EVERYDAY ATHENAS:
STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL AND IDENTITY FOR EVER-SINGLE WOMEN IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1880-1930

BY

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Abstract

This study of single women in the British Columbia context reveals the importance of marital status as a distinct category of analysis for women’s lives.

Marital status fractures the gender of women into identities that are deeply structured by relations of power and privilege, creating some fundamental separations between the married woman and the never-married (‘ever-single’) woman. By taking marital status into account, we can learn more about the historical intersections between women, gender, and society. By setting the heterosexual dyad aside, we can delve more fully into the varied life-sustaining relationships that women forged, especially with other women. We can more thoroughly reconstruct the social contexts of feminist ideas, and the roots of a female citizenship based on a direct rather than deflected relationship to the nation. We can also trace the nascence of an ‘individual’ female subjectivity based in self-reverence rather than self-effacement. And we can centre the conjugal family, especially the heterosexual dyad, as the essential unit of the Canadian past and the only legitimate site for women’s sexuality.

The ‘borderlands’ of British Columbia before the Second World War are an excellent place to examine the lives and identities of ever-single women, given the astonishing number of (ever-)single women present in unique demographic and economic conditions that would seem to militate against singleness. This project looks at four themes: survival, status, relationships, and identity. Material conditions of income and household composition offer us some of the strategies of survival single women employed. Looking at the discursive boundaries of certain social groups emphasizes the centrality of single women to (all levels of) society and the leadership that single women bring to both crafting and policing the borders of status groups. The patterns of relationships that ever-single women built and their voices on being single offer important models for thinking through women’s affective lives that do not privilege the heterosexual dyad. And the emplacement of the ever-single woman as ‘outside heterosexuality’ suggests some ways though the bind of the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy in thinking about women’s lives and especially the hybrid nature of their autobiographical voices.
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For my Papa and John

- you taught me to work and to love.
  My arms are emptier now.

◆

And for Brett

- whose everyday ideal of equal partnership has made this journey possible.
  I choose you still.
One: Contexts of singleness

It is with spinsterhood as with greatness; some are born old maids, some achieve old maidenhood and some have single blessedness thrust upon them. […] Born old maids […] are destined to that state from the cradle, and were as firmly settled in it at thirteen as at thirty or forty.

Achieving spinsterhood can be accomplished in various ways. The flirt and coquette attain to it in surprise […]. They were fascinating instead of attractive, and overdid it. The bad tempered often achieve it, unless they marry upon short acquaintance […]. Thus originates the peevish and sour old maid, who forms a very small proportion of the whole class, in spite of the paragraphers and cartoonists.

The third class are most to be pitied, and yet they do not want pity, merely sympathetic comprehension and friendliness. The single state has been thrust upon them. […] they were located in tiny villages or in the wilds where there were no marriageable men. […] Then there are girls whose sense of duty and responsibility make them give up the claims of love. To wait upon enfeebled parents, to care for motherless brothers and sisters, or to be mother to a brother’s orphaned flock, many a girl has given up her lover.¹

— Editorial in the “Home Journal” section in The Farmer’s Advocate, Dec. 4, 1910

Despite the great and varied public dialogue on the spinster throughout the Western world in the vital decades of social and economic change between the 1880s and 1930s, it is only recently that the study of “single” women has emerged as a growing sub-field of women’s history. Women’s history and gender history have developed into nuanced and complex fields, taking into account the multiple dimensions of women’s lives, including race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class. However, most studies still concentrate, consciously or not, on married women. Although at all times in Western history, the majority of women were married to men, this condition was by no means absolute, and the proportion of women without domestic ties to men – legally and socially defined as never married, separated, divorced, widowed, or abandoned – could be significant. The woman who did not marry (or found herself without a husband at some time over her life-cycle) had a very different

experience of work, economic survival, and social interaction than her married counterpart. Between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries in particular, living arrangements, family relations, and the pursuit of lifelong waged labour marked her life as significantly different from the married woman’s. Thus marital status was an essential division between women, one that cut across class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

This study highlights some key aspects of singleness and single women’s lives. Not a male, yet not taking a normative female role (marriage and motherhood), what roles, status, and identities could the single woman access? If her social class and especially her occupation became more important to her identity than her (absent) marital ties, it is possible that the adult, autonomous, privileged single woman took on (and unsettled) the identifying aspects of social citizenship mostly enjoyed by White, middle-class men: employment, economic independence, and self-authorized life choices. Such a potential subjectivity lent by economics and class, however, was highly contingent on age, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, and how the combination of these social forces affected the life chances of women who chose or were forced to remain single is critical to study.

As women in Canada, the UK, and the US moved from legal infants to voting citizens through the decades between 1880 and 1930, the transition and struggle in these years from women’s constrictive identification with nature and motherhood to autonomous personhood can be seen in the lives of women who did not take up marriage but instead remained outside traditional roles. Yet this period also saw a strengthening of negative stereotypes around the unmarried woman, from the unwanted spinster to the diseased prostitute to the dangerous lesbian. The idea that a woman who never married was a victim of misfortune, a deviant, or had ‘something wrong with her,’ is one we have not shed even today – and this has had an effect on the status of the single woman as a fit subject for historical study.

This project reveals the rich field of data, experiences, and identities that can be found in the study of single women. Although I concentrate on one particular and unique region and time period in Canada – British Columbia’s newcomer settlement frontier before 1930 – the scholarship of single women is a vital and underdeveloped element of historical studies of all geographical areas and eras. Single women were central players in the history of immigration, education, art, labour, politics, and culture in Canada and the West as a whole, especially in the transformative years between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth
centuries. The term ‘single woman’ also encompasses a fairly broad range of female identities from young girl to working adult to elderly woman. In fact, the single woman was a ubiquitous historical figure, whose salience across geographical and temporal lines, and across classes and ethnicities, ages and sexualities, makes it all the more surprising that she has been, on the whole, relegated to a side note in historical scholarship.

In this project, I focus on the ‘ever-single’ woman – a mature female adult who never married. In this study, I am framing the term ‘single’ in its widest sense, including the partnered but not legally married lesbian, as well as the heterosexual (or asexual), never-partnered, never-married woman - in short, the legally never-married woman who was not in a domestic conjugal relationship with a male. To remove all women who might have had conjugal relation with women creates a division between the ‘evidential’ lesbian (requiring evidence of sexual acts) and the never-partnered woman (by default presumed heterosexual) that I seek to avoid in this study, as all are, in my analysis, ‘outside heterosexuality.’

In focusing on ever-single women, I have discovered that they can offer important perspectives to the study of women and history; and while the resources for research on this significant group can pose difficulties, they are abundant. In addition, a significant part of this study is the personal and particular: the identities and subjectivities exhibited by ever-single women in their own autobiographical materials, which offer us a unique window into mainstream social ideals and practices – a matrix of adoption and resistance of inestimable value for scholars. Thus my focus is the ever-single ‘spinster,’ but of necessity I will also examine where appropriate the dynamic and varied category that is the larger context of single women – that wider group of women who were single at a given time but might cycle out (and even back into) singleness throughout their lives.

The image of the single woman

As the epigraph above demonstrates, a number of reasons, both practical and personal, circulated in popular culture to explain why some women remained ever-single in industrial societies such as Canada through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet historically, women who did not marry have experienced a detrimental public image. At times, they could be praised as viragos, even women warriors, eschewing (or denied) the traditional role of wife in the home to compete and serve in the public arena of work and
politics. But to most women and men, the single woman was a pathetic or even suspect figure, embodying a ‘failure’ to make a match with a man, or even a wilful deviance from prescribed female roles of domesticity, service, and governance by males. Single women were also bombarded by social prescription that assumed every real woman was to be a mother, and a woman who would not or could not take up this role was selfish, a failure, or a deviant.

Central was the ideal of the nature of Woman as helpmeet and mother, exemplified in the ‘Cult of True Womanhood,’ a widespread prescriptive ideology shared by the Canadian, British, and American bourgeoisie that came into full flower by the 1860s in America and lingered in various guises through to the twentieth century. This important nineteenth-century ideal emphasized the virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, embodied in the only ‘true’ role of Woman, motherhood. Middle class, White, and Protestant, the True Woman’s ordained sphere was the kitchen and nursery. Sexually passive, her function was reproductive, and any energies spent on other functions (such as education) depleted her store for reproduction and threatened her future children’s health – and thus the health of the nation. Yet as the avatar of all moral values, her moral character was of utmost importance and she was to teach and embody for her family its highest good. Ultimately, she “sought influence, not power.” The fear of ‘race suicide’ (the decline of the numerical hegemony of white, economically prosperous, Anglo-Saxon peoples) reinforced the nation’s need of the True Woman and was a topic of much debate in early twentieth-century Canada. In a 1908 speech, Mrs. (Dr.) Wickett of the WCTU warned that Anglo-Canadians were threatened by the more fecund French-Canadians, “all because we women, for various reasons, shrink from the duty and joys of motherhood.”

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3 Barbara Welter, whose work on early- to mid-nineteenth-century American prescriptive literature brought the term ‘True Woman’ into scholarly discourse, notes that “authors who addressed themselves to the subject of women in the mid-nineteenth century used this phrase as frequently as writers on religion mentioned God.” Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” American Quarterly 18/2 (Summer 1966), 151.


