, no - I'm with Linda."

"Who the fucks Linda?"

I went, "Pardon?" Girl, I was ready to run!... So Linda come out and I said "oh God did that guy ever scare me" and she said "what guy? did some guy say something to you?" She's lookin' around and I said "that guy there" and she said, "oh, Terry," and I said, "yeah, is that his name?" and she said, "yeah, that's her name"...They were all butch broads!⁴⁰

Tricia, an upwardly mobile medical professional, remembers her first visit to the Continental in the early 1960s:

the roles were really very obvious, and so I went and I didn't go anywhere [to a gay bar or club] for two years after that; it scared me, or overwhelmed [sic].... It was just tswchooo! and that was it. It was butch and fem... the roles were very distinct.⁴¹

Jan, who was one of the most well-known tough butches at The Continental, recounts her first visit there after leaving a medium-sized northern Ontario town in search of what her francophone community called "femmes aux femmes"⁴²:

I wasn't dressed butch when I met Yvette. I had long, long hair and I wore make-up and everything (...) And then we started to go out together and we heard about the Continental: "Oh, we must go to the Continental." So we go in the Continental, and we were kind of -- we were square, we were square. We had our little jobs, you know [sings:] Working nine to five, do doo. (...) But when I saw them all dressed butchy, I just went back the right

way, and I was never any different. You said, "You either can handle your fists or you come back in a skirt." So I could handle my fists. I went back dressed.⁴³

"Dressed," for a butch, meant anything from short hair styled in a DA (duck's ass) or a fountain, a shirt and slacks to a suit, and tie and bound breasts. But as Jan suggests, being butch was not just about appropriating male clothes. The anonymous author of "What is a Downtown Butch?," published in 1965 in one of Toronto's first gay magazines, eloquently described the 1950s and 60s butch:

When a female baby doesn't outgrow dirty denims, scuffed shoes, chain smoking and picking fights and acquires so much brashness that her family doesn't dare introduce her to their friends, she becomes a butch... The butch is a natural rebel. She loathes wearing female attire, squares, screaming fags, trespassing butches, work, slow cars and she will not conform.⁴⁴

In a culture that struggled against female economic and social dependence, butch women claimed the right to enjoy both the sexual and social privileges traditionally the exclusive domain of heterosexual men. The ability to defend that right - to 'handle your fists' - was important not only for the survival of individual women, but for the community as a whole. It was butch women who were expected to assume that responsibility. Deeply influenced by working class male cultural norms and values, butches modelled themselves after a rough-and-tough urban street style and attitude popularized by Hollywood actors Marlon Brando and James Dean.⁴⁵

In many ways, the sharp division between male and female roles in heterosexual culture was reproduced in butch and fem culture. For many of the narrators, for example, initiating sexual relationships was cited as the primary responsibility of butches. Fems, like heterosexual women, were perfectly able and willing to make a butch aware of her attraction to her, but it was always up to the butch to make the approach.

Norma: In any sexual act there is always a sexual aggressor. You want to call it butch? you want to call it fem? what do you want to call it? That's what it boils down to really.⁴⁶

Indeed, butch pride was in part invested in one's ability to court and woo a woman.⁴⁷ Conversations among butches at the Continental often revolved around sexual expertise, reinforcing their status as expert lovers and sexual aggressors.

Ironically, interdating - particularly butches dating butches, and less so fems dating fems - was considered taboo, and either kept well hidden or forced women to 'flip,' meaning change from butch to fem.⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that if one butch could get another into bed, and could treat her thus as a fem, she had 'flipped' her. Being flipped generally diminished one's butch status.

As well, butch women cultivated the kind of masculine pride and bravado that placed them centre stage both in the bar and on the streets whereas fems were generally expected to manage and maintain the domestic sphere, (which rarely

included children or anything larger than a small apartment). Like heterosexual men, butch women were responsible for protecting fem women from physical and sexual danger. This responsibility was especially important given that participation in the lesbian community demanded travelling to and from the bar late at night. As we shall see in the next chapter, non-Chinese women found in the Chinatown district were frequently subjected to multiple forms of formal and informal harassment.

Despite these apparent similarities, a meaningful understanding of working class lesbian bar culture demands a closer look at the differences between the dominant culture and gay women's subculture. It is important to note that butch and fem identities were not biologically assigned, they were chosen (although many butch women claim they could no more be a fem than they could be heterosexual). And while butch and fem were generally regarded as life-long identities, not all women felt a strong preference for one over another. Norma and Denise 'switched' between butch and fem regularly, while Arlene, a butch, switched only once when she fell in love with a heterosexual woman who thought she was better as a sexual aggressor. When Arlene agreed, she became a fem and her lover a butch. Jerry suggests that women frequently arrived in Chinatown a fem and later became butch. Certainly the popular phrase 'ten girls go in, nine boys come out,' referring to women serving jail sentences,

suggests that women's transformation into butches was often a dramatic, but normalized, metamorphosis.⁴⁹ That women could become a butch was put to unique uses among some women of the Continental crowd; according to Jerry, sometimes a fem would avenge her ex-girlfriend by becoming a butch and competing with her for new sex partners.⁵⁰ If this is indeed true, then it was switching from butch to fem, not switching in general, that was unusual, if not unacceptable. Indeed, Arlene sees herself as an exception to the rule. Generally speaking, though, switching was uncommon among the regulars at the Continental.

Other importance differences can be identified in the organization of domestic arrangements. Unlike married heterosexual women, butch and fem partnerships did not require that fems sacrifice their professional and economic independence, nor would many have been willing to do so. Of course, gay women were not the only women in the paid labour force. Women's presence in the labour market increased steadily throughout the 1950s and 60s.⁵¹ In the lesbian bar community, however, 'working fems' were anything but the contentious issue it proved to be in heterosexual culture. In fact, because fems were more often able to secure employment as a result of their ability to visually assimilate into heterosexual culture, they were frequently the sole wage earners in a relationship and often supported their butch partners.⁵²

Sexual relations between fem and butch women also reveal the unique qualities of working class lesbian culture enjoyed by gay women. In mapping out a geography of postwar lesbian erotic culture, Davis and Kennedy suggest that it differed from heterosexual eroticism in four distinct and important ways. First, lesbian sex was rooted in the similarity of two female bodies, not "governed by the demands and rhythms of the penis"; second, butch identity, unlike heterosexual masculinity, encompassed the giving of sexual pleasure, a role usually assumed to be "feminine." Moreover, they claim, despite the passive role assigned to fems, as the sole or primary recipient of sexual pleasure she might be considered "the more self-concerned or even more 'selfish' partner." Third, "the butch's pleasure was defined solely in terms of pleasing her fem," a sharp contrast to heterosexual arrangements in which male sexual satisfaction was paramount and female sexual aggression was considered abnormal; and finally, "butch-fem erotic culture contained few sanctions against women's expression of sexuality."⁵³ Perhaps Lynn, a young butch who had experienced sexually intimate relationships with other women in her teens but had never been to a gay bar, best captures the full sense of sexual freedom that bar culture celebrated:

The first night out that Sam took me to a club... I was just so excited... We weren't even there two hours and I went to the washroom and someone starts comin' on to me. I never had anybody in my

life come on to me that strong. But I just went with the flow. A good hour or more later, I had necked with about five women and I was brand new. And in those days, people just never wasted time. If they liked you they just let you know. I was just like letting a bull loose amongst a bunch of cows in the field... I was in my glory. It was like my life had just started...⁵⁴

As Lynn's testimony demonstrates, the sexual freedom the bar community offered was not a feature of lesbian life, but a feature of bar culture. Moreover, for many women the sexual freedom offered in the bars and clubs was represented much more than the ability to pursue same sex desire; finding the Continental was often accompanied by an overwhelming sense of personal freedom. Following her introduction to the bar, Lynn went "all the way;" she became a full-time butch, no longer willing to disguise her tomboy ways under a pretence of femininity. As we shall see, the decision to 'go all the way,' to become what some women contemptuously called a 'professional lesbian,' liberated women from the restrictive moral codes of the dominant culture. Not surprisingly, it also dramatically limited a woman's ability to achieve the postwar middle class dream of economic stability, familial harmony and personal security.

In both butch and fem bar culture in Toronto, there were two grades of each identity. Masculine women were either butches or dykes, sometimes called diesel dykes. The latter were decidedly more masculine in appearance, and able to pass as men on the street and sometimes on the job. Feminine women were either fems or ultra-fems, the latter

representing the exceptionally well-dressed, the especially feminine: women who costumed and accessorized themselves in the most popular and form-fitting fashions of the day. Unlike butch women, fems were more likely, and certainly more willing, to pass as heterosexual in mainstream society.

Because butch women were more apparently transgressive of gender norms through their clothing style and the cultivation of decidedly working class masculine mannerisms, fems might easily appear to the contemporary reader as rather conventional women. Outward appearances suggest that there was little difference between a fem and a heterosexual woman. Fem style, for example, reflected contemporary women's fashions: Pratt's description of fem-wear in 1964 included sweaters, slacks, and beehives. Dresses, she noted, were the exception to the rule.⁵⁵ Although women's off-the-rack slacks became increasingly popular after the Second World War, fems were quick to adopt them compared to the more reluctant heterosexual consumer.⁵⁶ And like all gay men and women, fems took enormous risks by pursuing same sex relationships, and by socializing in a gay bar. Moreover, they relinquished the social and economic advantages that came with heterosexual marriage, and instead made a life for themselves on a single female wage. Although integrating into the work force might seem an easy enough task, Mary suggests that it was in fact quite difficult. When the interviewer suggested that there was little difference

between fems and heterosexual women, she pointed out that she thought differently than the rest of the women. At work Mary often felt tremendously uncomfortable, particularly during coffee break when her co-workers would talk about their boyfriends. Some women coped with these types of situations by pretending to be straight, but Mary does not remember ever doing that herself. Instead, she simply kept silent, and was consequently isolated and estranged from her co-workers.⁵⁷

Indeed, when Mary left work at the end of the day, her evening hours were without a doubt spent in ways her co-workers never imagined. As Lillian Faderman has pointed out, the courage it took for women to participate in lesbian bar culture, from the most simple acts such as going out at night unescorted to having sexual relationships outside of heterosexual marriage, was not typical of the 1950s female.⁵⁸ Pleasure-seeking activities socially appropriate for the unmarried and unescorted woman were narrowly defined, yet fem women not only sought out other gay women to be with, but spent their leisure time in working class bars in one of the most reputedly dangerous districts of downtown Toronto. Moreover, as Line Chamberland has argued, "fems public image expressed sexuality in too flagrant a way for them to be taken for pure young girls or respectable wives."⁵⁹

When asked, most butches describe fems in conventional

and often unremarkable terms, but fems lived experiences suggest otherwise.⁶⁰ If the defining feature of butch identity can be said to be her responsibility to initiate sexual relationships, it is equally true that the most basic limitation on fems was the more traditionally female role in courting rituals. Just as butch women varied from the most violent to the most gentle, so too did fems. Fem women frequently participated in fights, both with other gay women and with straight men. At least one fem narrator was a tomboy in her childhood and early adolescence, a gender identity usually only associated with butches. Many of the Continental fems worked as prostitutes, a notoriously rough and dangerous business. For this and many other reasons, including fighting and vagrancy, fems also served jail time. Women like Ivy and Eve describe themselves in terms closely akin to the logic of liberal feminism: while butch women sought and claimed access to decidedly heterosexual male privileges, Ivy and Eve simply refused to accept limitations imposed upon them because of their gender. It is a subtle distinction, but an important one.

The structure of lesbian relationships also separates the experiences of fems from those of heterosexual women. Both short and long term relationships were commonplace in the bar community.⁶¹ Unencumbered by marriage and divorce laws, gay women were neither legally bound nor socially pressured to maintain unsuccessful or unfulfilling

relationships. There was no expectation of sexual respectability. Virginity was considered neither virtuous nor valuable. There was no status attached to being a woman's first female lover. In fact, many women were reluctant to get involved with fems new to the gay bar scene. Contrary to the myth that homosexuals recruit, many butches expressed reluctance about forming attachments to 'unconfirmed' homosexuals. According to Jerry, Lynn, Laura and Barbara, lots of women came looking for fun and adventure at the Continental, only to return to their boyfriends and husbands.⁶² Even if a woman insisted on her sincerity, both Jerry and Lynn felt that the gay life was too hard to encourage them to become involved.

Because women's lives revolved around a public social milieu, fems who participated in the bar community were less likely to experience isolation following the demise of a partnership than were married heterosexual women. With the bar the only place to go socially as a couple, many couples continued to maintain ties to the community throughout their relationship. Friends and acquaintances remained on hand, many who were willing to offer emotional support and care. As well, the enclosed quality of the lesbian bar community such as the one in Toronto meant that violent and abusive behaviour was more visible to its members, thereby enabling women to confront and to escape the kinds of dangers many heterosexual women faced behind closed doors.

Among the Continental crowd, there was a butch code of ethics that vehemently opposed physical abuse toward fems. Arlene, who switched from butch to fem, recalls running into an old enemy who fortunately abided by this rule:

There was one butch, and I was out with a girl, I was butch at the time, and she tried to take her away from me. Now -- stoned, mouthy -- I asked her to step outside. Now this was like asking the door to step outside, this woman was so big! Don't ask me where I got the nerve. And I walked outside and -- I didn't know at the time she had a glass jaw! And I figured, I'd better get the first hit in, because I'm going to be plastered all over the sidewalk. And I swung, and I connected. And she went down, just thump! (...) Now I hadn't seen this person, at the time I had this housewarming party, and I was fem. She walked in my door and I thought, "Well, I didn't go to the hospital then; I guess I'm dead now!" I went into the kitchen to get a beer, and -- she picked me up, just like I was a toothpick, and sat me on my own kitchen counter. And I'm just -- I'm shaking (...) And she's looking down at me, and she says, "It's very lucky you turned fem or I'd kill you right now." And I thought: "Oh god, do I faint now or later?" Because that's one thing that I noticed with the older crowd: unless it was someone that was a real sadistic monster, they never hit a fem. Ever. (...) In fact I've seen it stopped. If somebody started to beat up on a fem, three or four butches would grab them. No, you don't do that.⁶³

Lynn, a butch who was always ready to fight male attackers but deeply resented the violence among butches in the Continental crowd, says that many women came to the Continental thinking that lesbians would not engage in the kind of partner abuse that existed in the heterosexual community. Because she was physically abused by her mother, Lynn said, she did not have such expectations.⁶⁴ Eve, however, did. After leaving an abusive marriage, Eve became

involved with the Continental for a five year period. During that time she had two relationships, both of which were physically abusive. Realizing that she was no better off with women, she resumed seeking out relationships with men.⁶⁵

People have many ways of controlling and manipulating their partners, and violence is only the most extreme technique. Although it is important to recognize that butches adopted masculine mannerisms and behaviours that could also be oppressive to other women, we now know that partner abuse exists in lesbian relationships even when butch and fem identities are not part of the organization of the relationship.⁶⁶ Thus violent and abusive behaviour among lesbians cannot be said to be a product of butch and fem culture, only to have occurred within it.

In addition to providing a defined structure for the expression of sexual desire between women, butch and fem identities regulated and protected the community that valued them. Women whose sexual identities were unclear were either ostracized or confronted.⁶⁷ To be neither meant that you were an outsider, and as such a potential threat to one of the few public spaces in which gay women could 'be themselves.' Since the bar was the central space available to gay women, butch and fem norms functioned as a protective measure to keep outsiders out. Thus declaring oneself butch or fem functioned as a kind of initiation into the

community. A willingness to abide by those rules indicated a willingness to participate on their terms, and was proof that you were both gay and willing to take the risks that a public declaration invited. Arguably, the enforcement of butch and fem socio-sexual identities imposed some limitations on the social and erotic possibilities open to gay women in lesbian bar culture. But it was precisely those limitations that provided at least nominal protection against the threats of violence and persecution that lay waiting for them outside the bar.

The Second World War brought about tremendous social and economic change for women, change that would allow for the formation of a unique sexual subculture that firmly established an urban lesbian presence and persists to this day. By making lesbianism visible through butch and fem identities gay women were able to announce and assert their presence in a culture that persistently denied, suppressed and ignored it. The formation of a community of visibly identifiable lesbians extended to working class and upwardly mobile women a kind of personal and sexual freedom that was virtually unheard of anywhere else.

Notes

1. Interview with 'Beth,' conducted by Lesbians Making History (LMH), January 11, 1987.
2. I borrow the term "sexual silences" from Amber Hollingbaugh and Cherrie Moraga who use it for slightly different purposes in "What We're Rollin' around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism: A Conversation toward Ending Them" in The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader, ed. Joan Nestle (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992: 243-253).
3. A moral panic over sex crimes and those who committed them swept across the country following the Second World War, reaching its zenith in 1955-56. For a full analysis of this phenomenon in the United States, see Esther Newton's " 'Uncontrolled Desires': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960" in Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons, eds., Passion and Power: Sexuality in History (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989: 199-225).
4. J.D. Ketchum, "Prude is Father to the Pervert," in Maclean's, 15 January, 1948; p. 9.
5. For a study of sex education in Ontario schools in this era, see Christabelle Sethna, "The Facts of Life: The Sexual Instruction of Ontario Public School Children, 1900-1950," forthcoming Diss., Ontario Institute For Studies in Education, Toronto, 1994; and Mary Louise Adams, "The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Construction of Heterosexuality," Diss. Ontario Institute For Studies in Education, Toronto, 1994 (esp. chapter 6).
6. Interview with Tricia (LMH), September 21, 1986.
7. Interview with Laura (LMH), September 26, 1986.
8. See beginning of chapter, opening quote.
9. R.N. Shufeldt, "Dr. Havelock Ellis on Sexual Inversion," Pacific Medical Journal (1902), 45:199-207, cited in Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): p. 49.
10. Interview with Helen (LMH); nd. 198?.
11. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.

12. I am referring here to the 1989 U.S. study of suicide among teenagers in which it was found that gay and lesbian youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than other young people. Paul Gibson, "Gay Male and Lesbian Youth Suicide" in Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide, vol. 3, ed. Marcia R. Feinleib (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service: January 1989) pp. 110-142. See also Shira Maguan, "Teen Suicide: The Government's Cover-up and America's Lost Children" in The Advocate, September 1991, pp. 40-47.
13. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.
14. Interview with Jan (LMH), October 19, 1985.
15. See Lillian Faderman's Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: a History of Lesbian Life in the Twentieth Century (New York: Columbia University press, 1991); ch. 1.
16. Prentice et. al., Canadian Women: A History, p. 330.
17. See Mary Louise Adams, "The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Construction of Heterosexuality," p. 202.
18. Interview with Norma, March 11, 1992.
19. Interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993.
20. Allan Berube, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two (New York: Plume, 1990): chapter 1.
21. Gary Kinsman, The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada (Black Rose Books: Montreal, 1987).
22. Interview with Norma, March 11, 1992.
23. Kinsman, The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada: pp. 120-123, 124-125.
24. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.
25. See Joan Nestle, A Restricted Country (New York: Firebrand Books, 1987); p. 102. For an example of how clothing functioned in the same way for heterosexual teenage girls, see Melinda McCracken's account of growing up in the 1950s in Memories are Made of This (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1975), cited in Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, No Easy Road: Women in Canada 1920s to 1960s (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990): pp 111-114.

26. Donna Penn, "The Meanings of Lesbianism in Post-War America" in Gender and History 3.2 (1991): p. 194.

27. Recent sociological and historical research demonstrates that delinquency has been defined through the moral and sexual attitudes of law enforcement and court officials. Consequently, girls and women are much more likely than boys to be labelled 'delinquent' for types of behaviour that are often closely linked with sex and sexuality. See Stephen Schlossman and Stephanie Wallach, "The crime of precocious sexuality: Female juvenile delinquency and the progressive era," in Women and the Law: A Social Historical Perspective, edited by D. Kelly Weisberg (Cambridge, Schenkman, 1982).

28. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.

29. Interview with Eve, March 6, 1993; interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.

30. Thus far, research documenting postwar lesbian bar communities indicates that such communities existed in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. See Line Chamberland, "Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975" in Journal of Homosexuality 25.3 (1993): 231-269; and Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman's Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives (Toronto: National Film Board, 1992). These studies are by no means conclusive. Undoubtedly future research will reveal gay women's subcultures in other Canadian cities as well.

31. Daniel J. Robinson and David Kimmel, 'The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada' in The Canadian Historical Review, LXXV: 3 (September 1993); 319-345. See also Gary Kinsman, The Regulation of Desire, p. 120.

32. Interview with Laura (LMH), September 26, 1985.

33. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.

34. "Toronto Lowdown," in Justice Weekly, 7 July, 1951: p. 13.

35. Interview with Laura (LMH), October 19, 1995.

36. Interview with Mary, Beth and Jan (LMH), October 19, 1986.

37. Jo Anne Pratt, "A Study of the Female Homosexual Subculture," unpublished thesis, University of Toronto, 1964: p. 81-2.