5 Mariana Valverde, “‘When the Mother of the Race is Free’: Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism” in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds. Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women’s History
After the turn of the century, debates on the nature of Woman centred less on whether she should be educated or take on public roles, and more on what place those now-acceptable, middle-class female pursuits had in ‘real’ women’s lives, as wives and mothers. One nation-wide debate that would seem to have offered an opening for ever-single women was suffrage. The discourse over the right to vote contested women’s secondary place in the nation, including the right and ability of women for self-determination, for individuality, and for citizenship. In the US and Britain, a strong core of ‘radical’ equal-rights feminists maintained a presence for the independent woman within suffrage debates. However, in Canada the majority of suffragists were in some form adherents of maternal feminism, which in essence promoted the citizenship of women as flowing naturally from their ordained roles as wives and mothers. Some conceptual room was made for the single woman in an extension of the maternal model that allowed for a ‘public motherhood’ in social services such as nursing, teaching, and social work. Although suffrage was a key arena for single women to assert their right to independence and full political citizenship, the power of the maternalist discourse often succeeded in subsuming their aims under this essentialist umbrella. This mainstream ambivalence to single women continued into the post-suffrage era, when gains in access to education and middle-class employment for women had expanded the choices for privileged young White women, at least theoretically. However, marriage remained the ultimate goal for all ‘real’ women, although a stint in higher education, a job, or even a short professional career could be acknowledged as respectable

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(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 17. At the same time, the eugenics movement took on momentum, calling for the ‘unfit’ to be restricted in their reproduction (often through institutionalization or sterilization) for similar reasons. Perhaps not surprisingly, aboriginals, people of colour or non-Western European origin, the poor, and people with disabilities were prime targets and appear among the sterilized far out of proportion to their numbers in the population. See Angus McLaren, Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990).

6 Single women – including legally single women who had female partners – were prominent in the suffrage movements in the UK and US: see Faderman’s first section ‘How American Women Got Enfranchised’ in To Believe in Women: What Lesbians have Done for America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) and Jeffreys, Spinster and Her Enemies.

7 See Wayne Roberts, “‘Rocking the Cradle for the World’: The New Woman and Maternal Feminism, Toronto 1877-1914” and Deborah Gorham, “Flora McDonald Denison: Canadian Feminist” in Linda Kealey, ed. A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s (Toronto: Canadian Women’s Educational Press, 1979), 15-45. Although the maternalist stance and role of married women was dominant, key figures like Alice Chown in Ontario and Francis Marion Beynon in Manitoba advocated for suffrage based on equal rights philosophies. See Alice Chown’s autobiography, The Stairway, ed. and with an introduction by Diana Chown (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1988).
for many women, as long as it was understood to be a prelude to their ‘real’ careers as wives and mothers.

Mary Vipond finds that in the mass-circulation magazines of the 1920s, it was generally assumed that women would work for a few years before marriage. But a clear-cut choice, of marriage or a career, was pointed out for women, and “the magazines left no doubt that in their view every true woman chose marriage if she could.”8 Young women were assured that “success in a job would stand them in good stead when they became wives and mothers.” As a caveat, it would also prepare them for “the exigencies of spinsterhood or early widowhood.”9 Yet even the now-acceptable figure of the “working daughter” still threatened the home. In a 1920 speech before the middle-class Women’s Canadian Club in Victoria, Mrs. C.E. Clarke argued that overburdened mothers and neglected children are often the effects of daughters being employed outside the home. In answer to mothers who ask “why should she remain at home to do housework when she can be independent?” Clarke responds “If your daughter is to be of that 80 per cent [that marry], give her employment which will fit her for it.” Clarke argues:

Truly we can do so-called men’s work as well or even better than the men, but in doing it are we not leaving undone a work which men cannot do […] which is the greatest work of the nation? […] Say what we will, woman’s chief work is home, husband and children, and it behooves us to see that we do not become slackers.10

The maternal imperative also cut across class lines, although working-class activists were more likely to critique the economic barriers to marriage and healthy motherhood. Lillian Broadhurst, writing in the Woman Worker in 1927, remarked sympathetically on the imposed celibacy of poverty, when low wages and poor working conditions made people delay marriage, perhaps permanently. However, for the middle class she saw celibacy and childlessness as nothing less than “immoral”: “When I see a lovely woman without children,

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9 Vipond, “Image of Women,” 118.
I think of that quotation of Shakespeare’s – ‘Lady, you are the cruellitest she alive if you lead these graces to the grave and leave the world no copy.”

Yet despite the seemingly universal and self-evident nature of Woman as wife-and-mother, multiple images of the spinster traversed the pages of English-language literature from the mid-nineteenth century to the interwar period. From the extreme caricature of Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations (1861) to the figure of the invert (lesbian) Stephen Gordon seeking acceptance in Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness (1928), a wealth of images of the single woman – the majority deeply ambivalent to negative – appeared in novels, serial fiction, newspapers, polemical literature, and political cartoons in Canada, the UK, and the US. To this we can add the many serial novellas, letters, and advice columns dealing with single women that appeared in Canadian newspapers at this time – ranging in theme from anxiety over the New Woman to laments by the ‘woman alone.’ Although many of the voices heard in these fora are heavily prescriptive, some positive discourse on singleness can also be found.

In Dickens’ classic novel, Great Expectations (1861), Miss Havisham stands in many ways as the foundation of the stock figure of the spinster. Jilted on the day of her wedding, wealthy Miss Havisham’s life was literally stopped at the very hour she received the news of her betrayal; she even remains, decades later, half-dressed in her wedding gown. Her only pleasure in life is instructing her young female ward in how to use her beauty to enslave (then betray) men, and in tormenting her relatives, who yearn for her fortune when she dies. Miss Havisham is merely an extreme version of the images of the spinster that were popular through the turn of the century and into the interwar period: a woman who evokes pity or disquiet, having no dreams beyond the wedding day (that never comes); a figure of malice, officious interference, or superfluity/marginality in the community; and a symbol of the tragic end to family lines and fortunes.

The other prevalent image of the spinster was that of poverty and want. In George Gissing’s popular British novel, The Odd Women (1893), Monica Madden, thrown on her

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11 Mrs Lillian Broadhurst, “The Case For Birth Control” The Woman Worker November 1927, 13. Rpt. in Margaret Hobbs and Joan Sangster, eds. The Woman Worker, 1926-1929 (St. John’s, Nfld.: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1999), 213-14.

12 Both Sheila Jeffreys and Laura Doan offer good surveys of the image of the spinster in Britain in this period: Jeffreys, Spinster and Her Enemies; and Laura Doan, Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).
own resources by the death of her father, sees only the vulnerability of her sisters on a meagre fixed income (and the exhaustion of her own life as an ill-paid shop-girl):

She thought of her sisters. Their loneliness was for life, poor things. Already they were old; and they would grow older, sadder, perpetually struggling to supplement that dividend from the precious capital – and merely that they might keep alive. Oh! – her heart ached at the misery of such a prospect. How much better if the poor girls had never been born.13

Canadian images of the spinster run along these well-worn grooves, as editorials and serial fiction from the Toronto Globe attests. In an 1888 edition of the Globe, Marion Harland noted that doting fathers who might take umbrage at the thought of their daughters marrying and moving away from them needed to be warned of “the approach of the day when sheltering walls and arms will have fallen away from the lonely spinster, leaving her the forlornest being alive – always and everywhere excepting a confirmed old bachelor.”14

Even the most successful spinster was missing something elemental in her life. In M.E. Braddon’s “The Fatal Three” (1888), Miss Fawcett was a successful woman in every sense: a lady of wealth, impeccable manners, intellect, and taste. Yet the “chilling” grays and silvers of Miss Fawcett’s excellently appointed rooms and clothing denote an essential lack in her life, presumably the colour and warmth of marriage and family.15 In “The Deaconess and the Doctor,” Miss Beamer – an otherwise sympathetic figure who declares “there’s no sickly sentimentality about me” – is gently coerced by her younger neighbour, a younger spinster and deaconess, into being “useful” in the community by giving care to an indigent sick child. Nell, the sick child, works her way into the supposedly unemotional older woman’s heart and is brought to live with her in Miss Beamer’s wealthy but empty home. As a bonus, the medical specialist the rich spinster hires to care for Nell turns out to be an old beau of the younger deaconess, and the first steps to matrimony are taken.16 This is an oft-repeated narrative: the impoverished but genteel (and still attractive) spinster is portrayed as a figure deserving of pity, who very often in the end marries some long-lost fiancé or other suddenly-

13 George Gissing, *The Odd Women* [1893], Arlene Young, ed. (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1998), 58.
14 Marion Harland, “Choosing a Husband” *The Globe* Saturday, 7 April 1888, 12.
arrived eligible mate. Balancing that (sometimes in the same text) is the spinster as a garrulous, meddling gossip, who often threatens to bring the happy matrimonial prospects of others to ruin.

The popular images of the spinster were universal enough to allow prolific political cartoonist J.W. Bengough to adapt them for his commentaries on politics and nation in his late-nineteenth century Canadian political magazine, *Grip.*

![Figure 1: 'That Troublesome Youngster,' Grip 5 November 1881](image)

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In this cartoon, Bengough is playing on the well-known image of the spinster who thinks (rightly or wrongly) she knows more about raising a child than an indulgent mother, to demonstrate partisan wrangling over federal policy. As ‘Pharos’ gently mocks her fellow spinsters in her letters column in the *Globe* in 1891: “You know that the pragmatical spinster is quite famous as an explicator of child-nature; so much so that her genius has been crystallized into proverb. Old maids’ children are always shining examples.”²⁰ Bengough also frequently used the allegorical figure of ‘Miss Canada’ to convey his ideals of Canadian nationalism and politics to his readers, often in themes of youth: through references to the young nation’s need for protection and tutelage, or her vulnerability to the US-as-suitor or aggressor.²¹ At other times, she was depicted as the personification of electoral and/or moral authority.

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²⁰ ‘Pharos’ in “From A Woman’s Standpoint” *The Globe* Saturday, 19 August 1893, 5.
²² John Wilson Bengough, *A Caricature History of Canadian Politics: Events from the Union of 1841, as Illustrated by Cartoons from "Grip", and Various Other Sources*, vol. II (Toronto: The Grip Printing and
Through the turn of the century and into the 1920s, the ‘spinster’ continued to be a stock character of fiction, but she increasingly shared the stage with the New Woman, the Gibson Girl, the flapper, and near the end of the interwar period, the lesbian. The Gibson Girl and the New Woman were simultaneous evocations of the changes after the 1870s across Britain and North America in single women’s access to education, professions, and independence, although with differing advocates and effects. The Gibson Girl and her later counterpart, the flapper, were successive images of female self-assertion and independence, yet they were essentially images of young (and affluent) women, who would still be eligible for marriage after a foray into higher education, travel, and work. The Gibson Girl was a product of the American cartoonist Charles Dana Gibson, who created an image of the ‘modern,’ active young woman whose attractiveness lay not only in her beauty but also her wit and poise, moving easily from the social scene to the golf course. However, as Angelika Köhler points out, in the end the Gibson girl was a very ambiguous figure, able to be deployed both by conservatives seeking to rein in women’s opportunities and feminists seeking to widen them. She was a new type of girl, not a new woman, and her “dynamism and flexibility” were countered by her liminality: she will, in the end, adhere to the maternalist ideal and marry.\(^{23}\) Her later evocation, the flapper, was also a figure of limited impact: as Veronica Strong-Boag notes, “the flapper with her short hair and short skirts was an essentially confrontational figure, poised to contest the conventions of workplace and bedroom” but one whose salience and power receded with the onset of the Depression.\(^{24}\) As a working-class woman, she was

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the source of considerable anxiety and a host of legal and social policies to protect – and constrain – her from becoming the logical end of such female independence: the prostitute.25

It was the New Woman that posed the potentially greater and more lasting threat to the Cult of the True Woman and compulsory female dependence.26 In 1898 Jean Blewett, a frequent contributor to the Globe’s fiction sections, offered the sensible spinster’s critique of unworthy men and her impatience at young women’s lack of sense in loving them, having been taught that ‘romance’ was their only destiny. Miss Dorcas declares: “the new woman can’t get here any too soon. There is plenty of room for her and her innovations, bless her! I only hope [...] that she’ll have about half as much heart as the old woman, and double the quantity of common sense.”27 First seen in the fight to access higher education, then the professions, the New Woman eschewed marriage, and her middle-class White privilege allowed her to “defy proprieties, pioneer new roles, and still insist upon a rightful place within the genteel world.”28 As Olive Schreiner described the attention paid the New Woman in 1911, “On every hand she is examined, praised, blamed [...] ridiculed or deified – but nowhere can it be said, that the phenomenon of her existence is overlooked.”29

The greater – and much more dangerous – programme of the New Woman centred on her potential to forge a life without men, advocating instead female independence and attainment in the public sphere. As Carroll Smith-Rosenburg notes,

To place a woman outside of a domestic setting, to train a woman to think and feel “as a man,” to encourage her to succeed at a career, indeed to place a career before marriage, violated virtually every late-Victorian norm. It was literally to take her outside of conventional structures and social arrangements.30

A useful image of the New Woman in a Canadian setting is presented, interestingly enough, in an 1895 text-based ‘testimonial’ ad placed in the Globe for Paine’s Celery Compound, one

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26 For a collection of documents on the New Woman in the British context, see Juliet Gardiner, ed. The New Woman (London: Collins & Brown, 1993). See also Sheila Jeffreys’ discussion of the spinster as on strike from marriage and gender inequality: Jeffreys, Spinster and Her Enemies, 90-91.
of the wide range of ‘health tonics,’ often aimed at women, that purported to cure any number of ills. Declaring herself a New Woman, Miss Isabella Blake wants it to be known that she has not “adopted the fads of those light-brained women who would usurp the legitimate positions of men, and go through life half-clad in masculine attire, with the fixed idea of altering the plans of an all-wise Providence, and turning the world upside-down.” Rather, she is “healthy, vigorous, strong and active”\(^{31}\) – a positive trait presumably in opposition to those ‘false’ New Women that want independence (as well as the frail, clinging True Woman). That the ad still needs to appeal to women who might think of themselves as ‘New Women’ – but not those canting feminist types – demonstrates a very interesting ambivalence with which Canadian audiences might perceive the new images of publicly active, educated women.

To this ambivalence was added another figure of the single woman by the 1930s: the lesbian. Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) represents a watershed in the popularly available discourse on single women, replacing the pitiful and malicious (but asexual) Miss Havisham with the figure of the lesbian as the new problematic and deviant bordering figure for single women. Hall’s protagonist Stephen confronts the pains of growing up female but different: she is an ‘invert’ – a woman who has ‘male’ traits – and pursues intimate relationships with women.\(^{32}\) Although the book underwent an obscenity trial both in the UK and US, and was banned in the UK, the publicity that surrounded the trials and Hall herself gave the novel an extremely wide notoriety.\(^{33}\) The typically middle-class, educated readers of the *Canadian Forum* would have seen a fairly sympathetic review of Hall’s novel

\(^{31}\) *The Globe* Saturday, 2 November 1895, 14. Other ads featured the New Woman as consumer: New Women “should at once make themselves acquainted with the Luxurious Easy and Lounging Chairs” declare the Davies Bros. Company – sensing a market niche of women with incomes of their own and possibly rooms of their own to furnish as well (*The Globe* Saturday, 3 August 1895, 4).

\(^{32}\) Exposure to her father’s carefully hidden texts on sexology (the new branch of psychology that established its practitioners as experts on sexual deviance) confirm for Stephen that she is an ‘invert.’ The bulk of the narrative involves Stephen’s successes and failures in crafting a life for herself, amid family rejection and the new opportunities for women brought by the Great War. The novel ends after Stephen, having contested for possession of her female lover with a man (her former best friend), deliberately capitulates in order to give her lover an easier life – an identity as heterosexual and ‘normal.’ Stephen then dedicates her life and writing to publicizing the plight of the invert in a hostile world. In his preface to the book, Havelock Ellis (a key figure in sexology) endorsed its sensitive and knowledgeable handling of the plight of the invert. Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (Garden City, N.Y.: Sun Dial Press, 1928).

\(^{33}\) *The Well* was a very popular book in North America from its first US printing in 1928: 20,000 copies were sold in the first month and 100,000 within a year; by the end of December 1928, it had seen its second, third, and fourth printings. Leslie A. Taylor, “‘I Made Up My Mind to Get It’: The American Trial of The Well of Loneliness, New York City, 1928-1929” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10/2 (2001), 261.
in April 1928, and the book was available in print in Canada through Hall’s American publishers.\textsuperscript{34}

The publication of Hall’s novel was birthed by and in response to the rise of a psychologically-ridden image of the single woman as potentially sexually frustrated – or so unfeminine as to desire other women. The homosexual woman – the ‘invert’ or ‘lesbian’ – is important both as a term identifying a historically real subset of single women, and as a figure in socio-medical discourse that was used to re-define the borders of normative female existence between the turn of the twentieth century and the 1930s. The debates within the expanding field of sexology surrounding homosexuality and the role of heterosex in normative female functioning served to shift and solidify the borders around all women, leaving ever-single women effectively outside heterosexuality.

In this period, sexology emerged as a discipline influenced by the developing fields of genetics and psychology. Laura Doan and Chris Waters note “in the late nineteenth century a series of distinct ‘scientific,’ clinical and discursive practices established a new taxonomy of ‘deviant’ sexual behaviour predicated upon the presumed existence of a normative heterosexuality.”\textsuperscript{35} Sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and Edward Carpenter developed psychological case studies of the homosexual or ‘invert’ in their clinical practices and published influential treatises that would be referenced in medical journals, British Parliamentary debates, and legal cases, as well as in fiction.\textsuperscript{36}

Sexologists occupied a spectrum of political stances on the proper place (if any) of the invert in society. The early and prominent construction of homosexuality by Krafft-Ebing in \textit{Psychopathia Sexualis} (1886) as a “manifestation of functional degeneration” remained very

\textsuperscript{34} Steven Maynard, “Radclyffe Hall in Canada” \textit{Centre/Fold} 6 (Spring 1994), 9.
influential throughout the period. However, Doan and Waters argue that by the turn of century, leading sexologists worked (with varying effects) to counter the illness/vice models of homosexuality, espousing either a ‘third sex’ model as in the work of Edward Carpenter or the ‘sexual inversion’ model of Havelock Ellis.