38. Interview with Denise, April 23, 1993.
39. Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: chapter 3, esp. pp. 111-112.
40. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.
41. Interview with Tricia (LMH), September 21, 1986.
42. In her study of Montreal gay bars in this period, Line Chamberland found that femmes-aux-femmes was the most common term used to denote lesbian in Quebec. See Line Chamberland, "Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975" in Journal of Homosexuality, 25 (1993):3, p. 234.
43. Interview with Jan (LMH), October 19, 1985.
44. "What is a Downtown Butch?" in Two, 6 (1965): 2.
45. See Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: p. 90.
46. Interview with Norma, March 11, 1992.
47. See Joan Nestle, A Restricted Country, pp. 100-101. For an absolutely wonderful description of the fine art of 1950s-style butch courting rituals, see Merrill Mushroom's "How to Engage in Courting Rituals 1950s Butch Style in the Bar" in Mae West is Dead: Recent lesbian and Gay Fiction, ed. Adam Mars-Jones (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1983): pp. 44-49.
48. As was the case with Arlene, whose story we shall learn more about later.
49. Pratt, "A Study of the Female Homosexual Subculture," p. 45.
50. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.
51. See Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-60" in Canadian Historical Review 4 (1991): 471-504; and by the same author, "Canada's Wage Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle Class, 1945-1960" in Journal of Canadian Studies 29:3 (1994): 5-25.
52. See Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: pp. 288-293. Jo Anne Pratt also found that fems in Toronto often supported both themselves and their butch lovers. This practice may have been more common in the 1960s than in earlier decades, as Davis and Kennedy have

suggested. Pratt's oldest informant "criticized the practice of fems working and wondered whether this custom had come about as a result of the age we are living in in which both men and women work. When she was young a person would support her loved one for the duration of the relationship..." Unfortunately her age is not specified. See Pratt, "A Study of the Female Homosexual Subculture," p. 65.

53. *ibid.*, p. 193.

54. Interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993.

55. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993; interview with Eve, March 6, 1993; interview with Denise, April 23, 1993; and interview with Mary (LMH), October 19, 1985.

56. Women's slacks, it should be noted, were markedly different from men's pants, set apart by the cut of the fabric and the zipper on the hip.

57. Interview with Mary (LMH), October 19, 1985.

58. Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): p. 171. The notion of what constituted "typical" for women in the 1950s, however, has been recently challenged by some American women's historians. See, for example, Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960, edited by Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

59. Line Chamberland, "Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975," p. 241.

60. Because working class butch women are relatively easy to identify, butches are overrepresented in the historiography of postwar working class lesbian history. Davis and Kennedy noted their difficulty in contacting fems, and this project has likewise suffered from the same limitation. See Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, p. 18.

61. Davis and Kennedy devote an entire chapter of Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold to the structure of intimate relationships among bar lesbians in Buffalo. As with the rest of the text, their rich and intelligent analysis of this subject is thus far the most thorough and rigorous analysis of butch and fem culture published to date. See chapter 8. The trend in Toronto in this period appears to be one in which women who were active in the bar community before 1960 consistently worked toward maintaining stable and long term relationships, whereas the women who came out

in the late 1950s and early 1960s experienced an initial period of sexual promiscuity before they began to settle into committed relationships.

62. New women arriving at the Continental seeking lesbian sex and relationships was so normal, there was an expression for it: "At first you're curious, then you become a curiosity." See interview with Laura (LMH), October 19, 1985.

63. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987,

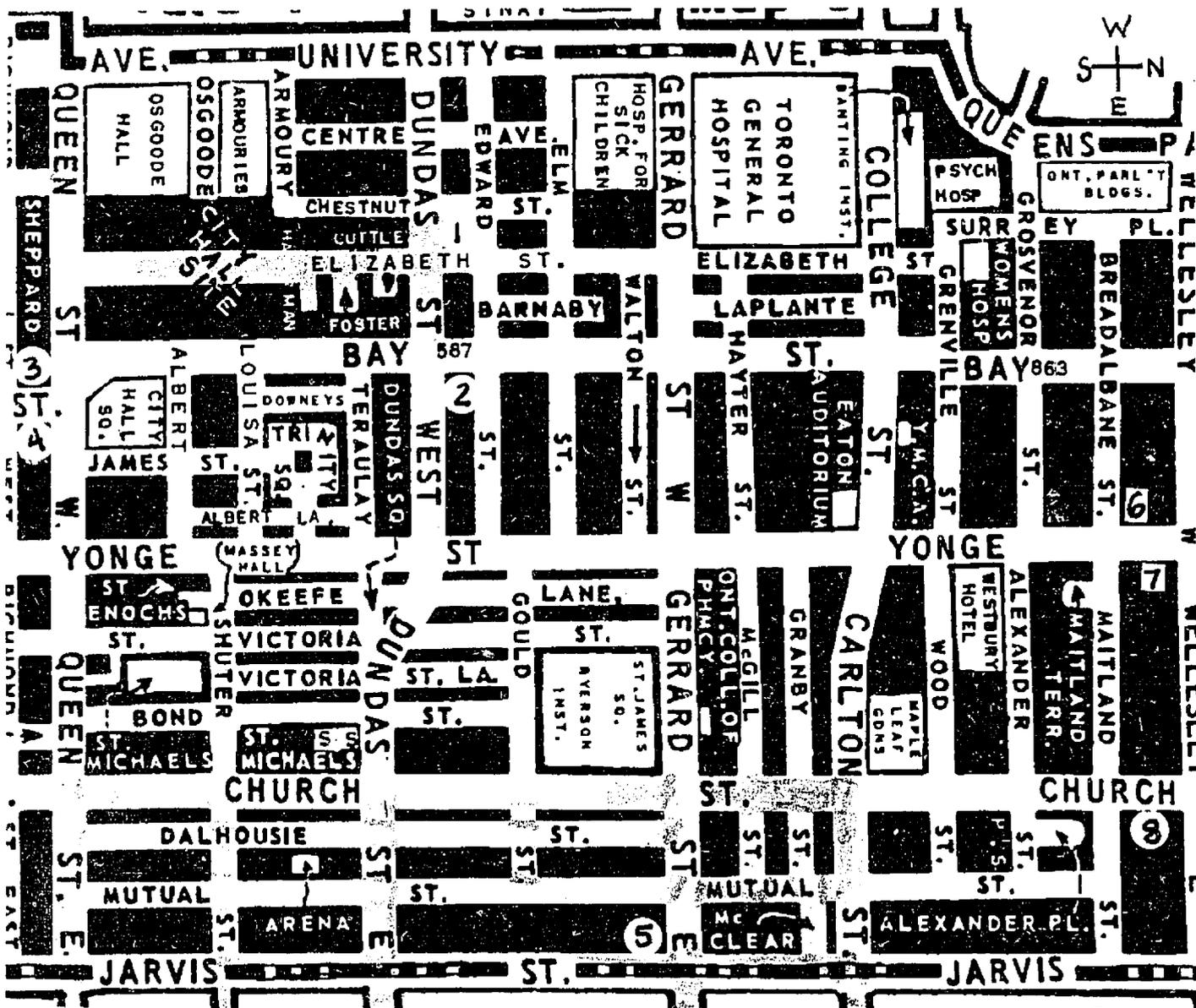
64. Interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993.

65. Interview with Eve, March 6, 1993.

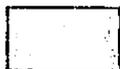
66. See Claire M. Renzetti, Violent betrayal: partner abuse in lesbian relationships (Newsbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992); also Laurie Chesley et al., Abuse in lesbian relationships: a handbook of information and resources (Toronto: Toronto Counselling Centre for Lesbians and Gays, 1992).

67. See especially Pratt, p. 98.

Figure i



- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|----------------------|
| 1 | Continental Public House | 5 | Rideau Public House |
| 2 | Ford Hotel | 6 | Parkside Tavern |
| 3 | Municipal Hotel | 7 | Music Room/Penthouse |
| 4 | Union Hotel | 8 | Melody Room |



Chinatown District



Tenderloin District

Hush

FREE PRESS

TEN CENTS

LABATT'S SUED OVER TAINTED BEER

(SEE PAGE 10)

DRIVEN TO LONELY ROAD CLAIMS RAPED BY CABBIE

(SEE PAGE 8)

Vol. 22, No. 37

TRANS-CANADA EDITION

TORONTO, ONTARIO

February 23, 1957

FREAK WEDDING

BRIDEGROOM IS A GIRL!

(SEE PAGE 4)



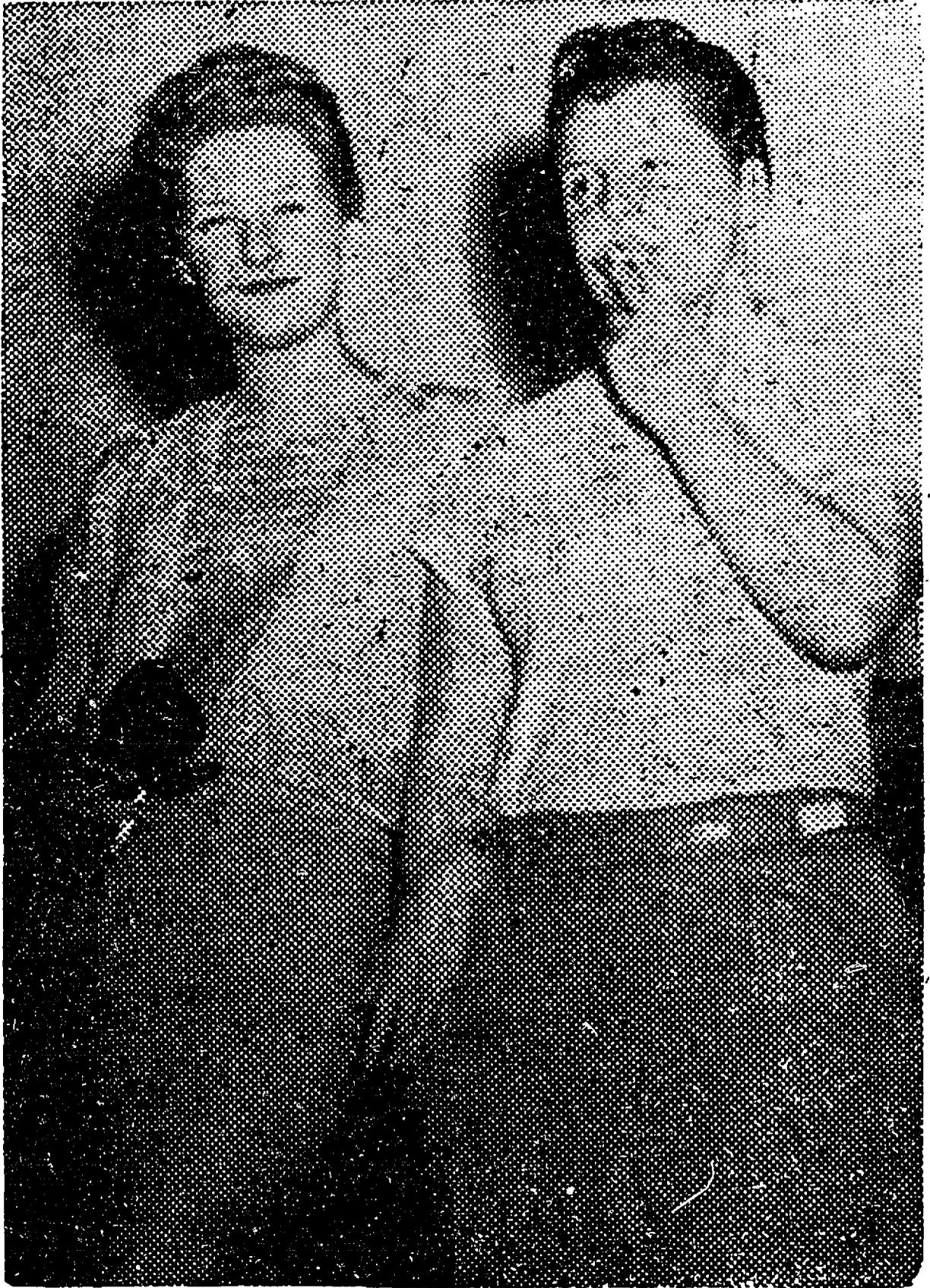
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"DOUBLE SINNERS" REFUSED DIVORCE

(SEE PAGE 6)

PATERNITY SUIT FAILS WHO IS THE PAPA?

(SEE PAGE 6)



Queenie and "Hubby"

Hush Free Press, July 28, 1956; p. 1.

CHAPTER FOUR:

The Makings of a Sapphic Subculture: The Downtowners and the Bar

Laura: It's much more exciting to be gay than to be straight. I wouldn't have changed a thing. Would you, Mary?

Mary: I don't know. It's hard to answer, whether I would or not. I'd choose to be gay, yes, sure. I think gay is more than sexual preference, too. I think it's a whole way of life, of looking at things... I've had these psychiatrists say, "Oh well, it's nobody's business who you choose to go to bed with, it's just that." And I said, "Mmm-mmm [no], it's a hell of a lot more than that."¹

By 1955, the Continental Hotel had begun its more than ten-year tenure as the Toronto hot spot for gay women. By no means was it the only place gay women gathered to socialize and flirt during this period, but its popularity remained virtually unrivalled until the mid-1960s. This chapter focuses on the social and economic forces that helped shape Toronto's postwar public lesbian community. Like our American neighbours, the bar - or, as it was known in Ontario, the beverage room and public house - served as the focal point of gay and lesbian communities during this period. I will begin, therefore, by examining the social and moral location of the beverage room in Ontario. Next, using information culled from oral histories, a 1966 Master's thesis and Toronto's tabloid press, I will look at the social, sexual and economic organization of the bar

community itself. The latter part of this chapter discusses the effects and implications of a visible community of gay women in Toronto, including an examination of journalistic accounts of this subculture in Toronto's yellow press, the regulation of lesbians by both local and provincial police forces, and finally, the expansion of the lesbian community in the 1960s.

The liberating experience of discovering a name for oneself was the point of departure in the lives of many gay women. Learning that they were 'lesbian' or 'homosexual' also meant learning that somewhere out there, there were other women like themselves. For many, this knowledge was debilitating, and marked the beginning of a life-long commitment to denial, seeking a cure, or at the very least, to hiding. But for some, learning that a sexual and emotional attraction to other women was a phenomenon not limited to themselves gave them the necessary confidence to seek out other lesbians, either in their own communities or, as the sexological literature and yellow press proclaimed, in the urban centres where lesbian populations were virtually exploding.²

As early as the turn of the century beverage rooms and sexual immorality were tightly linked in the cultural catalogue of indecency.³ According to Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, by the turn of the century public drinking, once an acceptable practice among both sexes, had vanished as a norm

for women. Though intemperance was a problem of all classes, she argued, by the late 18th century it came to be "associated with filth, disease, immorality and ignorance - all stereotypical of the 'dangerous' lower classes. It was also associated with men; consequently, the woman drunkard was a particularly degraded creature."⁴ Similarly, in her study of working women and leisure in turn of the century New York, Kathy Peiss argues that the saloon exemplified workingmen's public culture; known for its participants' "rowdy behaviour and vulgar language," it was hardly the place for respectable women. Indeed, among the women one was most likely to find there were prostitutes.⁵ But, as was the case in New York, women's presence in Ontario beverage rooms became more and more commonplace as the twentieth century progressed. In order to accommodate the gentler sex, New York saloons often only served couples in the back room, and barred unaccompanied women or men in order to ensure their good reputations.⁶ Similarly, in early twentieth century Ontario, many hotel beverage rooms consisted of a large men's room and a small 'ladies annex.'⁷ When the Ontario legislature passed the Liquor Control Act in 1934, the issuing of separate licenses for men's beverage rooms and women's, or ladies and escorts, beverage rooms reflected what had become a customary practice throughout the province. The effect was twofold: separate licenses reinforced the moral regulation of heterosexuality and

enabled government officials to punish beverage room owners for allowing prostitutes to convene in their establishment by revoking its ladies and escorts license.⁸

Public protest against Ontario Premier Drew's 1944 announcement that his government would be amending the Liquor Control Act to allow for the licensing of cocktail lounges indicates how alcohol consumption and beverage rooms continued to rouse moral opprobrium in the post war era. Following his announcement, the Provincial Board of The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) issued a letter to the Premier's office requesting that the government close all women's beverage rooms and remove all tables and chairs from men's beverage rooms.⁹ Nine months later, individual women's institutes and missionary societies from all over the province would send in letters demanding the closure of all beverage rooms. The FWIO's more conservative position, however, was likely a calculated political compromise. The temperance movement, supported by organizations such as the FWIO, had reached its political zenith much earlier. Undoubtedly it appeared unrealistic to FWIO members to advocate a return to Prohibition. Instead, the campaign against the 'liquor traffic' in the mid-twentieth century focused almost entirely on women, and was waged by mostly women as well.

It was a Toronto urologist, however, who was to provide the campaign with the 'scientific' evidence to support their

moral values. As if to confirm the Federation's belief that the proliferation of beverage rooms was a formal sanction for moral laxity (in 1945 there were 1,240 beverage rooms in Ontario¹⁰), a "well-known urologist" issued a public statement declaring that practically all the cases of venereal disease he had treated resulted from beverage room meetings.¹¹

As the mainstream news media brought public attention to the provincial governments proposed legislation to relax restrictions around the sale of alcohol in commercial establishments, individual chapters of women's institutes stepped up their letter-writing campaign in support of FWIO Provincial Board's request.¹² Surviving chapters of the WCTU, as well as women's church associations and missionary societies also participated in the effort to close women's beverage rooms. In fact, with the exception of a single male United Church Minister from Lakeside, Ontario, the entire campaign was waged by women's groups.¹³ Over thirty petitions were received by the Premier's office between September and December of 1945.¹⁴ Most simply reproduced the statement issued by the FWIO; others demanded that all beverage rooms be shut down. These documents demonstrate how earlier arguments against female alcohol consumption, and particularly public drinking, continued to inform the political and social views on the subject. The members of a semi-rural United Church Women's Missionary Society, for

example, equated healthy nationhood with abstinent motherhood in order to rouse the moral ire of the Premier:

Men have fought and died in the last six years in order to maintain good homes in Canada, but no woman will be a good wife or mother, or will be capable of building a good home if she is spending time in a beverage room. The heart of any home or country is good women, and these are not developed in beverage rooms. Social legislation is fine, but if the money thus derived is spent in a beverage room it is a curse instead of a benefit.¹⁵

As with turn of the century temperance advocates, alcohol consumption and maternal responsibility were viewed as entirely incompatible. The bad mother, argued Warsh, was second only to the fallen woman as the predominant stereotype of female degradation.¹⁶

Legislative reform advocated by early twentieth century women's organizations was often created with the intention of protecting the sanctity and welfare of the home and family. Although clearly female alcohol consumption was regarded as a persistent problem, particularly among the lower classes, the temperance movement advocated the abolishment of beverage rooms primarily to protect women from the negative economic and social effects of husbands who spent their earnings and leisure time on drink.¹⁷ This campaign, however, was meant to protect and preserve the same moral superiority and sanctity of womanhood and motherhood held up by many early female social and political activists from the tarnish of the decidedly unwomanly act of public drinking.

The following letter, notably one of only two sent to the Premier from an individual unaffiliated with either a club or religious organization, attributes almost every social evil to beverage rooms, and states quite explicitly the sexual chaos that public drinking induces:

Sir;-

I am writing this as a protest against the terrible evil of the liquor traffic, raging ahead causing so much trouble.

Every paper tells of some one killed because of drink. Murders, suicides, robbery, divorce, homes broke up, adultery, increase of venereal disease, illegitimate children by the hundreds, minors drinking, older men being paid by the liquor interests to get young people to start to drink.

A young father of six spends his money in drink and other women, contracted that awful V.D. and gave it to his wife who had to go to the hospital with no money to pay expenses. This right here in our village. A young mother, a widow with three girls, the oldest thirteen, is very seldom at home, drinking and running with every dog of a man that will go with her. What example is she for her own and other children?¹⁸

As the campaign to close women's beverage rooms highlights, public houses and hotel bars were regarded as highly sexualized environments - at least in the eyes of moral reformers. Women who went to such places were painted as promiscuous and morally irresponsible. Beverage rooms were still by and large working-class male territory, but as the letters suggest, more and more women were willing to stake out a place for themselves in their pursuit of recreation and pleasure.

The social stigmatization of beverage rooms lent itself well to lesbian appropriation. The need for a physical space

in which women could openly socialize with one another as lesbians demanded that it provide a significant degree of protection from mainstream society while still allowing a certain degree of lesbian visibility. Women's Institutes, for example, were homosocial environments, and although lesbian relationships may have developed among the members of such groups, they would be forced to remain covert. Bars, argue Davis and Kennedy, were the only possible setting for working-class lesbians to congregate outside of private homes.¹⁹ Unwelcome in most social settings, unsafe in open spaces like parks and beaches, and without the economic resources to cultivate a culture of private gatherings in the relative safety of one's home, working class lesbians had few opportunities to openly socialize with each other.²⁰

Given the circumstances, public houses offered the ideal setting. They provided an enclosed space that sequestered its patrons from the outside world. Other than the surveillance of beverage rooms by Liquor authorities and the local and provincial police forces, middle class reformers and their sympathizers were unlikely to patronize such places. They did not demand any financial or physical commitment for its physical maintenance or upkeep from the women who went there. In other words, for the price of a beer, women bought themselves a social club like no other.

If bars were considered sexually subversive territory,

it was unquestionably heterosexual sex that concerned their critics. The separation of men's and women's beverage rooms, intended to discourage unacquainted men and women from mingling with one another (men were not permitted to enter ladies rooms unaccompanied by a woman), ironically worked in favour of lesbians (and gay men) who preferred the company of their own sex. Unlike the unregulated gender mixing in Buffalo's bars which were the subject of study for Davis and Kennedy's Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, gay women in Toronto could socialize with other lesbians with less interference from men, thus making it easier for lesbians to appropriate a traditionally heterosexual space for their own purposes.