Edward Carpenter saw the invert as a positive figure, constituting a third or ‘intermediate’ sex, with women possessing the physical features of a female but the so-called characteristics of men (i.e. ‘logical, scientific, and precise’; an ‘active’ temperament; an aptitude for leadership). Carpenter’s sketch of the healthy intermediate woman, revolving chiefly around traits of responsibility, action, and intellect, led him to recommend her for “remarkable work, in professional life, or as manageress of institutions” – in short a description of the professional ever-single woman. This conflating of competence, ambition, and skill with masculinity – and thus inversion, if the person who held these traits was biologically female – was a common element in much of the sexological literature and put a scientific gloss on traditional notions of public success as male, and those women who pursued it as (perhaps dangerously) masculine.

As Lillian Faderman argues, the various attempts of the sexologists at codifying the invert both made clearer and narrowed the possibilities of lesbian existence; taking a broader view, it also meant that ever-single women regardless of sexual orientation would be caught up in the re-configuring of the borders of normative female existence. Even the key elements of respectable survival strategies for women were called into question by some sexologists: in what may have come as quite a surprise to many ever-single women, Krafft-Ebing declares “Suspicion may always be turned towards homosexuality when one reads in the advertisement columns of the daily papers: ‘Wanted, by a lady, a lady friend and companion.”

37 Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 45. This is not surprising, since it closely mirrored discourses on the equation of moral vices with ‘race degeneration’ within the eugenics and maternal feminist movements in Canada, the US, and UK. See McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*.
38 Doan and Waters, “Homosexualities,” 42.
42 Sheila Jeffreys demonstrates the bitter acrimony directed at the spinster for her ‘unnatural’ celibate state starting in the 1920s, even in British feminist circles. Jeffreys, *Spinster and Her Enemies*, 93-7.
43 Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 47.
And the chief traits of inversion were often exactly those traits exhibited by independent ever-single women. The identification of the female homosexual ‘type’ across the spectrum of sexology relied most heavily on characteristics that we would now understand as both feminist (refusing subordinate female roles) and consistent with survival as an independent adult: self-sufficiency, self-support, pursuing education and a profession – and displaying in a myriad of ways the self-confidence that might be built from these. Thus the construction of the invert served to build a clearer boundary around the ‘proper’ heterosexual woman and helped render all women without heterosexual credentials (husband and children) ‘outside’ heterosexuality.

By the 1920s in psycho-medical circles in Canada, the UK, and the US, sexologists and other ‘experts’ attempted to reinscribe women’s natures as sexual and thus in need of heterosexual fulfilment (rather than a child, as with Victorian sensibilities) – portraying ever-single women’s lives now as dangerously psychologically impaired, not because of their lack of maternity, but supposed lack of (hetero)sex. Karen Chow notes for England in this period:

Despite the threat of the censor, there was no escaping the new discourses of women’s sexuality in the popular media, in newspapers, novels, and films. […] sexual pleasure as represented in cross-class popular culture in the 1920s would reflect these discourses that presented women’s [hetero]sexual fulfillment as acceptable and even necessary.

As Smith-Rosenburg asserts, the figure of the fulfilled and psychologically healthy heterosexual woman – and her opposite, the lesbian – became a powerful tool to foreclose women’s claims to economic and social equality:

Linking orgasms to chic fashion and planned motherhood, male sex reformers, psychologists, and physicians promised a future of emotional support and sexual delights to women who accepted heterosexual marriage – and male economic

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44 Sheila Jeffreys examines the invention in the 1920s of ‘frigidity,’ a psychosexual category that was deployed to define women who were indifferent or adverse to heterosexual intercourse as suffering from illness; of interest is several psychologists’ solution: that the frigid woman had to admit to her inferiority, submit to her husband in all things, and give up a sense of having her own personality. Jeffreys, *Spinster and Her Enemies*, 182-3.

hegemony. Only the “unnatural” woman continued to struggle with men for economic independence and political power.  

Although the popular traditional images of the spinster would continue to be used in English-language fiction, these more complex and conflicting images of the single woman generated by fiction, political discourse, and the psycho-medical establishment by the interwar period would make for a more complicated landscape through which real ever-single women would negotiate their lives.

Marital status as a category of analysis

But who were these real ‘spinsters,’ the women who remained single all their lives, within this matrix of conflicting values and beliefs about Woman’s nature and destiny? Simply asking this question requires a vital reworking of traditional methods and categories of historical analysis. Feminist scholars understand that various material and discursive conditions shaped women’s life choices, and that these conditions changed over time and were contingent upon interlocking factors of race, class, sexuality, age, ability, and region. Those conditions were also mediated by marital status – shaping the lives of single women fundamentally differently from married women.

Just as Joan Scott envisions gender as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes” and “a primary way of signifying relationships of power,” marital status fractures the gender of women into identities that are deeply structured by relations of power and privilege. The allocation of economic resources and political and social status to women in most societies is deeply affected by women’s formal relationships to men. Because of this, marital status needs to be examined as a distinct category of analysis for women’s lives. Without examining the different experiences of women according to marital status, we subsume single women into married women’s experiences – much in the same way that studying the history of any group without reference to gender commonly collapses women’s experience into that of men. This preoccupation with married women, whether deliberate or not, not only excludes substantial numbers of women who did not marry, it also excludes most non-heterosexual women. Thus without attention to

marital status we risk privileging in our research only the women who fulfilled their society’s sanctioned, heteronormative female roles.

It is important to note that the term ‘single women’ actually encompasses a varied spectrum of women’s roles and experiences – as varied as the many terms that existed to describe them: spinster, old maid, odd woman, virago, unattached, unmarried; ‘working girl’ and ‘business woman’; and ancient terms for homosexual women such as tribade and sapphist, and the modern term lesbian. This range of terms demonstrates the wide spectrum of identities single women could inhabit – or be placed into by society. This list also shows the difficulty in conceiving of women independent from male conjugal protection and supervision as other than different from ‘real’ women in some way. This problem is reflected in the trouble we often have in defining a clear separation between women who are not married at some point in their lives, and women who remain single all their lives.

Judith Bennett and Amy Froide tackle this issue by dividing ‘single women’ into two groups in their important 1999 collection on single women in medieval and early modern Europe, Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800. ‘Life-cycle’ singles were women who had been unmarried for some portion of their lives (including women before marriage and widowed, divorced, and abandoned women) and ‘lifelong’ singles had never married.48 This life-cycle approach captures a very important sub-division of single women, as it clarifies the difference between singleness as a temporary state – for young women who eventually marry, or women who have passed through marriage – and women for whom singleness is permanent.

Throughout this project, I employ the term ‘ever-single’ in speaking of women who never marry, which in contrast to ‘never-married,’ de-centres marriage as the invisible norm for women and opens up the possibility of singleness becoming a legitimate referent of its own. I caution that I am not making a judgment here as to a choice that a particular woman might have made, but rather a historical, legal condition as seen by martial status at death. Both ‘single’ and ‘ever-single’ are used in this project, and employed for particular methodological reasons. ‘Ever-single’ is chiefly used to discuss the specificity of the ever-single experience, or to denote when the individuals or groups in question are actually known

to be never-married. In contrast, I will use the more general term ‘single’ as a broader category, to encompass the shared conditions and experiences of never-married women at a particular point in time, or to discuss singleness as an ideological phenomenon that impacted the lives of ever-single women as well as those who might eventually marry.

A look at the literature demonstrates that women have long advocated female autonomy from marriage, both inside and outside institutional settings. Historians of medieval and early modern Europe have led the field in studying the varied economic and social conditions of singleness. Using the contemporary term ‘singlewomen’ as offering the sense of a title as well as a category, Bennett and Froide make the valuable point that “Living in a patriarchal culture that praised wives, honored widows, and often ignored or maligned singlewomen, many Europeans between 1250 and 1800 were nevertheless surrounded by large numbers of adult women who had not married.”

The sheer press of women who advocated the single life or could not marry created a social crisis from the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century in particular, especially in Italy and England – a demographic precursor to that of the mid-nineteenth century’s ‘superfluous women.’ Many of the social and economic conditions faced by the early modern ‘singlewoman’ were shared by the Victorian ‘spinster.’

One important example is the legal and economic category of *femme sole* which allowed single, adult English women the ability to contract and conduct business in their own name, a right denied married women until the late nineteenth century in Britain and Canada.

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Bennett and Froide assert “there is much more to the history of singlewomen than merely ‘filling in’ an ignored subject.” Their discussion of the profound effects the study of single women can have on the field as a whole is worth recounting in detail here:

By looking at the lives of singlewomen in premodern Europe, we will learn more about women, gender, and society in premodern Europe. We will uncover more differences – and similarities – among women. We will better understand how women – single, as well as married or widowed – forged familial and social relations with other women. We will more thoroughly reconstruct the social contexts and beginnings of feminist ideas and advocacy. And we will decenter the conjugal family as the essential familial unit of the European past – seeing European society not as it ideally was, but instead as it really existed. […] By studying the lives of these women – life-cycle singlewomen as well as life-long singlewomen – we will construct a more complete and complex picture of the European past.\(^5^4\)

In turn, picking up the study of single women in the late Victorian period and into the twentieth century, we will also see a more complex picture of Canadian history. We can learn more about the intersections between women, gender, and society, uncovering differences in women’s experiences hidden by a lack of attention to marital status. By setting the heterosexual dyad aside, we can delve more fully into the varied life-sustaining relationships that women forged, especially with other women. We can more thoroughly reconstruct the social contexts of feminist ideas and feminist movement, and the roots of a female citizenship based on a direct rather than deflected relationship to the nation. We can also trace the nascence of an ‘individual’ female subjectivity based in self-reverence rather than self-effacement. And we can decenter the conjugal family, especially the heterosexual dyad, as the essential unit of the Canadian past and the only legitimate site for women’s sexuality. Ultimately, the aim to create a reconstruction of Canadian society “not as it ideally was, but instead as it really existed” is an ever-elusive goal, but we can certainly strive to forge “a more complete and complex picture” of that past.