Prostitution certainly gave working class bars a flavour that made it easier for gay women to openly congregate there, but my evidence suggests that prostitutes themselves played a much more active role in helping to create Toronto's lesbian bar culture than is attributed to them in Davis and Kennedy's study of Buffalo. In both cities, lesbians established a regular patronage in bars located in the 'red-light' or 'Tenderloin' district.²¹ Toronto's first known lesbian bar, The Rideau, was located in the very centre of the Tenderloin (see figure i).²² Davis and Kennedy argue that such establishments were more likely to tolerate lesbians than those in more respectable neighbourhoods, a claim that is supported by the patterns of

development of Toronto's postwar lesbian bar community. However, it needs to be pointed out that in addition to the tolerance of the bar owners, lesbians were dependent on the tolerance of prostitutes as well. Prostitutes may not have wielded any kind of formal power, but as we shall see later, simply making an environment inhospitable to unwelcome visitors can work almost as effectively as more formalized exclusionary tactics. There is no evidence to suggest that sex trade workers either resisted or resented the presence of gay women. On the contrary, gay women and prostitutes appear to have played mutually beneficial roles to one another. Additionally, prostitutes were often lesbians or bisexual themselves. It is quite plausible that it was lesbian prostitutes and their female lovers who initially created a 'public' working class culture of same-sex relationships between women, a culture which ultimately attracted other gay women. Whichever the case may be, the importance of the relationship between lesbians and prostitutes needs to be more closely examined. It is a theme which will reappear throughout the rest of this chapter.

Inside the Continental

When The Rideau changed its women's beverage room to a ladies and escorts facility, the gay crowd moved five city blocks to a location technically outside of the Tenderloin. As with The Rideau, no one knows for certain why, or how,

the Continental became the public house of choice among lesbians, but there are a number of factors that made it more favourable than others.

Situated on the corner of Elizabeth and Dundas streets, which was then the centre of Toronto's Chinatown, and surrounded by three major bus terminals, The Continental never became much more than a local drinking establishment for a working class clientele. It was notoriously filthy, poorly maintained and attracted some unsavoury and unruly characters. When it finally closed down in 1975, the hotel and its main floor beer parlour seemed destined to historical obscurity. Few Torontonians knew of its existence, and even fewer would have dared to venture inside.

Far from the tourist attraction Canada's Chinatowns are today, Toronto's Chinatown existed in almost complete isolation from the rest of the urban population. In 1951, with a population of 1952 Chinese women and men, Toronto's Chinatown was the third largest in Canada.²³ However, according to retired police detective Jack Webster, few non-Chinese Canadians ventured into the old Ward district, and even fewer during the evening hours.²⁴ Of the multitude of immigrants that Canada has received over the past century, no other ethnic group has experienced the kind of racial discrimination that was levelled against the Chinese, perhaps the most blatant of which was the federal

government's efforts to curtail Chinese immigration. The imposition of a 'head tax' in 1885, followed by The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923, had a profound impact on the development of Canada's Chinese population.²⁵ These "exogenous factors," Peter Li politely points out, profoundly constrained the development of the Chinese community in Canada:

By the turn of the century [the Chinese] had been reduced to second-class citizens in Canada. Subjected to social, economic, and residential segregation in Canadian society, they responded by retreating into their own ethnic enclaves to avoid competition and hostility from white Canadians.²⁶ The development of ethnic enclaves in Canadian urban centres is a common feature of immigration and urban history. Chinatowns however were especially unique in that they were overwhelmingly male.

The combination of low wages, poor working conditions, lack of employment opportunities, and racial tensions discouraged early male Chinese immigrants from bringing their families to Canada. According to Li, only a few were able to afford the expense of settling and supporting family in Canada.²⁷ Most continued to pursue a living wage in Canada's major urban centres and supported wives and children by sending earnings home. Family unification was continually postponed, but by 1923, The Chinese Exclusion Act made it virtually impossible. Consequently, in 1941 there were 36 Chinese men in Canada for every Chinese woman. Although changes to immigration laws in 1947 allowed the

immigration of children and wives, in 1951 the ratio of men to women in Toronto remained widely disproportionate at nine to one.²⁸

In the absence of familial/domestic responsibilities, leisure time in Chinatown revolved around public, not private, social activities.²⁹ Since as early as the 1920s, illegal but successful gambling houses provided crucial social and economic stimulation.³⁰ All-night restaurants extended opportunities for homosocial activity. However, none of these institutions were able to fulfil the need or desire for heterosexual companionship and physical intimacy.

In the postwar era, notes Li, inter-ethnic marriages were rare.³¹ Likewise, Thompson's study of Toronto's Chinatown showed that both Chinese men and women who were teenagers in the 1950s found that interracial dating was uncommon.³² Federal restrictions against Chinese immigration combined with the social taboos that prohibited cross-ethnic intimacy created a demand for sex trade workers that began almost as soon as male Chinese immigrants arrived in Canada and that lasted well into the 1960s. On the 'corners,' as Elizabeth and Dundas were known among the gay crowd, opportunities for white, Anglo prostitutes were plentiful.

The importance of the relationship between the red-light district and the lesbian bar community is supported by what we know about other public houses popular amongst the Continental crowd.³³ The nearby Municipal

('Muny'), Union and Ford Hotel were also known to have a modest lesbian clientele in their beverage rooms. But the Ford and the 'Muny' gained reputations not from their popularity among gay women, but for a willingness to serve prostitutes and their clients who posed as married couples in order to comply with the restrictive legislation that governed public houses' licensing.³⁴ What set the Continental apart from both the Ford and the Muny - and even the nearby Union, which was especially popular among the 'limp-wristed set'³⁵ - was that it provided two rooms for ladies and escorts. The room closest to the rear of the public house provided an architecturally contained space that became, with only rare exceptions, the exclusive domain of gay women.

The beer parlour, formally called a public house, was divided into three rooms. The front room was the men's room, occupied by both local working-class men and the occasional male traveller and bus drivers who came in from one of the three major bus depots in the immediate neighbourhood. The middle room was largely occupied by Anglo-Canadian prostitutes (many of whom were gay as well), their clients and, on especially crowded nights, overflow from the front and back rooms. The back room was ordinarily the exclusive domain of an established regular lesbian clientele. Moreover, as we shall see, the staff at the Continental not only tolerated gay women's presence, but played a key role

in protecting them from harassment. In an era in which working class women had not yet gained the economic power to build and maintain their own social spaces, the relationship between the employees and managers and the gay women who were their patrons was of vital importance to the creation and survival of a public lesbian community.³⁶

That the Continental Hotel became the centre of the lesbian bar community was no accident. Like prostitutes and the Chinese, working class lesbians in the 1950s and 60s were unwelcome in most Toronto urban spaces, including gay male bars. Although some women ventured into places like Letros and the St. Charles Tavern, many felt uncomfortable and unwelcome in the upscale environment these bars preserved.³⁷ Consequently, middle class and professional women were not only more likely to occasion the gay male scene; they were also more welcome. Both Letros and St. Charles discouraged the 'tough butch' crowd by refusing entry to women in pants, in spite of the fact that cross-dressing men were not only welcome, but often featured entertainers.³⁸

The protection provided by a sequestered community such as Chinatown was paramount to the successful cultivation of a lesbian bar culture; it reduced the risks of potentially dangerous clashes with mainstream society, and the Chinese, regardless of how they felt about the presence of gay women in their community, had little, if any, political power to

keep them out.³⁹

Beer parlours were, in the 1950s, just that. Public house licenses did not permit the sale of liquor nor did they allow dancing or other forms of entertainment. Social mingling occurred primarily over tables and draft beer. Private parties among the Continental crowd were infrequent, partly because women had few resources and partly because many did not have permanent or even stable housing. Lynn, who remembers being homeless for a five year stretch, slept in friends' apartments or shared rooms rented by prostitutes when they were finished working.⁴⁰ After the bars closed, gay women and prostitutes spilled out into the neighbourhood and headed for all-night Chinese restaurants like Hop Sam's, or local booze cans, both of which illegally served alcohol at inflated prices.

The women who frequented The Continental were divided along class lines -literally. Uptowners, or 'posh' girls, were professional women and 'career girls,'⁴¹ referred to by Davis and Kennedy as upwardly mobile. They limited the expression of their sexuality to the weekends when they would either patronize the bars or attend gay private parties. Otherwise, the uptowner posed as a heterosexual woman during the work week in order to maintain her career and in most cases, her relationship with her family. For some women, leading a double life was simply a necessary evil. Laura, a high school teacher, remembers her two lives

as "completely split:"

I was a professional when I worked and I went to the bar and I was myself. That was all.⁴²

For others, it was a source of considerable anxiety. Tricia, who was employed as a psychiatric nurse and later a grade school teacher, was not able to make the easy separation that Laura did:

It's a schizophrenic lifestyle... It's like, you're always changing pronouns in conversations, when you want to speak about 'What'd you do this weekend?' That's what people ask you. 'Well, I went here, right?' 'Where was that?' You don't say the place and 'with her' or 'him' -- it starts to get really sick.⁴³

The stress of leading 'the double life' was in itself an enormous emotional and psychological burden for many, but the late night hours and the alcohol consumption that defined bar culture made it even more difficult. Most women began their stay on the corners as uptowners (recall Jan's earlier remark about being a 'square' working girl). For some, however, living the double life was a sacrifice they were not willing to make.

Davis and Kennedy's study of Buffalo's bar community revealed a shift in the 1950s away from the earlier coping strategy of separating social life from work and family toward a commitment to living the gay life full time. In the 1950s, they argue, tough bar lesbians would not divide their lives in order to maintain a job or please family members. The bars became the focus of their daily lives, and butches appeared masculine as often as possible.⁴⁴ Because there is

so little information for the Toronto lesbian community in the 1940s, it is not yet possible to make a comparison with Buffalo in this regard.⁴⁵ However, Toronto's bar community was similarly divided between uptowners - women who lived a 'normal' life during the week and 'the gay life' on weekends - and downtowners - women who lived the gay life all the time.

Downtowners' commitment was to living 'the gay life,' which meant both spending the afternoons and evenings in the Continental, and for butches, refusing to pass as a heterosexual women. The choice to appear in drag at all times effected changes in women's lives in a number of ways, the most significant of which was a dramatic decrease in job opportunities. Downtown butches were able to secure few jobs outside of factory work and other low skilled, manual labour positions, but as the 1950s progressed, even these opportunities were limited.⁴⁶ Canadian labour demands were shifting from goods-producing industries to service-producing industries.⁴⁷ The number of women in the labour force increased by three and a half per cent, but the closure of Toronto factories like McFarlane-Gendron, a baby carriage manufacturer that provided steady employment for many of Toronto's downtowners, had a negative impact on the bar community.⁴⁸

Tilden and other car rental companies in the city became a well-known employer of butch women. According to

Jan and Jerry, their superiors understood that they were gay, but did not make an issue of it:

Jan: When I went to work, they knew what I was. 'Cause then I started to drive cars, and I was a car jockey... Lots of girls went into car jockeys and factory jobs... When I worked at Bay-Adelaide [Tilden], they preferred to hire gay girls. Because they were better workers and we were better drivers.. (Q: And they could pay you less.) Pay less, and we were good workers.⁴⁹

Manual and other traditionally male labour positions were not just the only jobs butch women could get, they were preferred. That butches were good workers was the point many stressed. Women, Jan insisted, could do men's jobs as well as, if not better than, men themselves.

Even the good jobs were tough to hang on to. Although narrators recall that employers like Tilden accepted their butch style, functioning in 'normal' society in full drag had its stresses. Butch women experienced harassment travelling to and from work, and sometimes from male co-workers who felt threatened by her mechanical expertise. Employers were often reluctant to promote butch women; Jerry recalls that during her seven years at Tilden in the 1970s, male co-workers often rose to supervisory positions while butches remained jockeys. Still, both Jan and Jerry regard Tilden's willingness to give women the opportunity to prove themselves as competent workers in a traditionally male job as a precious and valuable asset.

For both fems and butches, late nights spent drinking beer made going to work in the mornings extremely difficult.

Jerry, for example, got a job as a receptionist when she left home at the age of sixteen. After less than two years, she was fired for frequent lateness and sick leaves. When women found the working life incompatible with their social lives, the 'corners' offered up a number of opportunities that allowed women to combine their social and romantic pursuits with raising the cash necessary to support themselves.

Prostitution provided the basis for much of the underground economy among downtowners. Chinatown was a primary location for street prostitution. Unlike today, many women who worked out of the Continental did so independently, without the interference of a pimp. Women like Ivy, who worked as a prostitute after leaving her suburban home for the gay life, did not need to depend on tricks for long. She developed long term relationships with a number of clients over an extended period of time. Clients such as these were called marks, and according to Ivy and Jerry, it was common for women to have such arrangements. A mark provided financial security, minimized the dangers of working in the sex trade and were often quite lucrative relationships.

Equally common were 'johns,' the one time or occasional client who sought out prostitutes on an irregular basis. Johns were so common in the Continental that they were regarded as an economic resource by everyone. The 'ladies

and escorts room' that the gay women and prostitutes occupied required that men wanting to gain entry be accompanied by a female companion. Butch women were more than willing to provide this service on the agreement that the john pays the bar tab, and most men were willing to comply. Some butch women took greater advantage of the opportunities johns and prostitutes provided, and would act as an agent or pimp. In stark contrast to the image of the typical john, Jerry, Lynn and Ivy recall that many were too intimidated or shy to approach a prostitute themselves. By acting as a go-between, butch women were able to demand an additional fee. Even the dangers prostitution posed were economically exploited; some women extended their services to providing 'protection':

Arlene: a few fems got hurt, from the johns, the tricks. So we got a real good system going -- it was sort of like protection.. They [fem prostitutes] would walk out of the hotel, and they'd look at the clock, and we'd know exactly which place they were going. If they weren't back in fifteen minutes the two of us would go out, to make sure that she was okay. I think what made them happy was, we'd only take half the money, and then that half we'd split between us.⁵⁰

Women who worked as prostitutes have hotly contested this testimony, arguing instead that rather than protection, such arrangements were purely exploitative. Two incidents related by narrators highlight the relationship between butches and working prostitutes.

Jerry, for whom "protection" provided an occasional source of income, had contact with a regular john who paid

generously for virgins. None of the women she ever sent him were virgins, but all were good enough actors. On one occasion, Jerry took advantage of a young woman who had recently arrived on the corners and who made no secret of her attraction to Jerry. Taking advantage of the situation, Jerry urged her to have sex with the man. The young woman initially resisted the idea, but eventually acquiesced when Jerry promised to remain in the room while the john had sex with her. In exchange for her performance, the young woman received half the money.⁵¹

Conversely, Ivy, who made a living turning tricks for a period of about six years, but never split her earnings with anyone, was once threatened with a gun by a john. She managed to escape, and found her way to the Continental. There she met with Denny and Jan, two women with the shared reputation of being the toughest butches in town, and when the three left the bar together shortly afterward, Ivy spotted the gun-wielding john standing across the street. Denny and Jan moved swiftly to intercept him. They dragged him into a nearby alleyway and physically beat him. Ivy was unsure if he left on a stretcher or in a bag, but she knew he didn't walk.⁵²

Young women who were not street wise were easy targets for exploitation, whether in the Continental or elsewhere. However, not all women who played a protective role for working prostitutes demanded or even expected financial

rewards. Some butch women like Lynn had more mutually satisfying relationships with prostitutes and insist that although exploitation could and did occur, an atmosphere of co-operation prevailed.

Lesbian prostitutes were primarily fems, but butch women frequently turned tricks as well. In contrast to Davis and Kennedy's findings for Buffalo's postwar bar culture, turning a trick did not carry a stigma for butches in Toronto, a probable consequence of the fewer economic opportunities available to mannish looking women.⁵³ Pratt reported that one informant stated butch women would dress in female drag when they worked as a prostitute, but Lynn recalls that men were often more interested in picking up butches than fems⁵⁴:

I don't know if it's some kind of challenge to these men or what it was, but quite often you'd have a feminine person sitting beside a dyke and the fem would go crazy trying to grab a trick and [she would look] really pretty and everything and the guys look at the dyke. And some of the butches, they were better at the business than the fems.⁵⁵

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, a few butches expected their girlfriends to hook, but most preferred to turn tricks themselves rather than to allow their girlfriends to go out on the street. Hustling in downtown Toronto was considered dangerous, and even for experienced and street-smart women like Ivy, hooking was frightening and degrading work:

I had to get out there and I had to make some

money because I couldn't get a decent job. So that meant I had to hustle. That was awfully hard to do, so the only way I could do it was to take drugs and then nothing bothered me.⁵⁶

Petty criminal activities were commonplace among the downtowners, but according to Pratt, the "crime" of prostitution "evoked more by way of response than any of the other offenses":

In the six cases where an expression of feelings was obtained on this practice all coincided in their distaste of this activity. One subject disclosed that it is something one becomes conditioned to, is purely a business arrangement, and is devoid of any sexual connotations for her. Another who is disgusted by prostitution has to drink before she can involve herself. She enters into such liaisons without any feelings. Her involvement is attributed to financial gain. Another girl is unable to prostitute until she is re-enforced with goof-balls [heroin] or intoxicants. Most of the time she takes the money before the transaction is completed and excuses herself to go to the washroom and does not return.⁵⁷

As the latter informant suggested, prostitutes often tried to take advantage of johns. The tabloids ran frequent articles exposing men who were duped by crafty 'joygirls.'⁵⁸

In fact, some women concocted elaborate schemes to roll - steal money from - johns. As they sat in the Continental, waiting for a butch to arrange a 'date,' one or two women might act friendly toward him, and carry on a conversation. While one woman kept him engaged, the other cut a hole through his pants and stole his wallet. According to Jan, if he created a fuss, the bartender would throw him out and

take a cut of the money. The victims of this type of crime rarely went to the police, but when they did, women were usually successfully charged and imprisoned.

Occasionally a prostitute and butch would work as a team, one turning the trick and the other stealing his wallet while he was having sex.

Prostitution, gay women and the Chinese community were intimately woven together during this period. Prostitutes, for example, rented their rooms from local Chinese homeowners who charged between three and five dollars each time the room was used.⁵⁹ Chinese men were often street prostitutes' best customers - some even moved in with them.⁶⁰ According to Lynn, Chinese gambling houses generated a surplus of cash that the men were quite willing to spend on the gay women and prostitutes in the Continental. One butch lesbian who appeared in court gave the Chinese Recreation Centre as her place of employment, suggesting that the relationship between the two groups eventually transcended economics and sex.⁶¹

With prostitution, theft and alcohol abuse commonplace on the corners, the Continental hotel was well-known as a rough bar. But during the ten year period under study here, it became even rougher. Throughout the 1950s, the availability of illicit drugs in Toronto dramatically increased. In a 1964 study of narcotic addiction among women offenders in Ontario, Maurice S. Flint reported that between

1954 and 1964 the number of women charged under the Opium and Narcotic Drug Act rose from thirty to 110, or by 267 per cent. The number sentenced to Toronto's Mercer Reformatory for Women rose from nine to sixty-six, or by 633 per cent.⁶² According to reports in Hush Free Press, the Tenderloin and the corners were the prime urban neighbourhoods to 'score'.⁶³ As the heroin trade experienced a steady growth in Toronto, so too did addiction levels among the Continental crowd. By the 1960s, its use was so prevalent among working class gay women that those who dealt the drug could support themselves from profits earned by selling within the lesbian bar community alone.⁶⁴

The drug trade was a lucrative business that dramatically altered the community. Its addictive qualities meant that for dealers, heroin and speed provided a steady and reliable source of income that was much less degrading than prostitution, and much more profitable. Jan was one of the most prosperous dealers in the Tenderloin. With her profits she purchased a number of businesses, including a restaurant, which provided a stable space for her to distribute heroin, speed and other illegal drugs. When she decided to leave her businesses to live with a lover in the United States in the mid-1960s, she was able to live off her accumulated earnings for seven years.⁶⁵

Alcohol use among downtowners already strained women's daily lives, but drug use had far-reaching consequences. In

the 1950s and 60s, the sale, use and possession of drugs were considered serious crimes. The police and RCMP, affectionately known as the horsemen, stepped up their surveillance of gay women on the corners. Indiscriminate harassment became more commonplace. Jerry recalls one such incident:

I was upset because Joan [Jerry's best friend] had [moved] to New Toronto. So I was walking around Chinatown and this little bastard picked me up, told me to get into the car. So I did. And he was asking questions about somebody who was dealing heroin and I said, "I don't fucking know who you're talking about." He said "you don't know, eh?" Rack! ...this bastard hit me in the left arm and he broke it. Broke it with a fuckin' billy [club]... the cops didn't give a shit back then, especially the horsemen. If they thought that you were dealing in heroin, which was the common drug back then, they didn't give a shit. They got an address and all they did was bust it [raid the house and arrest the women found there].⁶⁶

Hush Free Press regularly printed reports of gay women being convicted for drug possession. Geraldine, a black lesbian and Continental regular living in North Toronto, was arrested for drug possession by the RCMP in her home along with her lover Norma and another man and woman. Hush's coverage of the court room event focused on the display of affection between Geraldine and Norma. According to the report, Geraldine took the guilty plea, letting her girlfriend and the others off. After being sentenced to twelve months in prison, Geraldine's butch girlfriend Norma was visibly distraught, and had to be assisted from the courtroom.⁶⁷ Tabloid titters aside, the increase in drug use

combined with the escalated surveillance and harassment of gay women led to a rise in court convictions and jail time served. Gay women's lives became less and less stable, and relationships were constantly disrupted.