**Contexts for the single woman in Canadian history and historiography**

Although the number of studies that take single women as a focus are as yet comparatively few, several key monographs have focused on some aspect of single women’s

\(^{5^4}\) Bennett and Froide, “A Singular Past,” 27.
experiences in Canada, Britain, Australia, and the United States. Important work has been done around the social construction of the ‘spinster’ in the UK and US.55 Other studies look at the survival strategies of single women facing the perils of self-support, such as Joanne Meyerowitz for Chicago (Women Adrift, 1988), and Martha Vicinus’ study of single women’s residential communities and social networks in Britain (Independent Women, 1985).56 Several studies have built on James Hammerton’s Emigrant Gentlewomen (1979), examining single women’s emigration from Britain to its outposts of Empire, including Canada, Australia, and South Africa.57

Carolyn Strange’s Toronto’s Girl Problem (1995) to date offers the only monograph that focuses exclusively on single women in the Canadian context, examining the phenomenon of the ‘working girl’ in Toronto’s industrial sector and the middle-class moral anxieties aroused by the spectre of legions of young, unsupervised women out in the city’s streets, partaking of its pleasures and dangers.58 Work has also been done on the opportunities and meanings of work for migrant Maritime and French-Canadian women in the US59 and the experiences of ever-single women in Prince Edward Island.60 Some biographies of single Canadian women have begun to appear: earlier work by Patricia Rooke and Rodolph Schnell on Ontario politician Charlotte Whitton has been joined recently by Jean Barman’s study on Nova

Scotian teacher Jessie McQueen and by Margaret Prang on Caroline Macdonald, missionary to Japan.61

However, the meaning of the category ‘single’ is seldom fully explored in these studies, nor has the ever-single woman been a consistent focus outside the biographies. Some, like Strange’s Toronto’s Girl Problem, concentrate on one life-cycle stage of one particular group – young single women seeking urban employment, housing, and leisure. Many ever-single women were probably captured in her study, but tracing young women before they married, not ever-single lives, was her aim; she deliberately sought to study the ‘working girl’ as opposed to the ‘business woman’ (a clear class and age distinction) thereby cordonning off a significant category for ever-single women.62 Betsy Beattie’s recent work on single Maritime women migrants in Boston between 1870 to 1920 looks at a similar group. On the whole, Beattie’s work is not concerned with the difference between women who did not marry, and those who married at some point in their lives. She does not differentiate between the two in her data, nor does she state whether women with children, or women in marriage-like living conditions (i.e. conjugal domestic relationships with men) are included in her statistics or analysis. She also seems to assume that an eventual marriage was the destiny for her subjects.63

Vicinus’ Independent Women examines middle-class English women who “could afford to live, however poorly, on their own earnings outside heterosexual domesticity or church governance.”64 She focuses on residential institutions for these “independent women” from 1850 to 1920. Again, Vicinus’ lack of clear differentiation between women who would marry some time in their life-cycle and lifelong, ever-single women limits her study’s usefulness for discussions of ever-single lives.65 However, while both Strange and Beattie capture (or

62 Strange, Toronto’s Girl Problem, 3.
63 Beattie, Obligation and Opportunity, 20.
64 Vicinus, Independent Women, 6.
65 Her later work, especially her recent Intimate Friends, goes farther in its usefulness in looking at ever-single women, but her focus is women who had same-sex relationships, regardless of their domestic and marital relationships with men over their lifetimes. Martha Vicinus, Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
assume) heterosexual women’s experiences, Vicinus seeks to also identify same-sex relationships in her study.

Scholars searching for lesbian lives in the past (however loosely or rigidly defined) have come closest to capturing the experiences of ever-single women. Most of the work on the identities of ever-single women in particular has been done under the rubric of lesbian history. This approach has had both positive and negative results for the study of single women as a whole. Often, the emphasis on women who lived women-centred lives does leave out those women who did not live, or explain, their lives in that way. But the most valuable aspect of this body of work is the willingness to frame the experiences and thoughts of ever-single women as central, rather than peripheral or marginal to what ‘real’ women thought or did. And historians of lesbian experience have given us tools to question the monolithic and uncomplicated ‘heterosexuality’ found in many histories, as well as investigate possibilities and variants of same-sex intimate companionship and sexuality.66

The assumption that ‘all women marry’ often seems to cloud the analysis of single women, creating the situation where we undertake to study ‘single women’ but do not treat specifically the women who did not ever marry, or conversely, treat with the ‘lesbian’ as an isolated subgroup without reference to the wider allied context of single women. Historians understand that the single woman is a key figure in the history of work, education, and social and political reform before World War II.67 Yet the experiences and consciousness of singleness are too often subsumed under a general category of ‘Woman,’ for whom work and education are assumed to be preludes to marriage – thus single women’s subjectivities are assumed indistinguishable from married women’s, and singleness imparts no significant


67 For example, the history of women and paid work before WWII is predominately that of single women. There are many good studies of women’s work in this period that acknowledge this fact, though none pursues the meanings or conditions of work for ever-single women; rather, marriage is assumed and often traced for its cultural and economic impact on women’s work patterns and workplace culture. See for example Joan Sangster, Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-town Ontario, 1920-1960 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). Single women would continue to form the majority of female workers until the late 1950s. It wasn’t until 1959 that married women matched the numbers of single women in the workforce in Canada: single (44.33%), married (45%), and Other (divorced, widowed, abandoned) 10.66%. Table, Marital Status of Females with Jobs, 1946 to 1960, in Jeffrey Keshen and Suzanne Morton, eds. Material Memory: Documents in Post-Confederation History (Don Mills, Ont.: Addison-Wesley, 1998), 266.
differences needing examination. Assuming that a future (and by no means guaranteed) event determines the nature of single women’s attitudes and conditions in their present is a particularly anachronistic approach that might stem from our own culture’s continued assumption of women’s lesser worth outside of marriage. This is also very evocative of conditions under which historians argued for the separate study of women from men.

Key here is our conception of adulthood. On the whole, we do not treat young men’s historical entry into waged work the same way – as transitory and a factor of youth, and not particularly relevant to the ‘wider’ or ‘real’ history of men – because waged work is a measure of male adulthood and citizenship, past and present. In contrast, the threshold of adulthood for women was marriage, ultimately coupled with motherhood. Young single women in school or in the workplace were liminal figures, not yet having achieved the female adult status of the wife and mother. And thus the framework for thinking about singleness is often tutelage and apprenticeship. Yet the figure of the spinster was clearly that of an adult – possibly seen as marginal in the community, but not as juvenile or in need of tutelage, as young women still eligible for marriage were perceived. In fact the spinster could be endowed with authority, as in the classic image of the maiden aunt who chaperones young nieces in fictional travel narratives such as E.M. Forster’s *A Room With a View* (1908) or Marilla and the various spinsters that appear in L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* series (1908-1939).

Where the adulthood for the married woman began in marriage, or perhaps the birth of her first child, the transition for ever-single women from tutelage to authority is less easy to determine. The community sense of the end of a woman’s eligibility for marriage is key. Eligible single women were considered fundamentally incapable of self-supervision to maintain respectable status, constructed simultaneously as sexual purity and availability for heterosexual marriage. Others were responsible, chiefly fathers, for maintaining a recognized net of protections and restrictions around the young single woman’s social interactions to safeguard respectability and severely limit her expressions of sexuality. Crossing this

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68 While it might be true that most young single women thought marriage was their future, as historians we cannot simply treat that future as a given, nor fold single women’s experiences into married women’s on the assumption that eventually, the subject of a study would marry and thus in the future take on a married woman’s subjectivity.

69 The ultimate end of young single women’s unbridled sexuality was, of course, the ‘ruin’ of her capacity for respectable marriage and motherhood in having sexual intercourse outside marriage, and the concomitant ‘fall’
threshold out of eligibility for marriage meant an end to tutelage and an assumption of self-responsibility. Once having achieved this status of full responsibility, the respectable ever-single woman was less an object of surveillance or protection and more a potential agent for securing norms of femininity in the community, qualified to supervise young single women and to mould them to normative heterosexual and gendered roles. Thus a division between the eligible or ‘liminal’ single woman and the confirmed ‘spinster-citizen’ existed that is crucial to understand as we attempt to look at single women in the past.

An interesting moment in Canadian political history seems to underline this division. In 1883, 1884, and 1885, Sir John A. Macdonald introduced uniform federal franchise bills that allowed for the franchise to be extended to unmarried women with property. Catherine Cleverdon notes that although the lack of any real strenuous opposition to the measures might have meant that those opposed had no real fear of their passage, she believes the Prime Minister personally saw the franchise in the hands of propertied, adult single women as both a logical extension of his vision of a universal franchise based on property, and a new conservative constituency in politics.70 This conception of the adult spinster-citizen lingered in the minds of some parliamentarians until at least the achievement of the franchise for White women in 1918. In that year Senator L.O. David moved that unmarried women under age 30 should be disenfranchised, because they should be concentrating on “preparing themselves to fulfill the duties of their noble position.”71

This rarely discussed aspect of suffrage history suggests that there existed a (small, but telling) category of women that could be conceived in terms of a broader citizenship than that accorded ‘women’ as a whole. This ‘spinster-citizen,’ however she may have been rendered invisible by the later claims by suffragists for civil rights for all (White) women, seems to be connected to the ever-single, adult woman who has achieved full personal responsibility in the eyes of the community.

But this potential position of responsibility and citizenship was precarious and mediated by a sheaf of social and economic factors, including demographics and location. Place mattered deeply for single women’s social and economic position in this period. Liminal or citizen, the single woman posed a crucial demographic and social problem in Britain: that of the ‘surplus woman.’ As of the 1851 census, there were 405,000 more women than men in the British population, and in the late Victorian period generally, one in four adult women would never marry. As Sheila Jeffries notes, the very idea that women could be conceived as ‘surplus’ – meaning surplus to the needs of men – was one which Victorian feminists would vigorously contest, addressing instead the economic and social conditions that made survival difficult for women outside marriage. But for many commentators, including some feminist organizations, the best solution to the ‘surplus woman’ was emigration. While the adult single woman was seen as a problem in Britain, as out-of-place, in the Dominion of Canada and other British possessions, single White women were in demand.

Late Victorian immigration societies on both sides of the Atlantic actively promoted and facilitated the movement of single women to Canada. As early as the 1860s, pro-West boosters called for ‘surplus women’ to look to the Canadian West as a solution to the barriers they found in living single lives in Britain. Well-paid positions in domestic service and farm help were abundant, and the large pool of available Canadian bachelors was promoted as a bonus.

Although the subject of marriage to the ubiquitous Western bachelor frequently appears in literature promoting the emigration of single women, booster Jessie Saxby explained: “I don’t want our girls to be sent out to the colonies in search of husbands. Certainly not!” Rather, if women say “I want to earn my own living” they will find happy homes to receive them in Canada.” Yet Saxby also listed a “man of her own” as the ultimate good outcome of emigration, especially for the ill-used governess or clerk. Some emigration propaganda unabashedly played on the fears of the ‘surplus woman’ that marriage was beyond her grasp.

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72 Jeffreys, *Spinster and Her Enemies*, 86.
73 Jeffreys, *Spinster and Her Enemies*, 87.
and offered the Canadian West as a solution. A less than flattering call for women to emigrate can be found on advertisements aimed at the unhappy British spinster, like this ca. 1910 postcard:

**URGENT!**

Thousands of nice girls are wanted in THE CANADIAN WEST.

Over 20,000 men are sighing for what they cannot get – WIVES! *Shame!*

Don’t hesitate – COME AT ONCE.

If you cannot come, send your sisters.

So great is the demand that anything in skirts stands a chance.

No reasonable offer refused.

They are all shy but willing.

All Prizes! No Blanks.

In the end, the prime reasoning behind much of the emigration propaganda promoting single women’s ‘use’ to Canada was their status as wives and mothers *in potentia*. The ability of respectable White women to ‘civilize’ the wild bachelors of the West and sow firm roots of Empire by inculcating their children in imperial allegiance was a central theme of much emigration rhetoric.\(^76\)

But always these were prospects not guarantees – because some women might not marry. From the earliest French bride ships in the seventeenth century to the English emigrants filling the immigrant society hostels of the 1920s, some proportion of the women who emigrated to Canada never married.\(^77\) As James Hammerton notes: “the rhetoric of the feminine civilizing mission continued to serve its ideological purpose despite its increasing irrelevance to the actual course of female immigration.”\(^78\) In fact, because some emigration societies, like the British Women’s Emigration Association and the Colonial Intelligence League, saw their primary practical function as placing single women in employment overseas, they helped in part to subvert imperial goals because they enabled conditions in which marriage was less of an economic necessity for some women. However, it is worth remembering that several groups of single women who emigrated to Canada did not do so for

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\(^76\) Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, 189.


\(^78\) Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, 189.
their own ends, or experienced coercion or lack of alternatives: Chinese ‘slave girls’ and indentured servants and Japanese ‘picture brides’ in British Columbia, as well as orphaned and ‘rescued’ British girls sent as wards and domestic servants to eastern Canada by various charity agencies such as the Bernardo Homes.79

The British women who came to Canada in the long legacy of ‘bride ships’ and assisted emigration schemes were able to employ more agency in their travel, ranging from obediently fulfilling their prescribed roles by taking positions in domestic service and marrying Canadian bachelors, to using the passage to strike out on their own in businesses, farming, and other employment.80 All of this points to an essential gap that was created between imperial ideology and the utility of emigration for the actual women who went. Canada required and authorized single women to join the nation; although they were called upon to be true ‘Women’ (meaning wife/mother) this invitation enabled other agendas, identities, and futures.

Singleness on the borderlands

It is these agendas, identities, and futures that are so intriguing. In the face of (apparently) every incentive to marry, how and why did women remain ever-single in the Canadian West? One approach to making sense of this diverse group of lives is to see how they intersected with both the social and physical landscape – the margins of normative social roles, and the margins of empire.

Mary Louise Pratt characterizes the colonial ‘contact zone’ as a series of “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly


80 For a discussion of the early single female migrants in pre-Confederation British Columbia see Perry, On the Edge of Empire, 139-166.
asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.” Lynette Russell sees these zones as

spaces both physical and intellectual, which are never neutrally positioned, but are assertive, contested, and dialogic. Boundaries and frontiers are sometimes negotiated, sometimes violent and often are structured by convention and protocol that are not immediately obvious to those standing on either one side or the other. In a White settler nation such as Canada, the contact zones are not just between colonizer and colonized, but also between newcomers, between genders, and between the aims of Empire and the individual.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1999), Gloria Anzaldúa explores the intersections of Anglo, Chicano, Mexican, and Indian histories and cultures in the border country of the American Southwest. From this she crafts the defining features of ‘the borderlands,’ the sites of physical and social encounters between peoples and cultures. Anzaldúa defines the borderlands as an ever-shifting site of conflict and confluence, where two or more cultures intertwine in unequal relationships of colonial dominance and subjection.

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.

More importantly, Anzaldúa is clear that the borderlands can also be cultural and psychological:

The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.

As we will see in this study, single women occupied the intersection of many borders: physical, political, economic, and social. As a site of such intersections, British Columbia offered single women crucial opportunities for survival and success. Literally on the edge of both Canada and the British Empire, British Columbia was a borderland, first as a late-contact, mixed-race frontier in the nineteenth century, and then through its transformation

84 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 19.
into an expanding White, imperial-Canadian hegemony in the twentieth. Both the physical and the gendered borderlands of the province created particular conditions for ever-single women’s survival and success.

British Columbia offered exceptional circumstances for non-Aboriginal single women in particular between Confederation and the Second World War. The province was a ‘late development’ frontier with an unusually high ratio of White men to White women. In 1881, newcomer men outnumbered newcomer women substantially – the number of women in the non-Aboriginal population was only 25.6%. The high ratio (over 2:1) of men to women in the non-Aboriginal population would continue through 1911, and would only approach parity after 1951. (European-origin people made up 79.7% of the non-Aboriginal population in 1881, 86.9% in 1901, and 91.9% in 1911). Given these conditions, there must have been extra-ordinary pressures on White women in BC to conform to social expectations of marriage and motherhood, and more than enough bachelors to go around.

Yet the substantial numbers of single women (approx. 25-30% for women over age 15 between 1881 and 1901) suggest that a large proportion of the female population were finding identities outside the marital home (and by 1901 this was a majority White population, particularly in Victoria). How can we explain the prevalence of single women in this period? Tables 1 and 2 offer a glimpse at the numbers of single women in Canada as a whole, British Columbia, and Victoria in 1881 and 1901. I have divided these into women over a base marriageable age of 15 (to capture the full cohort of single women – ‘eligible’ singles who would eventually marry together with the ever-single population) and women over age 30, to reflect the numbers that were very likely to remain ever-single (this definition will be discussed further in chapter two).

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Table 1: Women, comparative Victoria, BC, and Canada, 1881\(^{86}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All women</th>
<th>Single women</th>
<th>Single women as % of all women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>15 years and over</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>1701</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>10991</td>
<td>3158</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1293612</td>
<td>517476</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>30 years and over</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>6624</td>
<td>1263</td>
<td>19.1%(^{a})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>673081</td>
<td>90361</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\) This group is over-represented due to poor reporting of marital status for Aboriginal women.

Table 2: Women, comparative Victoria, BC, and Canada, 1901\(^{87}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All women</th>
<th>Single women</th>
<th>Single women as % of all women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>15 years and over</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>6102</td>
<td>2148</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC(^{a})</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada(^{a})</td>
<td>84543</td>
<td>32110</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>30 years and over</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>3439</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC(^{a})</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada(^{a})</td>
<td>48156</td>
<td>7003</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\) These numbers are from the Canadian Families Project, National (5%) Sample of the 1901 Census of Canada, January 2002. While the percentage of single women over age 15 for Canada is close to the figure calculated from the Historical Statistics of Canada (38.2%), the sample for BC is in fact somewhat low in comparison to published tables – only a 90.55% correlation (Canadian Families Project, User's Guide, 10).