According to narrators, in instances of group arrests, it was common practice for the police and the courts to demand a plea of guilty for one in exchange for the release of the others, as was the case in the arrest of Geraldine. Women would often negotiate among each other to decide who would take the guilty plea; such collective decisions usually took into account each person's previous record. Many butch women would rather take the charge than see their fem lovers sentenced to prison, but often it was agreed that women with the cleanest records were most likely to be treated leniently by the courts, and therefore they should accept the charge.⁶⁸ Ivy, who began using hard drugs to ease the stress of working as a prostitute, remembers being arrested along with seven other women for possession of heroin. In this instance, the RCMP were willing to take just two of the seven arrested. Ivy decided that she would volunteer to be one of the two because she felt it was time to get off heroin and thought jail was probably the best withdrawal program available. After her release, Ivy did not resume using heroin, and tried desperately to discourage other women from taking drugs, even buying them beer to encourage them to get drunk instead.⁶⁹

The number of drug-related deaths among gay women is impossible to ascertain, but for almost all of the women interviewed, losing friends and lovers to drug-related causes was a source of tremendous pain and regret. Lynn, who never used heroin herself, also tried to discourage women in the Continental from using:

Lynn: I used to sit down and cry and beg and preach to a lot of them who were my friends and were on drugs. I used to beg people to get off. Booze did its own damage but to me there was a vast difference between the danger of using drugs and taking overdoses and getting bad drugs and all shit and even being beaten up or killed because you had drugs or because you owed the guy pushing the money. To me it was much simpler to just go in and drink your face off and get drunk. I sat down one time in the Continental and we started writing names down and we had a list of over 50 people that had died drug related [deaths] that we knew. Some of them we had gone with [dated], some of them we had been to bed once with, some of them we just knew as part of the whole crowd down there. Of those 50 people, about 40 to 45 of them didn't even live to see the age of 30. I was always living in constant fear that one of my best friends, somebody that I really cared for, was going to end up dying from drugs.⁷⁰

The introduction of street drugs in the mid to late 1950s had multiple effects on the downtown lesbian community. Life on the corners became rougher and more dangerous, drug addiction led to an increase of petty crimes, incarceration, and deaths, and fewer uptowners felt comfortable in the Continental. Gay women began to seek out new places to socialize. Many downtowners would be excluded from the expansion of the lesbian community the 1960s exodus helped provoke.

"Hostility and social disapproval from the straight world defined the context for all lesbian social life," argued Davis and Kennedy. "Narrators assumed danger as the setting for good times."⁷¹ If life inside the Continental was rough, it was matched by what lay waiting for out gay women outside. Butch and fem women alike had to be rough, tough and ready to respond to the threats issued them on the streets. Women coming into the bar scene, and especially the downtowners, had to know how to protect themselves. Arlene remembers her initiation into bar culture:

[My friend] wanted to take me downtown and introduce me to the Chinatown scene and that. But she wouldn't let me go down until she taught me how to fight. She said: 'There's no way. You walk downtown and you'll be in the hospital in half an hour.' And it was just that simple. You had to know what you were doing. She taught me how to use a knife and how to use a straight razor. You had to.⁷²

Jan, herself a downtowner, suggested that uptowners not only had to protect themselves and their fem partners from the rest of the world, but had to protect them from downtowners as well:

[T]he girls at work, the teachers and girls that were nurses, they were butch... and they'd come out and in the daytime they'd be very feminine but when they came out with their girlfriends, they had to protect their girlfriend from the other butches, from the pimps,⁷³ guys in there, from the rounders [drug dealers] in there, from straight guys in there, from the cops.⁷⁴

Daily threats of physical and sexual assault necessitated advanced skills in self-defense and intimidation. Davis and Kennedy have suggested that at least part of the reason why

butch and fem identities became increasingly polarized throughout the 1950s was a natural consequence of the rise in violent attacks against out gay women.⁷⁵ Lesbian identities evolved in response to the community's need to protect itself from the highly-charged homophobia and sexism that surrounded them.

Laura: They tried to fight us, especially in the Buffalo and Detroit bars. They used to bar the doors and by god you had to be able to get out. I remember one time I had a bunch of women [with me]... I took them down to either Buffalo or Detroit in the car, and two or three big hoods [were] hanging over the wagon and I said 'You get the hell out of my way. I'm going to walk around and drive my wagon away, and I'll be god damned if I'm going to walk around you.' They moved, but god knows why.⁷⁶

Jack Webster, a retired police detective, felt that the biggest problem the gay women faced was the threat posed by straight men:

The Continental Hotel was their hotel... There were fights there. They fought amongst themselves but they also fought when they had interlopers come in there that tried to make fun of them, you know. When I say make fun they were usually out-of-town country people that came in that had never seen this type of atmosphere, small town men [would] go in there, [and] because the dress was different than something they had ever seen or remarks were made, fights would start. The police would have to respond but it would be to rescue the interloper... Those were tough, tough ladies. They could take care of themselves.⁷⁷

Although the ability to fight was both a point of pride and a necessary skill for Continental regulars, butch and fem alike, they couldn't always take care of themselves. Webster recalls investigating at least two separate unsolved murders

on Toronto's Cherry Beach in the 1950s in which the victims were lesbians.⁷⁸

Ironically, though Webster claims that the biggest problem faced by gay women in the Continental was straight men who, unlike the male regulars, were unaccustomed to visible lesbians, gay women themselves agree that the greatest threat they faced was the police who had an intimate familiarity of Toronto's Continental crowd.⁷⁹ The following excerpt from a 1961 Maclean's article discusses the progress of the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital's Forensic Clinic, an out-patient clinic established in 1956 for the treatment of sexual 'deviation.' It provides insight into police relations with Toronto's gay communities in the 1950s:

Despite the widespread ignorance surrounding sexual crimes, the clinic has made a start in teaching understanding. Already, Ontario police are becoming much less antagonistic to deviates. In the past, they might beat deviates in disgust. Today, some patients report the exceptional sympathy of arresting police, a sympathy for which they are deeply grateful since most sex offenders are terrified of authority. Recently, a police constable found a man in a Toronto alley in suspicious circumstances. Instead of arresting him, he said, "Why don't you give them a call down at the clinic. They might be able to help you."⁸⁰

The journalist's suggestion that an officer of the law "might beat deviates in disgust" is a clear indication of public tolerance toward police brutality directed at homosexuals. That such violence could be aimed toward women may have come as a surprise even to this journalist. Few

people other than the Chinese-Canadian community, johns, and the police had first hand knowledge of Toronto's thriving lesbian subculture. Psychiatrists were of the opinion that lesbians tended to go undetected because female to female affection and intimacy was not tabooed as it was between men. But anonymity was not a luxury butch and fem women enjoyed. Gay women were punished in a variety of legal and illegal ways by the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force for their claim to sexual autonomy.

Inside the Continental, the police assumed an intimidating posture, but most of the aggressive harassment took place out on the street. In Toronto the police were limited to routine searches (routine in gay bars, that is) for underage drinkers and narcotics. Their persistence rarely paid off. Bar owners scrutinized identification in order to prevent losing their license to operate. Although it is impossible to confirm, narrators believe that the owners of the Continental paid bribes to government officials to overlook much of the activity inside the bar. A survey of the Liquor License Board of Ontario (LLBO) files reveals that monthly reports on the Union, a popular gay male spot, almost always included detailed descriptions of the effeminate male patrons. The Municipal had recurring problems with prostitution which were duly noted by LLBO inspectors. Yet surprisingly, the Continental reports never once mention the presence of either prostitutes or gay

women. Moreover, some narrators claim that the bar staff usually informed their patrons when the police were coming.

For whatever reason, the police made no official effort to close down the Continental, nor were they able to prevent women over the age of twenty-one from going there. They did however find a variety of ways to discourage them. In both Canada and the United States, butch women have told interviewers that it was illegal for women and men to appear in public wearing fewer than three articles of clothing tailored for their biological gender.⁸¹ This has proved to be controversial testimony since no such laws actually existed in either country.⁸² Instead, it demonstrates how wearing men's clothes made one a target for arbitrary and indiscriminate police harassment. None of the women I interviewed were ever charged under such a law. Instead, they were held without charges, often overnight, only to be released the next day. Incidents such as these could be damaging enough to one's psyche. For women who maintained regular jobs, being held overnight also endangered one's livelihood.

Although the police did not always feel compelled to indicate under what charges a woman was being held, this was not always the case. Jerry says that gay women were frequently detained overnight on charges of public drunkenness, sometimes even when they had not consumed any alcohol. Such charges were often laid the moment women

stepped out from the bar onto the street at closing time, although, as was Jerry's experience, they could also be laid in the middle of the day before the bars had even opened.⁸³ Prostitutes were constantly charged with "Vag. C," soliciting for the purposes of prostitution, but in the late 1950s, police stepped up their regulation of women in Chinatown by laying "Vag. A" charges, defined as having no visible means of support. In two separate stories printed in Hush Free Press, two women found on the corners were charged with "Vag. A" and, unable to pay the twenty-five dollar fine, were sentenced to five and fifteen days in jail respectively.⁸⁴

Arlene, who also spent time in prison, claimed that the gay women who defended themselves against straight male assailants often received criminal sentences while "the guy who attacked them just walked out."⁸⁵ More serious charges such as possession of heroin and other illegal substances, or repeated offences relating to prostitution, led to more arduous sentencing. Ivy, for example, served six months in the Mercer Reformatory for Women for possession of heroin. Once released, however, Ivy, like all the other women who inform this study, did not hesitate to return to her old stomping grounds, despite the verbal threats issued by the police. Still, the threat of spending a night in a holding cell was no where near as frightening as the physical and psychological terror some Toronto police officers were known

to inflict on out gay women.

Arlene: Many [police officers] used to pick you up and kick your head in. It was a fun time; take you down to Cherry Beach and beat the shit out of you. This one time it was winter... I was on my way home, we didn't see them. And it was two morality detectives that are quite well known, which is why I won't mention their names. They finally split them up -- they were a constant team. When they were on the street you had enough sense not to go on the street. Only nobody had spotted them so nobody warned anybody. So we were just meandering on our own. I ended up on Cherry Beach. They stripped me. Raped me. Left me there. Took my clothes and hauled off... They left me [no clothes]. They did it to the gay guys too. Only in the winter would they take your clothes. [I was] just over seventeen [years old]. But there was nothing you could do. You couldn't lay complaints... [Q: Did you know any other gay women who were raped by the cops?] Quite a few of them. They couldn't do anything. They handcuff your hands behind your back; we didn't have any protection. You couldn't do anything. You couldn't walk up and say this chuck cop did this; you'd land in jail or something... And of course there were other cops that were doing it, but not as frequently as these two. These two would actually say to your face "the only good queer is a dead queer."⁸⁶

Police brutality presented a daily threat to the lives of the Continental women, both in and outside the bar. "To me, being gay meant you had to have the smarts," said Norma. "You had to know where you were going, how you were getting there and what you were doing."⁸⁷ But when your smarts weren't enough, the gay community developed protective measures to keep each other alive, out of jail, and off Cherry Beach.

The treatment gay women received in Ontario jails in this period is an area of research that has yet to be

explored, but my preliminary research in this area suggests that gay women were well-represented in Ontario's prison facilities. In his 1960 report on an experimental rehabilitation program at the Mercer Reformatory for Women, Maurice Flint indicated that the topic of lesbianism arose during the formalized discussion sessions in each of the four groups he lead.⁸⁸ That some downtowners would have experienced undue hardships in the prison system is evident in a 1960 report on the Don Jail in Hush. A journalist vehemently protested against the treatment of women who were addicted to heroin. In this report he claimed that these women were unfairly but routinely subjected to "intense body searches" and put into segregation for four days to come off the drug.⁸⁹

Established butches played a key role in developing community spirit and solidarity that was not only a necessary defense mechanism, but that also made the corners an exciting place to be. Young women often modelled themselves after the older crowd, and conversations between them encouraged women to face the challenge of being gay and butch:

Jerry: They taught me how to be a lot stronger in this life that I did live. This one woman in particular, she always said to me, "Jerry, this is hell really and to beat hell on earth, you have to be a lot stronger than anybody else." And those words I'll never forget. ... She said, "we'll always be around and we'll have one common denominator and that's all of us because we're all fighting for the same cause. And that's to be free and be able to do what we want to do as

individuals and maybe one day we will be accepted." And I just sat there and listened to her. She's a hell of a woman.⁹⁰

As Arlene described above, butch women often taught other women entering the dangerous Chinatown scene to fight. And, she continued, if the two most notoriously violent police officers were on the beat, warnings would be circulated amongst the women in Chinatown. When Metro cops parked outside of the bar at closing time, the patrons would travel in large groups, refuse to leave or, failing that, slip out the back door. If a Continental regular was being chased by the police, she knew that if she ran into the bar, sat down and grabbed a drink, the other patrons would collectively assure inquiring officers that she had been there all night.

Not only did the women act as a cover for each other. So too did the beer parlour employees. Most hotels and restaurants had a direct interest in keeping the peace in their establishments. Police attention was always unwanted: it discouraged business and if the bar patrons caused too many problems, the owners risked having their license revoked. But "Johnny the Waiter," as he is warmly remembered, went above and beyond the call of duty. Without his protection, many women felt that The Continental would have been a far more dangerous place than it was.

Beth: The waiter, whose name was Johnny, looked after the lesbians very, very well. He wouldn't take any nonsense, he would throw you out if you didn't behave yourself. Let one of the voyeurs start bugging us; they'd be thrown out. He was really terrific.⁹¹

Of course, the bar was not the only place out women fought back against violent and verbal assaults. Out gay women were especially vulnerable on the city streets where, alone or in small groups, they came face to face with men who demanded that if they were willing to dress like a man, they should be willing to fight like one. The Continental served as virtually the only safe haven, providing a ready arsenal of women fully prepared to mount counter-attacks:

Arlene: If someone walked in and said 'I just got jumped by two guys', a bunch of us would jump up and head straight for the streets. We didn't always get them, but sometimes we did. We'd spread right out over two or three blocks if there was enough of us.⁹²

Butch women were willing to fight back, but suffered serious injuries in the process. According to Arlene and Jerry, most gay men and lesbians avoided seeking medical help because they feared their injuries would attract unwanted attention to themselves. They could not risk the chance that the police might be called in, especially if their assailant had been a police officer, or if there was an outstanding warrant for their arrest. Being wanted by the police did not always imply guilt of a crime. Many women dodged the efforts of their families to get them out of the downtown core. A missing persons report successfully filed was enough to seriously disrupt and complicate a gay woman's life. In order to escape the dangers of seeking hospital care, Arlene and a friend established their own mini-hospital

specifically to meet this need:

We [Arlene and a friend] rented the place. We had everything you'd want there. Because at the time doctors' offices and [hospital] emergency [wards] were very open; you could sort of walk in and walk out with the hospital. And we were putting in stitches and taking out stitches and putting on casts -- you name it we were doing it. Because somebody would get their head kicked in by the cops, and they would be really afraid to go to the hospital. I know one girl got kicked, and she had her head split right across the front. Now she couldn't go to the hospital; and she couldn't walk around like that, so we fixed it.. [We ran it] for about a year and a half.⁹³

Arlene picked up the skills she needed to treat medical injuries from the textbooks she used to help her cousin study for his medical certificate. Although she claims she would have provided the same care to gay men, she says only lesbians sought help. This is not surprising given that downtowners like Arlene had only minimal contact with gay men.

Uptowners and middle class women who avoided the bars altogether were much more likely to include gay men in their social circle. Unlike downtowners who were committed to living the gay life seven days a week, these women attempted to pass as heterosexual or, at the very least, to fit in to mainstream society. Passing was an easy enough task; if one was butch one simply adapted appearance and mannerisms at work, school, and family dinners. One might mention a boyfriend, and talk about getting married some day. But there were always times when talk wasn't enough. Unavoidable social functions demanded a date, and it was during these

times that gay men and women could be especially helpful to one another. In an interview with researcher John Grube, the late Bev Wilson remembered the tight-knit social group of gay men and lesbians in Ryerson's theatre arts program during the early 1950s. In addition to enjoying each others company, they frequently posed as dates for one another. Such friends might agree to marry, usually in order to avoid the social and economic discrimination single men and women confronted. Arlene, for example, married a gay man so that he could claim his inheritance in exchange for a percentage of the money.⁹⁴ Among the downtown crowd, however, a marriage of convenience - sometimes called a 'front' marriage - went against the cultural values and social needs of women who were committed to being visibly and unapologetically out gay women.

It was more common for gay men and women to form co-operative and defensive strategies with each other on a smaller scale. Norma remembers that gay men, for example, would always invite lesbians to their parties:

As long as there was two women there, the cops couldn't raid the place. So we would get invited to these parties, and the women would sit in one room and the men in another. Who knows what they were doing - I didn't care. We got free booze and food.⁹⁵

Free booze and food, even for middle class women like Norma, was a pay off that did not go unnoticed. Anglo-Canadian gay men enjoyed a much higher standard of living than their female counterparts. Boasting a substantially higher level

of disposable income, the gay male community was able to create and sustain a much wider social network than gay women could even imagine on their limited wages. Economic privilege did not, however, protect gay men from experiencing the same kind of oppression women endured. Still, the social differences - of which economic class figured prominently - between gay men and the downtowners kept the two communities quite distinct and separate from one another.

Marriage, Pregnancy and Parenting

"It was a weird and fantastic wedding party," wrote a Hush journalist, "that gathered to help the 'Newlyweds' celebrate the tying of the bonds of 'holy matrimony.'" The marriage of two of Toronto's downtowners, Ivy (not the same Ivy interviewed for this thesis) and Geraldine, made the front page of the February 23, 1957 issue of Hush Free Press (see figure ii). Of course, what made it "weird and fantastic" was, as the headline declared, that the bridegroom was a girl. Decked out in a tux, with a best man at her side, Ivy took the plunge and recited her vows at a lavish ceremony attended by scores of mutual friends and well-wishers.

Between 1955 and 1965, lesbian weddings were celebrated by downtowners on a regular basis, and they were no small affair. Young couples made elaborate plans, sent out

invitations, arranged music and entertainment, sometimes hired a caterer and a hall, and suited themselves in traditional bridal garb. Father Murphy, a downtown regular, often officiated (thus her nickname), but occasionally gay male friends might take the place of a minister or priest. According to Ivy, weddings were serious events, and treated with the same degree of respect and reverence as they were in mainstream society.⁹⁶

According to the Hush journalist, the marriage of Ivy and Geraldine was a "glaring example of the ever-increasing boldness of the Lesbian gang." An institution celebrated only among the downtowners, lesbian marriages served a number of important functions: they were a means of proclaiming one's love publicly, before one's community members; they were a way to discourage other community members from attempting to interfere in the relationship (a common source of antagonism and hostility among the downtowners); they provided an important opportunity to build community solidarity; and finally, lesbian weddings allowed gay women to participate in one of the most 'normal' institutions in mainstream society.⁹⁷

That marriages were a phenomenon of the 'lower classes' highlights one of the most fundamental ideological differences between the downtowners and uptowners. Uptowners abided by the moral values of the middle classes, and hoped to achieve homosexual acceptance by proving that, other than

their sexual practice, they were quite normal. Downtowners, in contrast, simply staked out their territory in Chinatown and claimed for themselves all they could, including the right to get married. The approval downtowners sought first and foremost was that of their peers. What separated the two groups was precisely this approach to being gay. Only under the most dire circumstances would downtowners attempt to pass as heterosexual. Moreover, downtowners held little reverence for the institutions that sought to exclude or oppress them. Thus, appropriating the wedding ceremony as their own was both a testament of their refusal to accept the cultural symbols and celebrations denied them by mainstream Canadian society as well as an offensive tactic eschewed by the more conservative-minded.

Gay women's weddings are perhaps the best example of community cohesion. According to Jo Anne Pratt's informants, the structure of the ceremony was similar to that of heterosexual marriages, and details concerning its execution were limited only by the finances available to the engaged couple. For example, whether the wedding was in a home or a hotel, whether a band was hired or not, and whether the couple took a honeymoon all depended upon what the couple could afford. Friends often contributed to the costs, and at the very least arrived dressed in formal wear - one of the very few occasions downtowners dressed up - and sometimes rented limousines.⁹⁸ Weddings were known to last up to

three days,⁹⁹ and were one of the few public occasions women had to dance together before gay owned clubs opened up in the mid 1960s.

Gay weddings were not the only experience lesbians had with marriage. A surprising number of women who participated in the downtown bar community had been at one time married, or engaged to be married, to a man. Of the women who inform this study, four actually did enter a heterosexual marriage at some point, usually during their late teens, and one (Laura) continues to maintain a steady and close relationship with her husband today.¹⁰⁰ Having been married, whether butch or fem, did not have any impact on one's status in the community. In fact, many women at one time or another either attempted marriage or at least a sexual relationship with men to either 'cure' themselves of their homosexuality or to try and obtain a deeper understanding of their sexual desire. That women who appear to have been so certain of who - and what - they were felt such enormous pressure to become heterosexual attests to how vital a community of other lesbians could be. For most women, bar culture - and by extension weddings - validated their sexuality and lives in a world that treated them as freaks.

There is probably nothing that set gay women apart from gay men more than pregnancy and parenting. In the 1950s and 60s, women not only had little control over their own reproductive functions, but were also powerless to defend

themselves against the institutionalized forms of discrimination inherent in child protection agencies like the family courts and the Children's Aid Society. Whether coping with an unwanted pregnancy or fighting to maintain custody, few gay women were unaffected by the complications and difficulties that accompanied their ability to reproduce. In this final section, I will briefly examine some of the ways in which pregnancy and parenting affected gay women.

Looking back at what we know about post war working class lesbian culture, it is easy to see how some of the concerns and difficulties women encountered arose. There are three major issues at work: first, women often depended upon casual or regular work in the sex trade, which immediately placed them at risk for unwanted pregnancy. The risk was of course aggravated by the lack of effective and safe forms of birth control. Until 1969, abortion and the sale of contraceptives was illegal in Canada. As Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren found in their study of contraceptives and birth control in Canada, men and women in this era were forced to rely on a variety of unreliable and sometimes dangerous preventative tools, including coitus interruptus, the rhythm method, and vaginal douching.¹⁰¹ Consequently, Canadian women often resorted to either back street or self-induced abortion; it was estimated that anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 illegal abortions were performed in Canada

between 1954 and 1965.¹⁰²

Remarkably, of the four women I asked directly about abortion (Jerry, Eve, Ivy and Lynn), all claimed to have had no knowledge of either abortionists or of anyone who had used one's services, and although not questioned directly on the issue, none spoke of self-induced abortions either. However, a review of Hush during this period shows that there were a number of women in Toronto who provided illegal abortions in their homes. Many were located in the downtown core, others as far east as the small farming community of Pickering. On August 25, 1965, a report of the criminal prosecution of an abortionist was accompanied by commentary which argued in favour of the liberalization of abortion laws, noting that "illegal induced abortions [are] as cheap as \$125" while "doctors demand (and get) \$500 and up for an illegal operation."¹⁰³ Abortions administered by a doctor were much safer: according to Hush, those charged with giving abortions only came to the attention of the judicial system because their clients had experienced medical problems afterward. Illegal abortions were high risk procedures, but given the social and economic impact on women who had children out of wedlock, many thought it worth the risk.

That none of these four narrators - one of whom worked as a prostitute for eight years - recall having had any knowledge of the subject in this period suggests that

abortion in the gay women's bar community was either not discussed openly or was generally not practised.¹⁰⁴ When asked, Arlene felt that the latter was more likely:

Remember, it wasn't very safe having an abortion in the city of Toronto. You couldn't just get one. It was usually a butcher you had to go to... I guess that was just fear: what if I get a bloody butcher? It's safer to have the kid and raise it.¹⁰⁵

Narrator's memories suggest that pregnancy was more common among butches than fems. Because the majority of downtown butches did not like their fem partners to work as prostitutes, they would often turn a trick themselves in times of economic need, raising the risk of pregnancy.

Arlene: it was a case of: Oh my god, we need the money, and the only way to get it is to use our bodies. And they'd go out, and I guess they wouldn't use any forms of birth control. And bang.
 Q: Would there be very many butches who had kids, or would they just have abortions?
 A: No, if they got pregnant they had a kid... It used to strike me as really funny: the fems could be hustling day and night, and [it was] very rare if one got pregnant. Really, it was a rare event. Some butch would go out because they needed the money pronto, and the next thing you know, my god, I'm pregnant... [Butches] were more upset about it than anyone else.¹⁰⁶

It seems reasonable to assume, as does Arlene, that butches were more likely to become pregnant because they typically had no need for knowledge of methods of birth control. Women who earned their income performing sexual intercourse were more likely to be aware of ways to prevent pregnancy. Whatever the case, pregnancy was a consistent feature of post war lesbian bar culture.

Women who were pregnant often continued to socialize in Chinatown right up to the end of their term. It is easy to imagine how isolating it would be to stay at home given that the focus of the gay life was the bars. For those women who did carry to term, they faced an enormously difficult decision: they had to choose between becoming a parent or giving the child up for adoption. Although no statistical evidence exists concerning pregnancy or adoption among gay women, Jerry says that most chose the latter. It is impossible to know precisely why women chose adoption, but there are a number of important obstacles that certainly contributed to discouraging women from raising children single-handedly. First, there were enormous economic barriers. Low wages and a lack of affordable daycare made child-rearing without familial support almost impossible. Second, there was the threat of being ostracized from one's community compounded by the absence of traditional forms of support, particularly from a spouse, family and friends. And finally women battled against the stigma of homosexuality. Jerry's experience illuminates the multiple obstacles gay women faced.

In 1958, Jerry became pregnant after she turned a trick in Montreal. She gave birth to twins in the fall, and contacted her parents for the first time in almost eight years. Knowing she was unable to support two infants on her own, she asked them if they would raise the children. They

declined the offer. For Jerry, adoption seemed the only alternative:

About 90% of the women who were gay gave up their children... because they figured they couldn't give them the proper life, the proper upbringing, give them what they needed while they were growing up, possibly the love and affection they needed because they were too fucked up in their own mind.¹⁰⁷

According to postwar maternal and childcare experts, the proper upbringing for children demanded not only the presence of married, heterosexual, and financially secure parents but placed a great deal of emphasis on the influence of the mother in her children's development.¹⁰⁸ Sexologist's and psychiatrist's views on sexuality reflected this trend: it was during this period that the notion that homosexuality was caused by inadequate or unhealthy mothering styles began to take root in popular culture.¹⁰⁹

The psychological, economic and social obstacles single gay mothers confronted were not, according to Jerry, alleviated by community support. When asked what the attitude was toward a woman who chose to keep her child, Jerry replied:

Good luck, my dear. And that's all that would be said. There was no such thing as help from the community, there was no such thing as a community. You had to stand on your own two feet.¹¹⁰

The bitterness with which Jerry recalls this period in her life highlights the limits of any community, regardless of its structure or inhabitants. In this instance, butch identity and working class bar culture placed a high premium

on the ability to live independently, and, especially for butch women, their characteristic brashness often left little room for helping others to grapple with some of the more painful emotional issues women were sometimes forced to confront. Consequently, postwar lesbian bar culture was not always entirely successful at providing large-scale or long-term organized community support for all women who found themselves in positions of great need.

Yet some women did choose to keep their children, and some even planned their pregnancies. Lynn, a butch, describes how she came to give birth to her daughter, now a mother herself:

When I decided to have my daughter, the guy that I decided that I was going to use to be the father, it was ideal because for a year he'd been asking me 'Do you want to go?' [ie he was a john]. I'd say no because I wasn't hooking and I kept saying 'I don't do that.' But when I decided 'Hey, I'm twenty-eight, I've got to think about this. If I'm going to have this child, I've got to do it now.' I was with somebody then and the woman I was with and my ex, they helped me decide: 'You're going to make a great mother and if you want to be a mother, do it.' But I thought, 'How am I going to do this? I don't screw guys. What am I supposed to do, pretend to be in love with some guy and pretend to be straight?'

The next time the john approached her, Lynn explained:

I said, 'You want something and I want something. You want to get fucked and that's okay and I want a baby. You know I'm gay, you know I'm a lesbian. I don't have boyfriends but I want to have a baby. I'll go out with you.' And I made him pay me too. That's the name of the game down there, you pay.¹¹¹

After eight attempts, Lynn finally became pregnant.

Ivy also became pregnant by the same method, although her donor was a mark. It was, she commented, absolutely the best way to get rid of a mark for once and for all.

For Arlene, who was sexually abused as a child, having sex with a man made her so physically ill that it was simply not an option. She and her partner approached their doctor:

[T]he family doctor just sat down and said, "Get somebody you want; have them jerk off; [go] into the bathroom, get a 10cc syringe, take the tip off and use it." We were performing our own artificial insemination.

The interviewer asked if the doctor was gay, to which Arlene responded:

Nope. He was a great big Negro man. He wasn't even white! He was really good to the girls. He wouldn't -- not drugs and stuff, but [he gave us] proper medical treatment. There was no -- your sexuality meant nothing to him. Unless you wanted to get pregnant, then he's tell you what he wasn't supposed to tell you... five of six fems got pregnant that way.¹¹²

Given that in the present time lesbians in Canada are sometimes denied access to artificial insemination services on the basis of their sexual orientation alone, it is remarkable that Arlene received that kind of medical advice and information some thirty years ago.¹¹³

As if having children was not difficult enough, keeping them was a greater challenge. In this era, downtown butches maintained their butch identity throughout their pregnancy and afterward, and were consequently easy targets for regulatory agencies like the Children's Aid Society. Poverty conditions often forced women with children to seek

state assistance, thus endangering their parental rights. A close friend of Arlene's put her child in temporary foster care while she looked for a job and a decent apartment. The Children's Aid Society (CAS) soon informed her that they would not be returning her daughter. "You have to turn completely female," they insisted. The baby's mother had refused to relinquish her butch style throughout her pregnancy, and even wore a suit into the hospital when she went into labour. But faced with the threat of losing her daughter, she allowed Arlene to give her a perm, bring her woman's clothes and she even got a 'woman's job' working at a counter in vacuum sales. The CAS was apparently not satisfied. Arlene remembers the next time her friend went to visit her daughter, the agency was set to sign the baby over to new adoptive parents:

She was doing everything they wanted. She went up one Sunday to visit her daughter at the adoption home, and found out they were ready to sign adoption papers. She literally had to -- well, again, my dear mother -- she got my mother in a car, they drove up on a Sunday morning, and they literally kidnapped her back. That was the only way she got her kid back.

According to Arlene, incidence like these were not uncommon:

I don't know any gay women at the time, that if the Children's Aid got hold of the kids, they ever got them back. In fact, this woman I was talking to on the phone last night, they took hers from her. And her daughter's 18, and she wasn't even allowed visitation privileges. That's how bad it was.¹¹⁴

It would seem that any parent was better than a gay parent.

Ivy, the suburban housewife, experienced this first hand.

After a quick recovery from the shock of her first trip to Chinatown, she decided that she wanted to go out again. Leaving her three children in the care of her husband, she and Linda headed downtown.

I ended up going to the bootleggers with Linda that night and I didn't go home. When I got home, my baby was nine months old in the carriage in the veranda and my two older children were at the top of the stairs. When I came in the front door, he was behind the door and I didn't know it and my oldest son hollered 'Mummy,' like 'look out!' I got it with his fist right here between my eyes. He threw me on the floor and I ended up with a broken jaw, my ribs were broken, my eyes were closed for three days. I went next door to where Linda's brother lived and he was going to go and kill her. It wasn't Linda's fault. I phoned the police from there. I couldn't even talk because my lips were all out like this and my two kids were freaking... the police came in and asked me who had done this to me. I told them my husband did it. The police wanted to know why he had done it and if any of it was justified.

Linda took Ivy and the children to a friend's house where they stayed until she went to court a week later. Armed with photographs of her face and body taken at the hospital and a young lawyer retained through legal aid, Ivy and her husband appeared before a family court judge.

They said I was an unfit mother and that freaked me out. I just wasn't ready for them to come at me. But they said that because I had deserted the children overnight. They ate me alive. I had this legal aid guy, this kid, but my husband had a few bucks and got this real shyster lawyer who charged me with desertion. He said I had been in a lesbian den.¹¹⁵

The suggestion that Ivy had been to a lesbian den combined with the charge of desertion was cause enough for the judge to grant full custody of the children to their father,

despite the beating he administered. It is important to note that Ivy was not actually accused of being a lesbian, but simply of having willingly gone to a lesbian den. Even the most casual association one might have with homosexuals could permanently mar one's character and credibility. Shortly after the hearing, Ivy's husband placed two of the three children into foster care. Ivy was eventually able to locate them, and even snapped photographs from a distance, but did not dare to approach them. It was not until the children were in their late teens that Ivy was able to reestablish contact with them.¹¹⁶

Like their heterosexual counterparts, gay women were subjected to patriarchal laws that drastically diminished their control over reproduction and their ability to provide for their children. Women like Ivy had few avenues of recourse, and in the absence of a broad-based, organized women's movement, little support to initiate change. Unlike heterosexual culture however, illegitimate pregnancy was not stigmatized in lesbian bar culture as it was in mainstream Canada. Childbearing, adoption, and single parenting were simply facts of life. But for many, it was a painful fact that gay women felt powerless to change. The combination of the enormous obstacles women faced simply to come together as lesbians in the 1950s and 60s, the lack of economic and familial resources available to them, the social stigma attached to homosexuality and the organization of the

community around public houses might help to explain why lesbian bar culture failed to incorporate domestic responsibilities into its structure.

By the 1960s, the out lesbian community had expanded considerably. A new generation of gay girls had come of age, swelling the numbers of what had been a small and almost invisible subculture. Gay women became more self-confident and self-assured, and the bar, although still the focal point of working class lesbian culture, became less and less central to the fulfilment of women's social and sexual needs. The strength and confidence women gained from Toronto's bar community enabled them to boldly claim for themselves some of the privileges enjoyed by 'average' Canadians, including marriage and children.

The experiences of the women who participated in Toronto's lesbian subculture demonstrates how women's sexual freedom was seriously constrained in postwar Canada. In the postwar era, to openly pursue same sex relationships and even to socialize with other lesbians demanded the creation of distinct and separate subcultures insulated from mainstream society. Creating and participating in a gay social milieu was a dangerous ambition which, for working class women, was complicated by a lack of economic resources. Left with few options outside of commercial spaces, working and street class lesbian culture was by necessity a public one in which hostility and antagonism

figured as centrally as conviviality and fellowship. Indeed, it was the combination of women's low economic status, prevailing social and moral prohibitions against women's sexual and social freedom, stigma associated with homosexuality and the coercive, state-sponsored tactics deployed by the police and the Children's Aid Society to discourage and punish those who refused to be respectable that shaped the contours of the gay life, and forced others to lead a similarly troublesome double life.

The one thing downtowners could control was what they did with their bodies. That they used them to have sex with other women had far-reaching implications, not just in the way they became targets for innumerable forms of oppressive, but also in the way they perceived themselves.

Notes

1. Interview with Laura and Mary (LMH), October 19, 1985.
2. Frank Caprio points out the presence of lesbian subcultures in urban centres in his Variations in Sexual Behaviour, (New York: The Citadel Press, 1955); Toronto's tabloid press often referred to that city's "lesbian colony." See, for example, "Lesbians Overflow Chinatown" in Hush Free Press, 28 November, 1959: p. 12.
3. Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-Of-the-Century New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); see also Carolyn Strange, "From Modern Babylon to a City Upon a Hill: The Toronto Social Survey Commission of 1915 and the Search for Sexual Order in the City" in Patterns of the Past: Interpreting Ontario's History, edited by Roger Hall (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988): pp. 255-77.
4. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, " 'Oh Lord, pour a cordial in her wounded heart': The Drinking Woman in Victorian and Edwardian Canada," in Drink in Canada: Historical Essays. Ed. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); 76, 81.
5. Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-Of-the-Century New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); pp. 20-21; Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, " 'Oh Lord, pour a cordial in her wounded heart': The Drinking Woman in Victorian and Edwardian Canada," in Drink in Canada: Historical Essays (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993): p. 76, 85.
6. *ibid.*, Kathy Peiss, p. 28.
7. J.C. Watson, "Ontario liquor laws should be reformed," Saturday Night Magazine 61:18-19 (October 13) 1945.
8. For example, in 1946 the Union Hotel voluntarily relinquished their ladies beverage room privileges, "owing to the unfavourable publicity in the newspapers." Seven months later, the manager of the Union issued a letter to the Vice Chairman of the Liquor License Board of Ontario (LLBO) requesting that they re-instate their license. Provincial Archive of Ontario (PAO). Establishment Files, 1927-1961. Letter from Max Greenburg to Mr. Wm. Nugent, dated February 20, 1947. RG 36/ 36-8/17721. Eleven years later the LLBO suspended the Union Hotel's license for four weeks as a result of rooms being "improperly rented out for the night rather than by the week and are being used for

immoral purposes." PAO. Establishment Files, 1927-1961. Letter dated July 4, 1957. RG 36/ 36-8/17721.

9. In a letter dated Dec 19, 1944, the Provincial board of Federated women's Institutes claimed to represent 1,225 Women's Institutes and societies in Ontario, amounting to a total membership of 34,000 women. Most of these women came from rural settings. For more on Women's Institutes, see E.M. Chapman's "From Stoney Creek to universal movement in fifty years time," in Saturday Night Magazine, 62:30 (February 15) 1947; and Prentice et. al., Canadian Women: A History, (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988): p. 183.

10. G. Hewelcke, "Beverage Room," Maclean's Magazine, 58:11, 59 (December 1) 1945.

11. C.J. Donald, "Will cocktail lounges be a failure in Ontario?" in Saturday Night Magazine 62: 21 September 1946; p. 6-7.

12. PAO. Petitions to Close Women's Beverage Rooms. RG 36/5/0/38.1, 38.2, 38.3.

13. *ibid.*, PAO.

14. *ibid.*, PAO.

15. *ibid.*, PAO; United Church Women's Missionary Society, October 10, 1945.

16. Warsh, " 'Oh Lord, pour a cordial in her wounded heart': The Drinking Woman in Victorian and Edwardian Canada," in Drink in Canada: Historical Essays, p. 71.

17. See Wendy Mitchinson, "The WCTU: 'For God, Home and Native Land': A Study in Nineteenth-Century Feminism" in Linda Kealey, ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1979): pp. 151-167.

18. PAO. Petitions to Close Women's Beverage Rooms. RG 36/5/0/38.1, 38.2, 38.3; October 18, 1945. The other letter sent by an individual was from a woman in Britain who was planning to immigrate to Canada and open an English-style pub with her husband. That particular letter has the distinction of being the only one contained in the archives' files to support the Premier's proposed amendments to the Liquor Control Act.

19. Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community (New York: Routledge, 1993) p. 30.

20. *ibid.*, p. 30.

21. For an account of the location of lesbian bars in Buffalo, see Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, p. 71. Line Chamberland's study of postwar lesbian bars in Montreal reveals the same pattern of development in that city. See "Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975" in The Journal of Homosexuality, 25.3 (1993): p. 235.

22. Interview with Mary (LMH); October 19, 1985. I do not mean to imply that it was a lesbian-only bar, only that it was a bar which had a regular lesbian clientele. In fact, Toronto's first lesbian-only, The Blue Jay, did not open until 1972.

23. Richard H. Thompson, Toronto's Chinatown: The Changing Social Organization of an Ethnic Community (New York: AMS Press, 1989) p. 97.

24. Interview with Jack Webster, January 13, 1994.

25. Peter S. Li, The Chinese in Canada, p. 59.

26. *ibid.*, p. 2. For an excellent examination of the construction of Chinatowns, see Kay J. Anderson's "The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category" in The Challenge of Modernity: A Reader on Post-Confederation Canada, edited by Ian McKay (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992): pp. 156-188. For an examination of Chinese women in this period, see Dora Nipp, "'But Women Did Come': Working Chinese Women in the Interwar Years" in Looking into My Sister's Eyes: an Exploration in Women's History, edited by Jean Burnet. (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986): pp. 179-194.

27. Thompson, Toronto's Chinatown, p. 97.

28. Li, The Chinese in Canada, chapter 4.

29. *ibid.*, p. 81.

30. *ibid.*, 81.

31. *ibid.*, p. 72.

32. Thompson, p. 124.

33. Joan Nestle briefly examines the connection between gay women and prostitutes in A Restricted Country (New York: Firebrand Books, 1987); pp. 157-77.
34. Toronto's tabloid press published explicit details about the goings-on in the Tenderloin, including physical descriptions of their favourite prostitutes. For an example of just one article that 'exposes' the underworld of prostitution in Toronto, see 'After Dark Cesspool' in Hush Free Press, July 24, 1954, p. 6,7.
35. The 'limp-wristed set' and 'the lavender set' were frequently used in the tabloids to describe gay men. Thus far, no research has been undertaken to examine the relationship between gay men and women during this, or any other period, in Toronto. However, it is interesting to note that although both groups went to the Union during the same period, there was little, if any, interaction between the two groups. Personal correspondence with Jerry and John Grube.
36. Descriptions of the interior of the Continental, as well as of the relationships between the staff, male patrons, prostitutes and gay women were provided by almost all the narrators. Some of the richest details were provided in the interview with Jan, May and Laura (LMH), October 19, 1985; and the interview with Beth and Sandy (LMH) January 11, 1987.
37. Davis and Kennedy's study of the Buffalo bars reveals similar patterns of development in relation to gay male bars. Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, p. 72.
38. Personal correspondence, John Grube, November 17, 1994.
39. For an example of how the Chinese - both their needs and their expressed opinions - were disregarded in the political process, see Richard Thompson's discussion of the city of Toronto's decision to raze and relocate a significant part of Chinatown in order to build the new city hall in Toronto's Chinatown: The Changing Social Organization of an Ethnic Community (New York: AMS Press, 1989): p. 68.
40. Interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993.
41. Interview with Norma, March 11, 1992; Interview with Jan, Laura and Mary (LMH), October 19, 1985.
42. Interview with Laura (LMH), October 19, 1985.
43. Interview with Tricia (LMH), September 21, 1986.