At first glance, the demographic comparison between country, province, and city presents a straightforward picture of the result of a low population of ‘eligible’ women – the percentage of single women in the province is consistently lower than Canada as a whole, regardless of age group or year.\(^{88}\) Yet the question should be not why BC’s numbers are so

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88 With the exception of singles over 30 in BC in 1881 (19.1%) – a problematic number, since aboriginal women were clearly not adequately polled as to their marital status, possibly from enumerators’ assumptions about the legitimacy of Aboriginal marriages.
low compared to other provinces, but why in fact they are so high given the overwhelming male to female ratio (and strong colonial imperatives to marry). In addition, a closer look reveals a fascinating set of circumstances – between 1881 and 1901, the percentage of single women over 30 in Victoria grows by about 3%, three times the growth of Canada as a whole. Yet the percentage in BC decreases – thus Victoria in 1901 has over 10% more single women over age 15 and more than twice the percentage of single women aged 30 than British Columbia as a whole. In Victoria the numbers of single women were growing.

Here I want to make some key speculations about why there were proportionately more single women in Victoria than BC as a whole. First, this suggests that BC urban centres also benefited from the rural-to-urban migration patterns of the country as a whole.\(^89\) Also, as a site of colonial emigration (along with Vancouver after the turn of the century), Victoria benefited from the importation of single women, adding to those born to the city or migrating from other Canadian regions. Gender restrictions of late Victorian society were potentially contested and reconfigured on this frontier as on others, while notions of the necessity of White women to British hegemony also created unique circumstances for single British women.\(^90\) And perhaps most importantly, Victoria likely offered the economic and social opportunities to remain single, by choice or by circumstance.

Yet at first glance British Columbia as a whole seems a less likely economic haven for single women. The province’s reliance on resource extraction and the development of single-industry towns give it a very different economic base than Ontario or Quebec. Mostly absent before WWI was the enormous manufacturing sector that employed so many single women in industrial centres like Toronto.\(^91\) Robert A.J. McDonald notes:

> B.C.’s comparative disadvantage as a location for end product manufacturing – the result of a remote location, small population, and discriminatory Canadian tariff and freight rate policies – particularly affected Vancouver, where such industrial activity

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\(^89\) Prentice et al., *Canadian Women*, 113.

\(^90\) Sylvia van Kirk and Jean Barman discuss the loosening of some restrictions for women in rural BC towns, especially in taking up businesses and other public roles, an effect of the low numbers of single women and the looser social structure of the frontier – whether this pertained in Victoria, and for how long, is a topic for further study. Sylvia Van Kirk, “A Vital Presence: Women in the Cariboo Gold Rush, 1862-1875” in Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds. *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1992); Barman, *Sojourning Sisters*. And notions of the high social value of maintaining the respectability of British women prompted colonial-era Victoria to offer rare civic aid to women like the mentally ill Mills sisters (that they would be less likely to have received in eastern Canada). Perry, *On The Edge of Empire*, 188-90.

\(^91\) For the growing economic opportunities for women in Toronto in this period, see Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*. 
would have centred. Consequently, clothing, textile, tobacco and food processing industries, which employed large numbers of women in eastern cities and a growing number in Winnipeg, offered limited job opportunities for women on the west coast.\textsuperscript{92}

However, other opportunities in the growing urban service sector, in education, and domestic service (which continued to employ many single women into the interwar period) gave many women the means to support themselves in Victoria and Vancouver. As McDonald notes for Vancouver between the 1890s and World War I: “The city’s growing population also required a greater variety of retail, manufacturing, and professional services. The market for services encouraged the expansion and diversification of the city’s upper and middle classes” – both exemplary opportunities for women’s employment, and the means for daughters of middle-class entrepreneurs to remain single.\textsuperscript{93}

And up until at least the Great War, wages in some traditional female occupations were higher in British Columbia than eastern Canada, which may have acted as an enticement to come to the province. Not only were positions in teaching and domestic service plentiful through this settlement era, they paid better as well. In 1887 Jessie McQueen found the 60.00 per month wage in a rural BC school a great improvement over the 60.00 per term wage she could get in a Nova Scotia school, enabling her not only to live away from her family but also to send money home.\textsuperscript{94} And wages were higher for domestics in BC than in the East, with the demand most often exceeding the supply, especially in Vancouver’s boom years and with the rise of other employment opportunities for women in the professional and service sectors after the turn of the century. As most domestics had room and board included as part of their employment, the difference in wage rates meant a real difference in net earning power.\textsuperscript{95}

These interesting, even unique demographic and economic contexts in British Columbia situate this project. But what is more exciting is the wealth of statistical and archival data that

\textsuperscript{92} In 1911, women comprised only 9.6\% of Vancouver’s manufacturing workforce, as opposed to 17.2\% for Winnipeg and 25.5\% for Toronto. Robert A. J. McDonald, “Working Class Vancouver, 1886-1914: Urbanism and Class in British Columbia” \textit{BC Studies} 69-70 (1986), 42.
\textsuperscript{93} Robert A. J. McDonald, \textit{Making Vancouver: Class, Status, and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913} (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), 120. The Gilley family of New Westminster was a typical example of the Vancouver area’s boom economy enabling a set of entrepreneurial brothers (making their fortunes in logging and transportation) to fund the education and support of their ever-single daughters (Janet Gilley was one of the first female solicitors in Vancouver in the 1920s). Paul Gilley, personal communication, December 2002.
\textsuperscript{94} Barman, \textit{Sojourners Sisters}, 130.
enabled me to construct the three major datasets (demographic, associational, and autobiographical) that fund the study. Through these, I explore both the historical, material context of ever-single women’s lives and the meanings ever-single women made of their experiences. In essence, each chapter is its own satellite study, focusing on a particular dataset and particular issues in the material conditions and subjectivities of ever-single women. Each allows me to generate new methods and/or theory for the study of single women generally, as well as significant conclusions for my particular aim, the history of ever-single women in BC.

The women in this study are ‘everyday’ because the single woman was a visible, normal part of everyday life in Canada in this period. But they’re also Athenas because their experiences and identities are evocative of Athena, goddess of wisdom and war, the only major goddess in the classical Greek pantheon to have no predetermined sexuality and marital status, and whose traits were those usually coded ‘masculine’ (and certainly ‘public’) – intellect and warfare. To be included in the study, a subject must have spent a portion of her adult life in British Columbia. Because of the high mobility of many single women in this period, and given the province’s late-settlement nature, many subjects will not have been born in BC. I do not include women who are mothers, as that adds a complex and unique social and economic dimension that is beyond the scope of this study. Mothers occupied a distinct social category and were the centre of an immense ideological structure. Mothers who were not married (both ‘single mothers’ and widows) existed in an intricate web of ideas of moral and social worth that differed (though not completely) from women without children (although I have retained one woman in my study who had apparently adopted an older child in her middle age). My purpose in this study is to examine the experiences of women who did not participate in the traditional identity of wife and mother. In the same vein, my subjects must not be in a dependent, sexual domestic relationship with a man. However, the possibility of intimate relationships with other women, including sexual and conjugal, will be explored. Unfortunately, beyond some inclusion in the census sample used

96 However, they did need to live as women. Although the ‘passing woman’ – a woman who passed as a man – is an intriguing historical subject with much to offer about contexts of gender and sexuality, s/he is outside the scope of my study, which is focussed on women who lived as (single) women and faced the specific barriers and opportunities for those recognized as such. For similar reasons, the transsexual subject, which also deserves study, is not part of my framework. See Laura Doan’s interesting discussion on the passing woman in Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 82-94.
in chapter two, nuns and other religious women who live in community – notably, the order of the Sisters of St. Ann in Victoria – are also excluded, but the interconnections between the secular and the religious ever-single woman is another needed and intriguing area of study.\footnote{Unfortunately, the St. Ann’s archives were closed for residential schools litigation while I was doing the research for this study; for more on the order, see Jacqueline Gresko, “Gender and Mission: The Founding Generations of the Sisters of St. Ann and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in British Columbia 1858-1914” PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1999.}

Because of the nature of the available sources, the majority of subjects in this study are women of Anglo-European descent from the urban centres of Victoria and Vancouver. Most of the available archival, statistical, and media resources concern this group, supplemented by some illustrative examples of rural single women from the Abbotsford-Sumas-Matsqui area. However, I have aimed to glean from the partial and racialized nature of the historical sources some sense of the distinct differences in experience for women of Aboriginal descent and women of colour. Census records and some archival deposits by or about single women of colour were found, which allowed me to make some comments on their experiences in this study, a valuable discovery.

There are many opportunities and barriers to studying single women, and when possible, I highlight the methods I have developed and the issues I have confronted in order to facilitate further studies of single women in other regions and eras of study. I have also compiled a Methods appendix that allows a more detailed discussion of methods than would be appropriate for the body of the text.