44. Davis and Kennedy, Boots of leather, Slippers of Gold, p. 82.
45. In fact, two narrators have suggested that a bar culture or community did not emerge until the late 1940s. Interview with Mary, Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn weissman, n.d. 198?; interview with Norma, March 11, 1992.
46. Pratt's butch informants listed their job experience as truck and cab driving, machine operating, factory work, and race horse and car jockeying as positions they had held.
47. "Women Workers in Canada 1954-1964" in Labour Gazette, 65:338 (April 1965).
48. "Facts and Figures about Women in the Labour Force," Women's Bureau, Department of Labour: Queen's Printer, 1964.
49. Interview with Jan (LMH), October 19, 1985.
50. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.
51. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.
52. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.
53. Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, p. 101.
54. Pratt, "A Study of the Female Homosexual Subculture," p. 87.
55. Interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993.
56. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.
57. Pratt, "A Study of the Female Homosexual Subculture," p. 43.
58. See especially "After Dark Vice Cesspool," Hush Free Press, 24 July, 1954, p. 6-7.
59. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.
60. See "Aged Chinese Wins Marilyn" in Hush Free Press, September 20, 1959. Also, Jerry lived with a single Chinese man for a short period of time, although she does not reveal the nature of this relationship.
61. "Perfect defence for Vag C charges" in Hush Free Press, 27 June, 1964, p. 11.

62. Maurice S. Flint, "Narcotic Addiction in Women Offenders" in Canadian Journal of Corrections, 6:1964(246-265); 247.

63. In the Hush weekly gossip column "Toronto Breeze Around," frequent references were made to heroin sales, arrests and use. See for example 28 December, 1957, p. 6; 29 March, 1958, p. 5; as well as the article "Tenderloin Overflow" 20 June, 1959, p. 7.

64. Interview with Jerry; November 23, 1992.

65. Interview with Jan (LMH), October 19, 1985.

66. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.

67. "Law Separates Romantic Females" in Hush Free Press, 7 February, 1959, p. 12.

68. Interview with Ivy; April 8, 1993. Interview with Jan (LMH); October 8, 1985. For an example of a butch taking the guilty verdict for her fem, see "Blonde Addict Wins Freedom for Beloved 'Sweetheart' " in Hush Free Press, 3 January, 1959.

69. Ivy also recalls seeing a high incidence of heroin addiction among gay men at the Muny and Union hotels. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.

70. Interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993.

71. Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, p. 52.

72. Interview with Arlene (LMH). May 6, 1987.

73. Susan is presumably referring to female pimps as male pimps were virtually unheard of until the mid 1960s. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992; interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993; interview with Jack Webster, January 13, 1994.

74. Interview with Jan (LMH), October 19, 1985.

75. Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, pp. 288-293.

76. Interview with Laura (LMH), October 19, 1985.

77. Interview with Jack Webster, January 13, 1994.

78. *ibid.*, Webster.

79. See also Pratt, "A Study of the Female Homosexual Subculture," p. 77.

80. F. Russell, "Clinic to Curb Sex Crimes Before They Happen," in Maclean's, 23 September, 1961: 30, p. 47.

81. See Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, p. 180. See also interviews with Arlene; Lynn; Jan.

82. In his brief review of sex offences, author R. S. Rodgers argues that transvestism in women is the "most obvious" case of female sexual behaviour, and "conceivably comes under s. 158" of the Criminal Code. Section 158 covered "indecent acts," broadly defined as offences against public morals. It did not specify cross-dressing. R.S. Rodgers, Sex and Law in Canada (Ottawa; Policy Press, 1962); 15. Davis and Kennedy report that they have yet to uncover any such law in the U.S. See Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, p. 180.

83. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.

84. "Kept Dolls Roam Around Chinatown," 17 March, 1962, p. 13; "Disobedient' Daughter Jailed" in Hush Free Press, 5 December, 1964, p. 11.

85. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.

86. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.

87. Interview with Norma, March 11, 1992.

88. Maurice S. Flint, "Narcotic Addiction in Women Offenders" in Canadian Journal of Corrections, 6:1964; pp. 250-251.

89. Hush Free Press, 2 January, 1960; p. 11.

90. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.

91. Interview with Beth (LMH), January 11, 1987.

92. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.

93. *ibid.*, Arlene.

94. *ibid.*, Arlene.

95. Interview with Norma, March 11, 1992.

96. See also Pratt, "A Study of the Female Homosexual Subculture," p. 57.
97. *ibid.*, p. 56-57.
98. *ibid.*, p. 59.
99. *ibid.*, p. 59.
100. See interview with Laura (LMH), September 26, 1985; interview with Jan (LMH), October 19, 1985; interview with Arlene (LMH) May 6, 1987; interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.
101. Agnes McLaren and Arlene McTigar McLaren, The Bedroom and the State (Toronto: McClelland And Stewart, 1986), chapters 1 and 2.
102. Canadian Medical Association Journal, (97) 1967, p. 1233. Cited in McLaren and McTigar McLaren, The Bedroom and the State, p. 136.
103. Hush printed a number of stories on the criminal prosecution of local abortionists, most of whom were women. See 21 March, 1959, p. 5.; 28 March, 1959, p. 9; 12 March, 1960, p. 6; 9 December, 1961, p. 6.
104. Unfortunately I failed to ask what birth control methods were used.
105. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.
106. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.
107. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.
108. "[B]y the 1950s," argues Kathy Arnup, "psychological problems, rooted in faulty maternal behaviour, had emerged as the cause of many psychical childhood disorders." Education For Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 151.
109. This is nowhere more evident than in the position taken by the Parents Action League (PAL), an advocacy group organized in 1956 by three Toronto women in response to the growing fears and perceived dangers around sex crimes committed against children. PAL supported the notion that mothers had a role to play in raising 'normal,' sexually well-balanced children by fighting the dangers of the sex criminal in the home. In an article in Liberty Magazine, they wrote: "Elimination of the sex "deviate" is up to you; not by waging a war against him, but by fighting his

sickness, bred in the home and nurtured by the turned back of society." Liberty Magazine, August 1955, p. 15.

110. Interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992.

111. Interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993.

112. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.

113. The Royal Commission on new reproductive technologies found that some semen donor clinics deny lesbian women access to their services based on their sexual orientation. See Proceed With Care: Final report of the Royal Commission on New Reproductive Technologies (Ottawa: Ministry of Government Services Canada, 1993).

114. Interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987.

115. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.

116. *ibid.*, Ivy.

CHAPTER FIVE:

**Improving the Lesbian Image: Class conflict among gay women
in the 1950s and 1960s**

Tricia: I think just choosing to be a lesbian at the time these women did, no matter whether it was weekends or non-weekends, is political in itself; whether a person or not [is] a part of putting that intellectually, organically, it's political.¹

Denise: I don't think socially today, depending on the people you go with, [being gay is] acceptable... And I don't think it should be flaunted and built up to be something beautiful because, how can I put it? You like for a person or dislike for a person or whatever should be very private... I'm not saying that gay life itself is private. I'm saying that life itself is private.²

In the annals of gay history the postwar era - characterized by anti-homosexual witch hunts, aversion therapies invented by psychiatrists, and dimly-light gay bars - came to an abrupt end in the late 1960s. On the night of Friday June 29, 1969, New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar that attracted a motley crew of drag queens, runaways, go-go boys and other street class gays and lesbians, many of whom were young and nonwhite.³ On this particular night during a routine raid a lesbian patron - one of the last to be forcibly removed from the bar into an awaiting police car - resisted arrest, and in doing so incited a riot that lasted three days.⁴ The Stonewall riots have since come to symbolize the turning point in the

political and ideological consciousness of gay communities across North America.⁵

Gay liberation, notes John D'Emilio, was a male dominated political movement that often failed to speak to lesbian's concerns.⁶ The sexism and misogyny that plagued many civil right organizations, including groups that organized under the banner of Gay Power, led countless women to defect to the women's movement. Furthermore, lesbians who were not comfortable or did not feel able to come out in the 1950s and 60s did so within the ranks of the women's movement, swelling the numbers of gay women in feminist organizations.⁷ Helen was one such woman. For her, The Continental Hotel "wasn't a place I was interested in going [to]. On the contrary, I heard of it in the context of a place that you didn't go to." Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Helen preferred socializing at the private parties she attended with a "mixed" social circle of prominent Canadians in the arts: "It's not until the women's movement that I really found a place and people," she continued, "and that's when my lesbianism really flowered." Helen described this time in her life as "just like finding something that you didn't know you lost, but really, really, sort of BINGO! Now all those problems [around my sexuality] were solved... It was: now you could be what you wanted to be and how you wanted to be."⁸ For women like Helen who did not participate in bar culture, becoming an out lesbian through women's and

gay rights organizations was accompanied by the same sense of freedom and empowerment that many lesbians in the 50s and 60s experienced when they first walked into the Continental.

The impact of the political ideology of the women's movement on the social organization of lesbian desire, not to mention female sexuality in general, was dramatic. According to Lillian Faderman, lesbian-feminists were a very different breed from the lesbians of the previous generation.⁹ Grounded in a rigorous political critique of patriarchy and heterosexism, lesbian-feminism rejected gay women's bar culture, and especially butch and fem identities which, it was argued, entrapped rather than liberated women from the oppressive structures of heterosexuality. According to Helen, Toronto lesbians involved in feminist organizations "weren't interested" in butch and fem "roles:"

Q: Would [they] have been considered incorrect?

A: Absolutely, but it would have been considered unnecessary, that's the whole point. The way we would have articulated or analysed the situation was that this is no longer necessary, so why would anybody do it? It may have been necessary at some point, but it wasn't, like passing, why would you pass if you didn't have to pass?¹⁰

The speed and efficiency with which feminist liberationist ideas about lesbian sex, identity and relationships swept across North America should give pause for thought. How is it possible that a newly mobilized political and social movement could so rapidly change the shape of urban lesbian subculture in North America? In this chapter I will

demonstrate that although there existed tremendous differences between the pre- and post- Stonewall generations of gay women, animosity toward butch and fem gender identities preceded the women's movement by at least two decades. This chapter traces the roots of past and present debates surrounding the historical meaning of post war butch and fem bar culture in North America and its significance in lesbian and gay history.

Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy suggest that lesbian-feminism's negative valuation of butch fem culture is likely a response to the explicit sexuality these communities expressed through butch fem roles. "From the beginning," Davis and Kennedy wrote, "lesbian-feminists tended to downplay sexuality between women in an attempt to free lesbians from the stigma of sexual deviance."¹¹ But as both historians Christine Stansell and Kathy Peiss have demonstrated, there exists a powerful link between sexuality and class.¹² In this chapter I will argue that criticism surrounding lesbian sexuality in butch fem culture was merely one way in which a much greater difference manifested itself in the discourse by and about butch and fem women and their detractors. The anti-butch and fem rhetoric popularized by the women's movement was not entirely a product of the ideological tenets of modern feminism but rather grew out of divergent social ideals that were grounded in class differences. As we shall see, tension

between working and street class gay women and their 'upwardly mobile' and middle class counterparts percolated throughout public and private lesbian communities of the 1950s and 60s. This chapter aims to demonstrate how class interests and identity played an instrumental role in the battle over lesbian identity, culture and community.

Historian and archivist Joan Nestle, a lesbian fem who actively participated in New York's postwar lesbian bar culture, has forcefully argued that lesbian-feminists assessment of butch-fem culture is grossly misguided. Throughout the 1980s, Nestle campaigned tirelessly for a reassessment of butch fem culture, first in an article published in Heresies Sex Issue #12, followed by a paper delivered at the 1982 Barnard Conference, "Towards a Politics of Sexuality," and finally in her book A Restricted Country. She has argued that butch-fem relationships were "complex erotic social and sexual statements, not phoney heterosexual replicas."¹³ Moreover, working class lesbian bar culture, Nestle claimed, was feminism in its pre-political stages.

The conditions under which a discussion of post war working class lesbian history can occur, a discussion which necessarily includes a study of butch and fem identity and eroticism, has been profoundly swayed by the defensive stance Nestle was forced to take against the deeply entrenched feminist position on prefeminist working class

lesbian sexuality. Historians interested in examining North American working class lesbians as culturally meaningful figures in lesbian history have been obliged, to some degree, to authenticate Nestle's claim that butch-fem culture fits into the feminist narrative of political struggle against the forces of oppression aimed at women and lesbians. The history of butch-fem bar culture is forced to demonstrate itself as a progressive part of women's past. The agenda, in other words, is in part determined by the very forces that have historically denied its legitimacy.

Equally important to the study of post war lesbian subculture as an investigation of the role of butch and the fem is an examination of the climate of oppression within which the gay bars of the 1950s and 1960s flourished. Historical accounts of lesbians and gays in general, but especially of this period, have paid a great deal of attention to the risks and dangers for homosexuals who pursued and engaged in sexual relations, and even for those who simply dared to associate with other homosexuals. As I have argued, gays and lesbians were the target of a widespread campaign to identify and root out 'sex deviants,' and were subjected to multiple forms of harassment and physical and psychological abuse at the hands of both the American and Canadian federal governments, the police and the medical community.¹⁴ At the same time, postwar gay history often strives to challenge the commonly held

misconception that pre-Stonewall gays and lesbians made little, if any, contribution to the advancement of lesbian and gay rights. John D'Emilio, for example, explicitly frames his 1983 study of post war American homosexual communities as an attempt to demonstrate how homophile activists laid the groundwork upon which gay liberationists built the modern gay movement.¹⁵ Likewise, Davis and Kennedy framed their investigation of Buffalo's lesbian communities within the political category of resistance. Thus both the climate of oppression experienced by lesbians and gays, and the significance of their contribution to modern gay politics have become central themes in the narration of post war lesbian and gay life.

Taken together, these two themes, while unquestionably important in and of themselves, have diverted attention away from the way in which economic and social class played a key role in the organization of post war lesbian and gay life. This is especially evident in the writing of twentieth century North American lesbian social history, a field which has grown out of the political ferment of feminist and lesbian and gay rights politics. Consequently, the development of North American lesbian social history, perhaps best exemplified by Lillian Fadderman's Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers and Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy's Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold is both enriched and constrained by the overarching agenda of

two separate, although sometimes parallel, ideologies.

The anti-butch and fem position propagated by the pro-woman ideology of second wave feminists was not the first time working class gay women encountered hostility from other lesbians. Throughout the twentieth century middle and upper class lesbians had little interaction with their working class 'sisters.'¹⁶ By the middle of the century, when small but visible communities of working class lesbians emerged in almost every major urban centre across North America, gay women who sought to maintain the illusion of respectability - which meant, of course, keeping the nature of their sexual desire a closely guarded secret - were eager to put as much distance between themselves and the embarrassment - and threat - identifiable lesbians presented. As the lesbian bar communities of the 1940s, 50s and 60s increased in size and number, there were countless women who privately and sometimes publicly disparaged their existence, and went to great lengths to distance themselves from them.

These sentiments were clearly articulated in the pages of one of America's first lesbian publications, The Ladder. Produced by a San Franciscan organisation named the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), The Ladder was virtually the only forum through which lesbians could express their ideas and opinions.¹⁷ Originally just another private social group formed as a more palatable alternative to the gay bar scene,

DOB founders Del Martin and Phyllis Lyons quickly identified the need for an organization that went beyond the scope of a social group.¹⁸ Through its newsletter, meetings and special events, DOB worked toward earning lesbians their right to live a normal life. To this end, they were deeply committed to improving the lesbian image.

That there was a lesbian image to improve was in part the result of the visibility butch fem culture lent to female homosexuality. It was, after all, the presence of cross dressing women, not of women showing affection toward one another, that informed newcomers they had entered lesbian territory. Small isolated pockets of urban lesbian subcultures alone did not earn the butch and fem the role they assumed as the principal representatives of female homosexuals, however. With the help of pulp novelists and tabloid journalists, the research findings of postwar psychiatrists, sexologists and other medical experts propelled butch fem eroticism of working and street class lesbian bar culture into the dominant public discourse.

It was the popular images of the lesbian - as psychologically underdeveloped, as solely a sexual being, and as a woman who wanted to be a man - that the Daughters of Bilitis were determined to counter. But despite the bad rap they received, butches and fems were not simply fictional characters or false stereotypes. They were real people who existed well before they became fodder for

sexological interpretation and pulp publishing exploitation. If DOB was to create a new image of the lesbian for public consumption, they were going to have to contend with true to life butch and fem women who monopolized both lesbian and popular culture in North America.

'One of DOB's goals,' write Martins and Lyons, 'was to teach the Lesbian a mode of behaviour and dress acceptable to society.'¹⁹ Making the lesbian acceptable to society wasn't just a goal, it was a strictly enforced rule governing DOB meetings and events. While many were attracted to DOB and social groups like it for precisely this reason, what made DOB unique was its efforts to convert butch and fem women to their way of thinking. DOB organizers believed that, given the proper encouragement and support, any butch lesbian could learn to accept herself as a woman. But it wasn't just any woman DOB wanted lesbians to be. A successful conversion meant not only learning proper gender identification, but achieving an acceptable level of conventional respectability. Perhaps the best example of DOB's strategy to foster and promote the lesbian ideal is the story Martin and Lyons relate about Toni, a classic bar butch. Described as "a friend of times past," (Del Martin confesses at the beginning of Lesbian Woman that she used to identify as a butch) Phyllis and Del bumped into her in "a rather raunchy gay bar." (They offered no explanation as to why they were in a 'raunchy' bar themselves). After some

prodding, Toni began to attend DOB meetings and eventually "toned down her [masculine style of] dress." She refused, however, any attempt to "get her in a dress." For reasons they fail to explain, Martin and Lyons enlisted the help of a gay man who, "over the months... helped [Toni] feel comfortable with herself as a woman." Finally Toni was ready to make her debut:

We met Toni for dinner before the theatre one night. There she was in all her glory, neatly turned out in a dress, hat, gloves and high heels, the very epitome of a middle class matron. The only different note was the lack of lipstick. "My mother never wore it, so why should I?"²⁰

The narration of Toni's conversion employs melodramatic conventions reminiscent of turn-of-the-century moral reform literature produced by such groups as the Salvation Army.²¹ In Lesbian Woman, butches become the modern fallen women, victims of the new evil - patriarchy - and DOB's outreach workers the noble and enlightened campaigners waging a battle against misplaced gender identities. With the proper guidance (and some gentle prodding), the Toni's of the lesbian world could make the miraculous journey from the corruption of the working class bar to the respectable world of the theatre.²²

DOB wasn't unique in its approach toward achieving homosexual liberation; according to John D'Emilio, the Mattachine Society also held the view that in order to diffuse social hostility toward homosexuals, gays and lesbians needed to adopt normative standards of proper

behaviour. The homophile movement, he concluded, "took upon itself an impossible burden - appearing respectable to a society that defined homosexuality as beyond respectable."²³ As the story of Toni reveals, 'respectability' encompassed not only a narrowly prescribed definition of femaleness, but demanded a taste for a conventional middle class lifestyle. DOB's approach to homosexual liberation was bound to encounter formidable resistance from the very community it most sought to win over.

Officially DOB's rejection of butch and fem identity and culture was rooted in the firm belief that assimilation into mainstream society was the best strategy for lesbians to achieve social acceptance and understanding, and its founders sought to educate women toward this end. That the goals of the group did not meet with the approval of all women was evident early in DOB's history. According to Martin and Lyons, a rift between the group's original 12 members developed after only a few meetings, causing half of the gay women to drop out. Upon reflection, Martin and Lyons noted that 'the DOB split was along worker/middle class lines.'²⁴ Martin and Lyons continued to encounter resistance from working class women toward their ideas and attempts at reform, but successful conversions like that of Toni reaffirmed their convictions.²⁵ As I will argue, the women's movement institutionalized them.

In the 1950s and 1960s, butch and fem bar culture was

distinctly working class. Gay women who organized their leisure time, and in some cases, their work, around the bar community either came from or became part of a traditionally disenfranchised social and economic class. This is not to say that middle class and upwardly mobile women did not partake of the sexual and social pleasures the postwar bar culture had to offer, but that the socio-sexual organization of gay women's bars was guided by the rhythms of the street, the bar and the long arm of state regulatory bodies. For many women, the seedy bars and unsavoury neighbourhoods where working class gay women congregated was an alien world in which traditional values around female sexuality and the social conventions of the middle class had little currency. In an era when butch and fem bar culture was the only publicly organized social life readily accessible to gay women, DOB and other privately organized social groups were able to offer a much desired shelter from the post war storm of gender chaos and homosexual danger.

Although neither the Daughters of Bilitis nor their newsletter, The Ladder, was familiar to many gay women in Toronto, DOB would have had no difficulty finding new members in that city. Laura, the high school teacher who was dedicated to her career as much as she was to her work in the Canadian political left, was approached by a local private lesbian social group.²⁶ One of its members, a doctor, contacted Laura by phone and asked a series of

questions based on her lifestyle, and beliefs about lesbianism. She was informed that the group was private, and its members were, like herself, professional women interested in maintaining a high degree of discretion and confidentiality. Like DOB, such private circles went to great lengths to protect their members' reputations. Laura, however, found the idea of a secret legion of lesbians distasteful, and declined the invitation. Already deeply involved in the downtown bar community, Laura had no desire to be associated with a group of women preoccupied with protecting their public image.

Laura's contempt for private social groups and the latter's disapproval of the bar life - and the women who participated in it - is indicative of the class tensions that permeated lesbian culture and communities in the post war era. It is a tension that emerged in the narratives of almost all gay women's personal accounts of Toronto's public lesbian community. Research on the nature and function of Toronto's lesbian private social circuit has yet to be fully explored, but we can say for certain that such groups did exist, and in significant numbers.²⁷ The absence of first-hand accounts of gay women's experiences in these circles does not prevent us, however, from determining the powerful force social and economic class exercised over the organization of lesbian desire and sociability. A close examination of both oral interviews and published and

unpublished records from the period allows us a unique opportunity to discover how these tensions were interpreted and given meaning.²⁸

For the very same reasons that the Continental was ideal for working and street class lesbians, it was an unappealing and culturally alien territory for women unfamiliar with either the downtown core or working class culture. Although the social changes induced by the Second World War normalized the presence of women unescorted by men in the world of upscale commercialized urban entertainment such as dinner clubs, lounges and the theatre, the working class bar remained traditionally male terrain.²⁹ The presence, and potential and imagined dangers, of the type of male patrons who occupied the front room, the heavy consumption of alcohol in a public setting, and the constant traffic of prostitutes and their johns was utterly shocking to the sensibilities of most Toronto women, regardless of class. And by all accounts, The Continental was exceptionally low grade. The regular crowd nicknamed it 'the pit' and refused to use the washrooms because they were so poorly maintained.

If the physical condition of the Hotel itself and the 'quality' of the people inside disturbed, shocked or intimidated most, witnessing the appearance and behaviour of the women was overwhelming to all. That every narrator has a stunningly vivid memory of their first visit to a gay bar

(which during this period was most likely to be The Continental) points to how dramatically different it was from 'normal life.'³⁰ The first and most obvious difference was the presence of butch women. Even those who grew up as a tomboy felt overwhelmed (and often intimidated) by the sheer number of butch women, some of whom had gone 'the full distance' to capture the style and mannerisms of working class male culture that they might easily be mistaken for the opposite sex.³¹ The other significant difference was the relaxed rules (or what probably appeared as an absence of rules) governing the expression of sexual desire. As historians of women's sexuality at the turn of the century have shown, decorum and respectability, virtues that governed relations between the sexes among the middle class, were not absent, but rather measured on an entirely different scale.³² This holds true in the Continental, where although women discussed their and each others sexual relations openly, they were governed by unwritten rules concerning how much was said, about whom and in what manner. For example, for a butch to reveal explicit details about a specific individual she may have had sex with, particularly if her comments were not especially complimentary, was considered crass and out of line.³³

Within the 'free and easy' atmosphere of the working class public house, women revelled in the sexual banter that coloured their conversations and relations with one another.

In her 1966 study of Toronto's female homosexual subculture, Jo Anne Pratt observed a "lack of restraint" among gay women in their relations with one another. During her visit to the Continental, she noted that conversation tended toward sex, a topic which was discussed "in an unconcerned and bantering manner." Those present openly talked about their "skill in the art of love-making." Sex was even the source of lesbian humour. Pratt recounts the actions of a butch who, while looking through the classified section of the newspaper in search of a job, saw an advertisement for a camp counsellor at a girls' camp. "Her eyes," Pratt noted, "lit up excitedly," eliciting laughter from her companions.³⁴

Pratt found a similar attitude toward sexual relations at the Music Room, one of the few new gay-owned clubs that did not bar the rough and tough crowd. Here Pratt witnessed a woman "place her hands on another girl's breasts."³⁵ Shortly after, she overheard "a white 'butch' and negro 'fem' ... discussing sleeping arrangements."³⁶ Although Pratt did not discuss the presence of black women in the bar, undoubtedly the obviously sexually intimate relationship between a black woman and a white woman was likely as morally startling to her as it was for other women who were unaccustomed to seeing mixed race couples.³⁷

Although the relaxed sexual environment Pratt witnessed was the norm in Toronto's lesbian bars during the 1950s and 60s, her subjects readily identified class as a significant

factor in the expression of lesbian sexuality:

Two [informants] saw "class" as playing a part in dating and maintained that among the lower class homosexuals their approach is more direct. According to one of these "butches" a middle class "butch" would approach a "fem" by sending a drink over to her table, while a lower class "butch" would introduce herself with a smart remark while passing by.³⁸ The other subject referred to the [Continental] Hotel where an individual "gambits" [put's one's hand up someone's skirt] and expects it. At this particular local one girl will ask another to come home to bed with her. There is no attempt to conceal one's motives.³⁹

As one subject suggested, the lack of sexual restraint displayed by the women in both the Continental and the Music Room was considered indicative of their "social inferiority."⁴⁰ Pratt's informants often described the patrons of the Continental as the representative of the "lowest strata" of female homosexuals. Still, for the women Pratt joined in conversation, the back room of the Continental was familiar, and that familiarity was comforting. For them, it was home.⁴¹

If butch and fem were on the top of the list of identities that organized Toronto's lesbian bar culture, 'downtowner' and 'uptowner' ran a close second, and through the back room of The Continental Hotel's public house ran an invisible line that separated them.⁴² As the names themselves suggest, the geography of the post war Canadian city was becoming increasingly stratified by economic class. With the development of the suburbs, thousands of middle class Canadians escaped the downtown core for newly developed outlying regions.⁴³ Thus the label uptowner was

similar to the American colloquialism 'Saturday night butch,' a derogatory term that referred to women who lived a 'normal life' during the work week, and donned the accoutrement of the butch only on weekends when she went to the gay bars.⁴⁴ In Toronto, though, the term 'uptowner' denoted any woman of an elevated social and economic class, and only implied their part-time gay status. Downtowners were butch and fem women who lived 'the gay life' every day of the week.

On the surface, the terms uptowner and downtowner indicated social and economic class, but it signified a wide range of differences that were merely predicated on class. To grasp the full meaning of the terms, it is important to understand the paradigms through which gay women understood themselves, and their community. The bars, for example, were not simply a place for lesbians to meet, but were the centre of 'the gay life.' To become a part of the gay life meant recognizing and accepting that you didn't fit in, it meant leaving 'normal life' behind, accepting the hardships and the stigma of your social and sexual values while at the same time demonstrating a willingness to defend yourself and others for what was not just a set of sexual practices but a way of life. 'The gay life,' then, was distinguished from 'the double life' by its participants' persistent and relentless acts of resistance against the dominant culture. Accordingly, the greater the act of resistance, or, the more

provocative and counter-normative women were, the higher they climbed on the social hierarchy among downtowners. Simply to desire other women sexually did not constitute equal status with other women in the post war gay bars.

To be a downtowner, and especially to be a downtown butch, was regarded as the ultimate act of social transgression, and was interpreted by working and street class women as both a refusal to submit to the confinements of social convention - including gender conventions - and as an expression of gay pride. In the 1965 article 'What is a Downtown Butch,' for example, the author defined her subject as possessing qualities typical of the postwar working class rebellious male youth.⁴⁵ Moreover, butches, she argued, are "useful for giving orders." They "loath housework, ...wearing female attire, slow cars and will not conform."

Davis and Kennedy attribute this brash and bold attitude of the rough and tough 1950s bar lesbians to the fact that, in contrast to upwardly mobile and middle class women, blue collar lesbians had little to lose by being identified as homosexual - as downtowners surely would have been. "The expanding economy of the 1950s allowed tough bar lesbians to risk exposure," they claim, "because they did not have to worry about keeping any one particular job. In blue collar work, if they lost one job, they could always find another."⁴⁶ At least one of their own narrators contradicts this claim, but even if this was the case in

Buffalo, it certainly was not the experience of many of Toronto's downtowners.⁴⁷ Most Toronto narrators who identified themselves as downtowners reported frequent periods of unemployment.⁴⁸ In fact, some women even gave up their pink collar jobs and others, their middle class marriages, in order to pursue the gay life full time.⁴⁹ What drove women to choose to live the gay life over the double life cannot be explained by the expanding postwar economy. That more and more women became less and less willing to hide their 'true' identity can be attributed to the strengthening of a supportive community of others who, like themselves, rejected the social and moral restraints that denied women the right to openly declare their homosexuality.

In addition to an "in-your-face" brand of personal politics, the downtown butch was, according to downtown butches themselves, a walking manifestation of gay pride.⁵⁰ More than simply an indication of one's class position, it was worn as a badge, a declaration of one's commitment to 'the gay life.' Conversely, the term uptowner implied one's lack of commitment, and suggested that when push came to shove, an uptowner was likely to put the bars, and by extension the women in them, second to their personal, social, and economic security.

Although downtowners shared many of the same life experiences, the uptowners cannot be so neatly categorized.

The term uptowner, for example, included women who went to the Continental and other lesbian bars quite regularly, such as Laura, and those who went only very occasionally, such as Denise and Norma.⁵¹ There many well have been many women who went only to the more upscale male gay bars such as Letros, and still others like Helen who did not go to the gay bars in the 1950s and 60s at all.⁵² For the purposes of this argument, however, I will contrast the opinions and views expressed by downtowners with those of women who did not participate in the gay life full time. No doubt further research into the experiences of professional and semi-professional women will reveal different shades of opinion, views, and experiences among those whom I broadly capture under the colloquial term uptowner.

The terms downtowner and uptowner, while indicative of the class interests of the women who bore those labels, were deeply coloured by the social and political ideals that the two groups held. On a very general level, many of the women might have found that they shared the same frustration with both their roles as women and their oppression as homosexuals, but the way in which they sought to overcome those obstacles was precisely the point at which they diverged from one another. Ironically, there existed some striking similarities in the ways both uptowners and downtowners attempted to minimize the negative impact their sexuality could have on their lives.

The lesbian bar was a unique environment if for no other reason than that the working and street class, not the upwardly mobile or the middle class, stood squarely at the helm. Like the private social groups that depended upon the discretion of each of its members, all women who entered the Continental Hotel's public house and other places like it were obliged to adhere to the unwritten rules that governed gay women's participation in bar culture. Regulating members' behaviour was important because, unlike privately organized social groups, no one was hand picked. Lacking the economic resources to create, and therefore control, their own social spaces, working class gay women depended upon the tolerance of bar and restaurant owners to make a space 'lesbian territory.'⁵³ Consequently, every new face that turned up in the bar posed a potential threat to the stability and security of the entire group.

As much as middle class and upwardly mobile women were anxious to maintain a standard of respectability despite their sexual transgressions, so too were working class women eager to maintain access to a community of women like themselves. Women in the bars may not have been able to prevent unwanted observers or disagreeable women from entering, but they could deploy a number of highly effective tactics that would discourage them from ever returning. These tactics included social ostracism, and verbal and/or physical intimidation and abuse. Jo Anne Pratt experienced

this first hand when she visited the Continental, which by 1966 was no longer the most popular bar among lesbians but was the most notoriously rough one in Toronto. Hoping to observe the women there, Pratt found that she was completely ignored when she went on her own. However, when accompanied by one of her informants, she was permitted to join a small group at their table.⁵⁴ When the same informant took her to another club in which she herself was not familiar with the clientele, no one interacted with either the informant or the researcher, despite Pratt's impression of the club as a highly social environment. Social ostracism effectively eliminated the weak-hearted, and made gay women less vulnerable against visitors with dubious intentions. Gaining entry into a social group was not the only way to befriend other gay women, but it was the quickest and the easiest.

There was virtually nothing inside the bar to encourage a women to make a place for herself within the very tightly controlled environment she was forced to navigate. Nothing except for the fact that there was no where else gay women unconnected to a private circuit could safely pursue sexual partners and where they could be honest and open about their sexual desire. For some women, the suspension of everyday conventions that governed the outside world was a welcome change. One of Pratt's subjects explained her attraction to the Continental Hotel over the other, more 'upscale' clubs that had opened in the mid-60s as "a desire to experience

'the seamy side of life.' "⁵⁵ For women like her, going to the Continental was more than just having the opportunity to be openly gay - it was a chance to go 'slumming' among a group of women who openly rebelled against the conventions that they themselves lived by. Others still were so attracted to 'the gay life' they happily traded in their comfortable jobs and middle class status for the social excitement and sexual freedom life on the corners offered.⁵⁶ Yet for many women, having to conform to rules and standards of a class of women they felt lesser than themselves was a bitter pill to swallow.

Denise⁵⁷ was one such woman. The daughter of Italian immigrants who owned a fruit and vegetable store in the west end of the city - of which she eventually assumed ownership - Denise depended upon the few contacts she made with downtowners in her neighbourhood to sustain her social and sexual life. Contrary to the element of risk gay historians have emphasised when discussing post war gay bars, Denise did not feel that her infrequent visits to the Continental posed any threat to her personal life, which she safeguarded with the utmost care. She had nothing to fear from the police, she claims, who made routine visits to the back room of the Continental looking for drugs, underage drinkers and illegal weapons.⁵⁸ So long as she was not guilty of any such crimes, Denise was certain that she would never be subjected to police harassment and subsequent exposure. And although

the Continental was known to attract its share of unwelcome curiosity seekers, Denise declares that they, too, were of no concern to her:

Anybody that seen me down there wasn't worth worrying about. When I went out with Natalie for an evening, I mean it was always a proper nightclub, or dinner, or dinner and dance, and whatever. So who the hell was going to go to the Continental?⁵⁹

No one among her class of people, she was certain, would ever step into the Continental Hotel.

The middle class and upwardly mobile women who did make a place for themselves among the working and street class lesbians devised strategies of coping with the dangers of being discovered that were significantly different from the downtowners. Like Denise, many felt that their class protected them from being discovered, and in a number of ways it did. Working and street class women appear to have been more directly targeted for police harassment and scrutiny, in part because they were engaged in the illegal economy. Women who had a steady income did not need to turn a trick or sell drugs to raise rent, and so long as they kept their distance from the downtowners, they felt safe from the danger of criminal prosecution and public exposure. Indeed, it was an effective strategy. Laura, the school teacher mentioned earlier, claims that the local or provincial police might come into the Continental and arrest every woman there except her. She attributes this to her refusal to become involved in the illegal activities of her downtowner friends. Likewise, Laura claimed that if she was

to see anyone in the bar that would challenge her presence there, she would simply deflect the question back, thereby ensuring that no one would expose her for exposing themselves. Still, the chance of running into problems remained, and in the event that none of her other tactics worked, Laura was prepared to provide a good account of herself. "I figured I'd just tell them I was writing a book," she explained.⁶⁰ While it is questionable whether or not her strategy would have worked, it is most certain that it would not have for her less literate working and street class companions.

Although Laura's close relationship with the downtowners demonstrates how the division of lesbians along class lines was not immutable, she was certainly an exception to the rule. Most middle class and upwardly mobile women held the downtowners in contempt. For example in Chatelaine's first ever feature article on lesbians, journalist Renate Wilson interviewed a group of gay women, one of whom made the point that

[t]he girls you're meeting here... don't go to gay bars and hangouts. We look on the butch on skid row wearing men's clothing the way you do the rest of the skid row population. They're a minority. Just because we're gay, we don't all run in a pack. There are groups of working class girls, of professional women and middle-class girls like us-and there's very little come-and-go among us.⁶¹

Yet it was many of these same women that still found themselves dependent on the working and street class community to provide them with a much needed socio-sexual

outlet. Like Martin and Lyons who, despite their avowed rejection of butch and fem lesbians, found themselves compelled toward the 'raunchy' bar scene, upwardly mobile and middle class women were trapped in a love-hate relationship they deeply resented and yet could not completely exorcise themselves from. Denise, for example, is both proud of the fact that Toronto's downtowners accepted her, and that they even protected her from potential danger. "It didn't matter if you had one dollar or one hundred dollars in your pocket," she said of the downtowners. "If you were liked you were liked, if you weren't, you weren't." Yet at the same time she refers to the same women as "flakes," "truck drivers," and "the kind of people I wouldn't care to be seen on the street with." This attitude earned women like Denise the derogatory label 'elite lezzie,' a title which carried with it all the contempt the downtowners could muster.

The Daughters Of Bilitis differed from most private lesbian networks by becoming an active political organization, but their determination to keep out "street toughs"⁶² was shared by the multitude of private gay women's social groups scattered across North America. By the mid-1960s, even Toronto's expanding lesbian bar culture became less and less tolerant of the rough and tough lesbian crowd. Sometime in the early 1960s, both gay men and women began a northbound migration to the Yonge-Church and Wellesley

district by making the Parkside Tavern a favoured bar for both groups. In 1962, Sara Dunlop and Richard Kerr took over the nearby Maison de Lys and renamed it The Music Room.⁶³ It was Toronto's first gay-owned club that set out to serve an exclusively gay clientele. Far from Toronto's Chinatown and red-light district, lesbian bar culture began to sever its connection with both Chinese-Canadians and prostitutes.⁶⁴

Clubs like The Melody Room and The Music Room - the former of which lasted until 1966 when a fire destroyed the premises and the latter of which was renamed The Penthouse in the same year - did not replace the bars. Rather they were unlicensed after hours clubs that attracted the post-last call crowd, and all but replaced the all-night Chinese restaurants that gay women had frequented with prostitutes in nearby Chinatown.

Downtowners quickly discovered they were unwelcome in many such places. Narrators report that police surveillance of such clubs was much more intense and frequent than it ever had been in places like the Continental: downtowners' willingness to settle disputes through physical force, and the unwanted police attention their illegal activities attracted made them undesirable patrons.⁶⁵ By enforcing a dress code that barred women wearing pants, as was the case at gay male bars like the St. Charles tavern, or by insisting its female customers wear women's slacks⁶⁶ and shoes, as was the policy of the lesbian co-owned Music

Room/Penthouse, the "lower strata" of lesbian society was effectively excluded from the expansion of urban gay public space.⁶⁷

That upwardly mobile and middle class gay women were becoming more and more willing to seek out the company of other lesbians is demonstrated by the success of the exclusive Regency Club. Located well outside of both the Yonge Wellesley area and Chinatown, The Regency was the brainchild of Toronto musician Robin York.⁶⁸ She and her partner owned a house on Prince Arthur, an upper-middle class neighbourhood near the University of Toronto. They converted the main floor into a club, and, according to a 1965 advertisement, offered dining, dancing, a patio and a floor show on weekends. The Regency set out to draw a more upscale crowd of professional and semi-professional women - not even Jo Anne Pratt's middle class informant would do more than offer a description.⁶⁹ Only one of the downtowners interviewed for this study recall ever having heard about it, suggesting that the owner successfully kept out the rougher working and street class crowd.

Even with the appearance of more respectable clubs, many gay women continued to have little or nothing to do with the public lesbian subculture that flourished in Toronto's downtown core. Despite the enforced exclusion of the downtowners in Toronto's lesbian community, lesbian desire and sociability at clubs like the Music Room

continued to reflect the same cultural values found in the Ladies Room at the Continental. Some women may have found the Music Room more palatable than the Continental, but the rules governing the behaviour of the women who went there continued to be deemed offensive by more respectable women. Still, as uncomfortable as it may have been, many continued to seek out friends and lovers in Toronto's bars and clubs, even as they criticised them for being low class.

Like the private lesbian networks of the 1950s and 60s, lesbian bars and clubs evolved out of the needs, resources and value systems of the women who created them. The cultural dynamics were organized around same sex desire, but through the logic and language of the working and street class women that sustained it. No one was prevented from participating, but they were however obligated to play by the rules established long before their arrival.

Because being exposed as a homosexual had profound consequences in the 1950s and 1960s, historians of lesbians and gays in this period have paid great attention to the very real fears and anxieties connected to one's sexual identity and relations. It is not my intention to undermine the significance of the dangers associated with homosexuality, but rather to suggest that postwar lesbian bar culture was complicated by class conflict in ways that transcended the dangers imposed upon gay women by mainstream society. For some women, their social and economic class

placed a distance between themselves and the bar community that sexual sameness could not, and did not, bridge. This network of discontent provided some raw material for the construction of the 'Lesbian' in the 1970s, the subject of the final section of this chapter.

The concept of lesbian identity shared by the Daughters of Bilitis and similarly organized groups was easily integrated into the new feminism of the 1970s. This is perhaps best demonstrated by DOB founders Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in their 1972 publication Lesbian Women. In this book, the authors expand on the earlier work of their organisation - to cultivate an alternative social scene that will meet the needs and affirm the values of middle class and upwardly mobile lesbians and to improve the lesbian image - by integrating their earlier critiques of butch fem culture with feminist theory.

In developing the image of the new Lesbian, Martin and Lyons devoted considerable energy to the issue of butch and fem lesbianism. They argued that some lesbians have become "trapped in [a] butch-fem pattern [of role-playing]." Butch women were described as "a sad caricature of a male, trying to dress and act in the manner she deems 'masculine,' and generally aping some of men's worst characteristics."⁷⁰ Later Martin and Lyon observed that "the minority of Lesbians (sic) who still cling to the traditional male-female or husband-wife pattern in their partnerships are

more than likely old-timers, gay bar habitues, or working-class women." However, they happily added, "the old guard changeth... and as the women's movement gains strength against this pattern in heterosexual marriages, the number of Lesbians (sic) involved in butch-femme roles diminishes."⁷¹ "Most," they argued, "come in time, as we did, to the realisation that they are both women and that's why they are together."⁷²

The lesbian-feminist ideal based upon the notion of 'shared womanhood' was a rejection of masculinity and patriarchy, two qualities which Martin and Lyons argued were inherent in the traditional male chauvinist butch role. Rather than challenge sexologists erroneous interpretation of the butch as a woman who wants to be a man, most feminists came to share that view. The absorption of the anti-butch and fem sentiment espoused by many middle class and upwardly mobile women into the anti-patriarchy rhetoric of early modern feminism ultimately legitimized and institutionalized the rejection of working class lesbian values and culture within feminist politics and ideology. What separated the Daughters of Bilitis from other upwardly mobile gay women who actively avoided and privately condemned butch and fem bar culture was their campaign to educate the butch and the fem out of the lesbian. It was a project that fit in neatly with the consciousness-raising approach feminists adopted to facilitate personal and

political revolution.⁷³

By the 1970s, DOB was joined by the growing ranks of feminist and homosexual organizations across North America that advocated new ways of being gay. In Toronto, a small group of lesbians joined up with the Canadian Homophile Association of Toronto (CHAT). One of those women, Tricia, who remembered having been so overwhelmed by the Continental crowd that she did not venture into another lesbian bar again for two years, was relieved to see the changes that were coming about. Being involved with CHAT, she recalled, she felt much more at ease. Shortly after joining, Tricia decided to reach out to the Continental crowd in an effort to encourage them to consider becoming involved in the gay rights movement. She vividly recounted the occasion:

L.J. and I decided one day we'd hit the Continental, to try to encourage people to come to CHAT. I felt like the Salvation Army walking into the place, that's what I felt like! L.J. and I looked at each other and I said, 'Now come on, what are you going to say? They're doing five-dollar blow jobs out the back door and what are you going to talk about, L.J.?' She said, 'Well, you're the talker; you do it.' I said, 'What am I going to say? I don't want to be knifed; I don't want to be passing some judgement. And that's all we can look like right now.'...[I]t was primarily a working class community.⁷⁴

Tricia's experience inside the Continental highlights the cultural and class divide that stood between most lesbian-feminists and bar lesbians. Ironically, although Martin and Lyons and other lesbian-feminists sought to de-emphasize lesbian sexuality in favour of a more comprehensive image of the lesbian, their critique of butch fem culture focused

almost exclusively on the way in which their sexuality was expressed.

Class tensions were so much a part of the politics of Toronto's postwar lesbian bar community that working and street class gay women and middle class and upwardly mobile women even developed 'strategies of resistance' against each other. They rarely socialized together and were cautious about who they welcomed into their circle of friends. They used the terms downtowner and uptowner to distinguish themselves from one another. Many women, such as Denise and Jo Anne Pratt's lesbian tour guide, kept a critical distance from the downtowners, and, as was the case with Renate Wilson's informant, made it clear that 'they' were not like 'them.' Likewise, downtowners held such women in contempt, and labelled them 'elite lezzies.'

Divergent class sensibilities was one of the fault lines upon which the modern feminist movement would - wittingly or unwittingly - reject butch fem sexuality and construct its image of the new 'Lesbian.' The political and social emasculation of butch fem culture cannot be accounted for by the sudden emergence of a mass movement alone, no matter how effectively mobilized. The anti-butch fem rhetoric captured in Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon's Lesbian Woman was borne out of the belly of at least two decades of discord among gay women. The common bond of homosexuality proved to be not much of a bond at all when filtered through

the values system of two distinctly different social classes.

Notes

1. Interview with Tricia (LMH), September 21, 1986.
2. Interview with Denise, April 23, 1993.
3. John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983): p. 231.
4. *ibid.*, p. 232.
5. See also Alan Berube, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) p. 271; and Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) p. 194-5.
6. John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities, p. 236.
7. Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): p. 197, 200.
8. Interview with Helen (LMH), n.d. 198?
9. Faderman Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p. 197.
10. Helen's use of the word 'passing' is interesting because she could either mean 'passing' as a man, which was how it was used prior to the women's movement, or she could mean 'passing' as heterosexual, which is the more common usage of that term today.
11. Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, p. 11.

12. See Christine Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860 (New York: Knopf, 1986); and Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-Of-the-Century New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).
13. See "The Fem Question" in Carole S. Vance, ed., Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality (Pandora: London, 1992): p. 232; and Joan Nestle's A Restricted Country (Firebrand Books, New York, 1987): p. 100.
14. See Gary Kinsman, The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987); Allan Berube, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two (New York: Free Press, 1991); and John D'Emilio, "Gay Politics and Community in San Francisco" in Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past, Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr., eds. (New York: New American Library, 1990): 456-473.
15. John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities, pp. 2-5.
16. See Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p. 160; and Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, pp. 138-145.
17. D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities, p. 110.
18. See Fadderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p. 149.
19. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, Lesbian Woman (1972; New York: Bantam Books, 1983): p. 66.
20. *ibid.*, p. 66.
21. For an examination of turn-of-the-century moral reform literature, see Mariana Valverde's The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English-Canada, 1885-1925 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991); also Judith Walkowitz's City of Dreadful Delight (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
22. It would be difficult to overlook the symbolic meaning of Toni's refusal to wear lipstick. It can be interpreted a number of ways: first, as a form of resistance on Toni's part against her complete 'co-optation' by the middle class, and as a declaration and symbol of her 'true' status as an outsider. That her mother refused to wear lipstick implies that her 'authentic' self is working class. By not pressing her where they did before, the narrators implicitly preserve the class division between themselves and their subject.

23. D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities, p. 109, 125.

24. Martin and Lyon, Lesbian Woman, 213.

25. *ibid.*, 64.

26. More research needs to be done in the area of informal private social groups that met outside of the bars, usually in residential homes and sometimes in public places like Hanlan's Point, Ward Island, a popular spot for Torontonians, and especially gays and lesbians, to visit during the warm summer months. Evidence thus far concerning these informal social circles is drawn from interviews with Norma (March 11, 1992); Helen, ([LMH] nd. 198?); Denise (April 23, 1993); and Bev Wilson, interviewed by John Grube (n.d. 198?). See also Jo Anne Pratt, 'A Study of Female Homosexual Subculture,' unpublished thesis, School of Social Work, University of Toronto, 1966. On gay picnics at Hanlan's Point, see Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman's documentary film Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives (Toronto: National Film Board, 1992).

27. *ibid.*

28. The evidence from which I have culled information in reference to Toronto is derived primarily - although not exclusively - from working class and upwardly mobile women's testimonies.

29. It is interesting to note that, according to Carol Ritchie-MacIntosh, the more elite Toronto commercial spaces such as the King Edward Hotel continued to bar unescorted women and women in slacks into at least the 1950s. Fernie and Weissman, Forbidden Love.

30. See chapter three.

31. Interview with Lynn, May March 29, 1993; interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992; interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993. Both Lynn and Ivy recall having difficulty believing that the butch women they first met were not men. See chapter three.

32. See Christine Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860 (New York: Knopf, 1986); Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-Of-the-Century New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, ' "Oh Lord, pour a cordial in her wounded heart": The Drinking Woman in Victorian and Edwardian Canada' in Drink in Canada: Historical Essays, Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, ed., (Montreal: McGill-Queen's

University Press, 1993), 70-91; and Carolyn Strange, 'From Modern Babylon to a City Upon a Hill: The Toronto Social Survey Commission of 1915 and the Search for Sexual Order in the City' in Patterns of the Past: Interpreting Ontario's History, ed., Roger Hall (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988), 255-77.

33. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993; interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993.

34. Jo Anne Pratt, 'A Study of the Female Homosexual Subculture.' Unpublished thesis. University of Toronto, Masters of Social Work, 1964; p. 116.

35. *ibid.*, p. 81.

36. *ibid.*, p. 81.

37. Upon her first visit to the Continental, Ivy recalls feeling completely shocked at seeing Asian women and black women mingling with Anglo-Canadians. Equally shocking was butch women. It did not take long for her to overcome both. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.

38. Significantly, the "butch" she is referring to here is her only middle class informant. Of the 14 women she interviewed for her study, thirteen were contacted through the Mercer Reformatory for Women. Of these, many could be considered upwardly mobile, and not necessarily working or street class. The fourteenth was a copywriter.

39. Pratt, 53.

40. *ibid.*, p. 85.

41. Narrators who were Continental regulars frequently described the Hotel in this way. Interview with Jan (LMH), October 119, 1985; interview with Arlene (LMH), May 6, 1987; interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992; interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.

42. For more on the importance of butch and fem identities in the organisation of post war gay women's bar culture, see Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, esp. ch. 5.

43. See Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-1960" in Canadian Historical Review, (4)1991: 471-504.

44. See Leslie Fienberg's Stone Butch Blues (New York: Firebrand Books, 1993). In this semi-autobiographical novel, Fienberg repeatedly refers to her ex-lover's girlfriend as a Saturday night butch, a derogatory term that implied that the girlfriend is not an authentic butch lesbian.
45. "What is a Downtown Butch?" in Two 6 (1965): p. 2.
46. Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold, p. 145.
47. *ibid.*, p. 321.
48. Interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993; interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992; interview with Jan (LMH), October 19, 1985.
49. Interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993; interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992; interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993.
50. In answer to sociologist Jo Anne Pratt's queries, one butch informant described dressing in men's clothing as 'an indication of one's pride in a homosexual way of life. Pratt, 48. See also Davis and Kennedy, Boots of Leather, 184.
51. Interview with Laura (LMH) September 26, 1985; interview with Denise, April 23, 1993; interview with Norma, March 11, 1992.
52. Interview with Helen (LMH) nd. 198?
53. Gay women were so successful at making the Ladies beverage room in the Continental Hotel their own that retired police chief Jack Webster referred to it as 'lesbian territory.' In fact, the yellow press regularly ran stories in the 1950s and 1960s about Toronto's 'Lesbian colony' in which the Continental Hotel was identified as their main haunting ground. See for example, Hush Free Press, "Mixed Up Sex Lives -This Story Will Shock You" 8 July, 1956, p. 8; "Freak Wedding Bridegroom is a Girl!" 23 November, 1957, p. 4-5; and "Lesbians Overflow Chinatown," November 28, 1959, p. 12.
54. Jo Anne Pratt, "Female Homosexual Subculture." Of Pratt's 16 informants, one went so far as to deny that 'homosexual clubs' existed. Pratt noted: "In view of this girl's extended contact with the criminal and homosexual elements, it is believed that she was deliberately withholding knowledge of the Clubs." p. 84.
55. Pratt, p. 119.

56. Two of the subjects interviewed as part of this project left pink collar jobs in order to become 'full time butches.' See interview with Jerry, November 23, 1992; and interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993.
57. Interview with Denise, April 23, 1993.
58. The police did arbitrarily harass gay women, brutally in some instances. But the evidence provided by informants suggests that they tended to target downtowners, and that surveillance of the gay women's community increased as drugs became more prevalent. As part of the downtown street culture, downtowners were very involved in the introduction of heroin use and distribution in Toronto in the late 1950s, and consequently were subject to the harsh policing of the drug trade.
59. Interview with Denise, April 23, 1993.
60. Interview with Laura (LMH) September 26, 1985.
61. Renate Wilson, "What Turns Women to Lesbianism?" Chatelaine (October 1966): p. 131.
62. See Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, p. 191.
63. Lesbian and Gay Heritage of Toronto, Canadian Gay Archives Publication No. 5: 1982.
64. According to Ivy, the northward migration of the gay bar community made it difficult for prostitutes to continue to socialize in a gay bar setting. Interview with Ivy, April 8, 1993. But the move to the Yonge/Wellesley area did not immediately or completely sever this connection. A year after opening The Music Room in 1962, Dunlop and Kerr opened the Melody Room on Church Street. When Jo Anne Pratt visited there in 1965 or 1966, she noted the presence of prostitutes, identified by her informants. Pratt, "A Study of the Female Homosexual Subculture," pp. 85-6, 90, 96.
65. See Pratt, p. 107; also Interview with Mary Axton, Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman, nd. 198?.
66. Women's slacks were, by the 1960s, socially acceptable as casual wear. They differed from men's pants, which were worn by devout butch lesbians, in that they were fastened on the hip, not at the front. Men's shoes were also the preferred footwear for butch women.
67. In Lynn Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman's interview with Mary Axton, Axton reported that in addition to imposing a dress code, Penthouse owner Sara Dunlop kept a baseball bat at the

front desk to "keep her Continental friends out." n.d. 198?

68. *ibid.*, Mary Axton.

69. Pratt, "The Female Homosexual Subculture," pp. 111-113.

70. Martin and Lyon, Lesbian Woman, pp. 3, 5, 65.

71. *ibid.*, pp. 68, 69.

72. *ibid.*, 3. Emphasis added.

73. Consciousness-raising groups were small, intimate discussion groups that met over a period of time to discuss a variety of issues pertinent to women. According to the authors of Feminists Organizing for Change, "The CR group emerged very quickly as a powerful tool for grass-roots organizing. by focusing on the reality of each woman's life, it was able to reach and, ultimately, activate women in a way that more abstract calls to organize around an issue would not have done. These CR groups encouraged women to think about acting politically." Adamson et al., Feminists Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988): p. 44-45.

74. Interview with Tricia (LMH), September 21, 1986.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

Lynn: Some of the stuff when I reflect on it I think, how did I ever survive? Yet, I have to say in some ways, I miss that excitement. Life is kind of boring now.¹

Heterosexuality was not just a norm in the post-war years. It was vigorously promoted in the school system, in the popular media and in the familial home, and it was zealously enforced by a plethora of state regulatory agencies including the police, the judicial system, medical and psychiatric professionals, and the Children's Aid Society. Of the fifteen women included in this study, four made a concerted effort to have a normal heterosexual relationship in the hope that they would, as Jan's mother said, outgrow their same-sex desire.² Despite the fact that The Continental women were the most 'out' lesbians, the most committed to their sexual autonomy and the public expression of not only taboo, but illegal desires, the fact that four out of the fifteen considered marriage is a good indication of the pressure to conform to heterosexual social standards, if only to escape the isolation and stigma attached to homosexuality.

It is difficult to imagine how many women chose to deny or simply felt unable to express their same-sex desire. But in light of the ubiquitous enforcement of heterosexuality, it seems safe to assume that the Continental women

represented only a minority of Toronto's gay women. Being 'out' at any time, be it day or night, weekend or weekday, was an act that demanded courage, conviction and "smarts."³ It was an enormous risk with potentially devastating consequences. And it required a deep commitment to a kind of sexual autonomy that few women could even conceive.

To be an out lesbian in Toronto in the 1950s and 60s meant living in opposition to every legitimized institution in North America. In the hyper-gendered postwar years, the butch lesbian, by appropriating traditionally male-defined codes of dress and manner, announced her sexual identity and her willingness to fight for and protect her sexual autonomy. Likewise, fems turned up their noses at the restrictions imposed upon women's socio-sexual freedom and openly pursued sexual relationships with other women for their own pleasure. "It's like a thistle," said Laura, "if you grab a thistle hard it caves in. Touch it gently, it half kills you. You have to grab life... if you are doing something that is against the norm, you gotta do it boldly."⁴

As early as 1948, the Director of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Dr. C.M. Hincks, warned the Canadian public that sexual perversion is one of the most difficult of all mental diseases to treat successfully.⁵ Gays and lesbians in the 1950s baffled psychiatrists by refusing 'treatment,' claiming to be content with their

lives. The presence of an out community of gay women like that found in The Continental played a vital role in enabling women to assert the legitimacy of their sexual choice, and offered the necessary support to break the isolation and diminish the stigma associated with homosexuality. Postwar street and working class lesbian bar culture gave women something they would be hard pressed to find elsewhere: inside the Continental Hotel, gay women gained a sense of self-respect and confidence necessary to resist those who defined them as freaks, deviants and abnormal. Surrounded by other women, who, like themselves, were ostracized from the rest of the population - and sometimes from their own families and children - because of their sexual identity, gay women constructed a life and a culture for themselves which both openly celebrated and fiercely protected the expression and pursuit of that desire.

As I hope to have shown, however, the experiences of Toronto's postwar working and street class lesbian bar culture sheds light on more than just a small and distinct subculture of female homosexuals. Martha Vicinus' recent assertion that 'the lesbian is never absent from any definition of woman, whatever her avowed sexual preference'; that 'lesbian or lesbian-like conduct can be both a part of, and apart from, normative heterosexual marriage and childbearing' is supported by the findings presented here.⁶

By examining the experiences of women who stepped outside of the sex and gender norms prescribed by mainstream society, it becomes startlingly evident how female and lesbian sexuality and behaviour was regulated, controlled, curtailed, monitored and punished by a myriad of localized and systemic forces that functioned covertly and overtly.

In the postwar era, butch was a unique gender identity that challenged what it was to be a woman. By making lesbianism visible, it provided gay women with a sexual language and erotic symbology that facilitated the growth and development of a distinct community of women who opted out of mainstream society, legitimizing and validating their sexual choices. It also had a profound impact on the future of feminist organizing. In the 1950s and 1960s, sexologists successfully made the butch a symbol of the malaise of the postwar gender crisis, and entrenched the links between women's desire for emancipation and man-hating lesbianism. Feminism as a movement and political ideology has yet to recover from the stinging criticisms of postwar sexology. The linking of the symbols of masculinity - from the simple wearing of trousers to the desire for sexual self-determination to the dream of equality in the labour force - with sexual abnormality and perversion might also help to explain why so many women embraced the feminine ideal, and why to the present day some women remain reluctant to identify themselves as feminists.

As was outlined in chapter one, the underlying political values that drive historians of specialized fields of inquiry such as gay and lesbian history, combined with the residual tensions surrounding the meaning and value of butch fem bar culture have deeply influenced the paradigms through which postwar lesbian history has been articulated. In her study of working class women in turn of the century New York, Kathy Peiss argued:

...it is necessary to understand how women pushed at the boundaries of constrained lives and shaped cultural forms for their own purposes. In essence, understanding working women's culture calls for a doubled vision, to see that women's embrace of style, fashion, romance and mixed-sex fun could be a source of autonomy and pleasure as well as a cause of their continuing oppression.

Peiss's analytical model, if applied here, allows us to circumvent the contentious debate that has plagued the last decade of postwar working class lesbian historical scholarship. But if we wish to harness the past to inform our present, then assessing our subject(s) through a paradigm of political use-value appears a justifiable and even necessary project. However, to do so demands a much more comprehensive and nuanced notion of how we define that which constitutes 'political.' If we are to apply the model Ruth Peirson used to frame her study of women during the Second World War - did gay women achieve liberation? - we must answer no. If we are to measure the impact of urban working and street class lesbian subcultures by the number of laws that were changed, reforms that were implemented,

and petitions signed, then we must conclude that it had no lasting impact at all.

But clearly postwar lesbian bar culture did have a dramatic impact on both mainstream Canadian culture and gay women's lives, including those who were troubled by its existence. Butch women inadvertently helped to give shape to the postwar feminine ideal and provided medical experts with ammunition to launch an effective ideological war against women's social and economic emancipation. Moreover, Toronto's working class lesbian subculture highlights how women could and did refuse to co-operate with the social and economic structures that actively discouraged them from making the sexual choices they did. Instead, they used the few resources they had, including their bodies and their legal right to socialize in public houses and beverage rooms to create a relatively secure and stable environment in which they could openly congregate with one another.

Finally, the experiences of Toronto's downtowners demonstrates how categories of class, gender, and ethnicity have molded lesbian communities and identities. The moral values shared by downtowners were informed by the logic of the street, and were in direct conflict with middle class and upwardly mobile women's need for invisibility and discretion. Creating alliances with gay men was a necessary survival strategy for women who lived the double life, but passing as heterosexual was neither required nor valued by

most working and street class women. Without a movement that strove to fight against the oppression of male and female homosexuals, the two cultures whose primary purpose was to create homosocial environments permissive toward gay sexuality had little to offer each other.

As Mary said at the beginning of chapter three, being gay is much more than who one chooses to have sex with. All of the women who claimed a space for themselves on the corners experienced their gayness through the filters of class, ethnicity and gender. Lesbian and gay history must necessarily attend to those differences, while at the same time redraw the relationships such communities and people had with the world around them.

Notes

1. Interview with Lynn, March 29, 1993.
2. Interview with Jan (LMH), October 19, 1985.
3. Interview with Norma, March 11, 1992.
4. Interview with Laura (LMH), September 26, 1995.
5. J.D. Ketchum, "Prude is Father to the Pervert," p. 42.
6. Martha Vicinus, "Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?" in Radical History Review 60 (1994): p. 58.

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 Jerry, November 23, 1992.
 Ivy, April 8, 1993.
 Lynn, March 29, 1993.
 Eve, March 6, 1993.
 Denise, April 23, 1993.
 Jack Webster, January 13, 1994.

*The women interviewed for this thesis were contacted either through Toronto's now defunct lesbian newspaper, *Quota*, or through personal contacts. Jack Webster was contacted through the Metropolitan Toronto Police Archives where he supervises the Police archives.

Interviews courtesy of the Lesbians Making History Archives

Arlene, May 6, 1987.
 Tricia, September 21, 1986.
 Beth, January 11, 1987.
 Jan, October 19, 1985.
 Mary, October 19, 1987.
 Laura, September 26, 1985.
 Sandy, January 11, 1987.
 Helen, nd. 198?

Bev Wilson, 1985. Interviewed by John Grube for Project Foolscap.

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