This study does not claim to be an exhaustive look at ever-single women in the BC context. Rather, I will investigate four major themes: survival, status, relationships, and identity. A full sample of the 1901 census for the city of Victoria forms the empirical core for the demographic section of the study concentrating on material conditions of income and household composition, offering us some of the strategies of survival single women employed. Vancouver’s social and city directories as well as police records offered excellent material for a complementary associational study of ever-single women’s social status networks. And the voices and experiences of ever-single women from Victoria and Vancouver, based chiefly on archival deposits of autobiographical materials and biographical studies, form the other core dataset on relationships and identities.
Chapter two, ‘Conditions of singleness,’ examines the empirical conditions of singleness, focusing on the urban single woman in Victoria. The ‘Athenas sample’ of single women in Victoria in 1901 that I have compiled for this project reveals very interesting data about numbers, occupations, and incomes of single women over age 30 (my line for determining those women most likely to remain ever-single). Due to the rich weave of race, ‘colour,’ and birthplace information in this census, I have assembled good profiles of women of colour. The highlight of this chapter is undoubtedly the household analysis I was able to perform with the cross-indexing of the manuscript census, city directories, and obituaries. Household-level analysis, coupled with information on incomes and occupations, tells us much more about strategies of survival for single women than the individual records of single women taken in isolation. Some preliminary thoughts are also offered on the construction of class for ever-single women, keeping in mind the vital interrelation of economic class and social status.

As a complement to the study of Victoria up to 1901 in chapter two, chapter three (‘Making it in Vancouver: Respectability, status, and the single woman’) focuses on Vancouver after 1901, the year in which the booming new city surpassed the older capital in population, on its way to becoming the economic and social hub of British Columbia. In this chapter, I turn from an examination of material conditions to questions of status. Looking at two status groups in Vancouver – those of the lowest status (prostitutes), and the highest status (‘Society’ women) – reveals interesting conditions, even contradictions, in how single women might negotiate the status hierarchy in a growing urban centre. Most significantly, this chapter emphasizes the centrality of single women to (all levels of) society and the leadership that single women bring to both crafting and policing the borders of status groups.

Chapter four (‘Emotional geographies’) focuses on two key elements: ever-single women’s own voices on singleness, and the vital relationships they built for themselves. The Farmer’s Advocate quote at the beginning of this chapter offers a myriad of circumstances that shaped the lives of ever-single women. Yet the quote is missing a critical category: women who made the choice to be single. Ever-single women’s own reasons for being single will be examined in chapter four, demonstrating that women made rational choices about their own lives – and the conditions of marriage and singleness in their times. Far from being ‘alone,’ kin and personal relationships were very important to most single women. Many
women lived within family structures, with parents or siblings, and others lived in clusters with friends, workmates, and partners. And the range of relationships that these women built, from the homosocial to the homoerotic, deserves close examination.

In chapter five, ‘Eccentric Subjects,’ the voices of ever-single women will be examined not just for collective patterns and details about their experiences as single, but also for the very ways they speak of their lives. I open this chapter with a discussion of the nature of the ever-single woman as ‘outside heterosexuality’ and suggest some ways through the bind of the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy in thinking about women’s lives. I then propose that ever-single women could have a particular ‘voice’ that was profoundly influenced by their position on the borderlands of gender: taking on many aspects deemed appropriate for men, such as lifelong employment and self-support, yet experiencing the impacts of gender regimes that insisted upon female ‘difference,’ deference, and subordination. My theory of the hybrid nature of this autobiographical voice is the key contribution of this chapter.

Throughout the study, I aim to demonstrate the impact of marital status as a category of analysis, and what the study of the (ever-)single woman offers to our understandings of history. An important place to begin is to examine the conditions that defined single women’s choices and chances for survival, outside the economic support of (and dependence upon) a husband. In the next chapter, I will examine just what might have been the conditions and strategies of survival for single women in Victoria in 1901, looking at what occupations they might have had (if any), incomes, and most importantly, the structures of their households and how those might contribute to their survival or even prosperity.
Two: Conditions of singleness

Fate had nailed me down hard. [...] No, I was not nailed. I was screwed into the house of All Sorts, twist by twist. Every circumstance, financial, public, personal, artistic, had taken a hand in that cruel twirling of the driver. Each twist demanded – "Forget you ever wanted to be an artist. [...] Buckle down to being a landlady."

– Emily Carr, *House of All Sorts*, 202

Economic circumstances deeply structured single women’s choices – and compromises – to ensure survival. This chapter offers an analysis of the material circumstances that conditioned single women’s strategies of survival and success on the borderlands that was Canada’s most western province. The very productive intersection of the manuscript census, city directories, obituaries, cemetery records, and vital statistics has allowed me to build a rich dataset on a cohort of individual single women. This dataset reveals some of the strategies of survival adopted by single women, from the types of occupations that provided a living wage, to (more significantly) the variety of living arrangements that allowed their incomes to stretch over expenses, to support kin, or in some cases to support their own autonomous lifestyles. Also revealed are fundamental connections between race and class. Possibly the most important aspect of this branch of the research is my focus on household-level analysis. As I mined the manuscript census for single women, it became clear to me that we need to look at single women’s lives as they were embedded in structures of family and living arrangements, rather than simply comparing single women in terms of occupation or income, or some other factor that treats single women as if they were, at all times, living completely alone. What we will see, however, is that single women most often did not live alone, and that we need to move beyond a simple independent (alone) versus dependent (at home) paradigm.

This chapter will focus on the urban single woman, exploring a full sample of single women in Victoria drawn from the 1901 Census of Canada – a census year in which the growth of Victoria’s single female population outstripped BC and Canada as a whole, making it an interesting site for analysis of single women’s lives. Because my analysis draws mainly from group data on single women in particular moments in time, a major portion of the discussion will concentrate on the wider group of women who can be identified as single
at that moment. Then I will move on to supplement this with a supporting discussion about the confirmed ever-single women that can be found within this data. Finally, I will return to the wider category of single women, and offer some preliminary thoughts about class and how we might determine the class identities of single women.

**Importing single newcomer women**

As early as the 1860s, the single Anglo-Saxon woman was a desired emigrant to this far outpost of Empire, an indispensable player in the aim to replace the Aboriginal population with a replica of White, British society. As early as 1869 the *British Columbian* presented emigration to the colony as an excellent solution to the “redundancy of women,” and single British women were actively recruited to come to British Columbia as part of the defence and re-creation of British cultural norms in Canada.¹ As Adele Perry notes, “White women were necessary ingredients in the reconstruction of the colonial order, but as lesser partners.”² Perry outlines a threefold strategy of immigration policy. The presence of White women would induce White men “to reject the rough homosocial culture of the backwoods in favour of normative standards of masculinity and respectability.” Secondly, White women coming as servants for middle-class and elite homes would “simultaneously address the local labour market and relieve overpopulation in Britain.” And third, White women would combat the “other central ‘problem’ of British Columbia’s gender organization, namely, the widespread practice of white-Aboriginal conjugal relationships.”³

The internal migration of women from rural to urban areas throughout Canada was also a marked feature of the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the Second World War.⁴ In addition to the women recruited for the province by service organizations in Britain, single women of non-Aboriginal (and mixed-blood) descent were born to the province as legacy of the first waves of European settlement, while others traveled to the province as individual opportunists seeking livelihoods and adventure. Many newcomer women who were destined to stay ever-single would have come as girls with their families to take up

¹ Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 144.
² Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 130.
⁴ Mobility between urban centres was also particularly was high. The increase in urban populations after the mid-century point averaged 34% per decade, while roughly 50-70% of urban residents in a given decade could not be traced in the next census a decade later. Prentice, et.al. *Canadian Women*, 121.
farms in British Columbia, or residence in the new cities of Victoria and New Westminster (and later Vancouver), and many also were born to the increasing numbers of immigrant families since stable newcomer settlement was established in the 1860s. And many adult women came to BC seeking survival and success, coming on their own initiative and funds, or utilizing the various sponsored-emigration schemes run by British emigration societies, from the ‘brideships’ of 1861-63 to the employment and hostelling programs of the interwar period.⁵

Single newcomer women also travelled to British Columbia as early as the 1860s to find a livelihood, though not necessarily as traditional rural settlers. The women Sylvia Van Kirk studied in the Cariboo gold rush in the 1860s and 1870s ran boarding houses, laundries, restaurants, and saloons, building a much-needed service industry around the great numbers of unpartnered male miners who “now had to pay for services that they would normally have expected to be provided free by female kin.”⁶ There were also opportunities for traveling entertainers, especially with the lucrative hurdy-gurdy troupes, who were dance partners for miners in the saloons at a dollar-a-dance. The sex trade also offered opportunities – although Van Kirk does not find a discernable White sex trade, there was evidence of Aboriginal and Chinese women working as organized or casual prostitutes.⁷ By the turn of the 20th century the expansion and intensification of in-migration to British Columbia brought new opportunities for many single women, in business, trade, the service industry, and the professions.

**Tracing the urban single woman: Victoria 1901**

Whether they were from overseas, rural areas, or the eastern provinces, single women migrated to BC’s urban centres in search of survival and success, part of the pan-Canadian migration of women from rural to urban centres that was a marked feature of the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the Second World War.⁸ Although the young city of

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⁶ Van Kirk, “A Vital Presence,” 27. Of 75 white women in her study, 61 could be identified as married, leaving 14 or 18.7% (possibly) single.
⁸ Mobility between urban centres was also particularly was high. The increase in urban populations after the mid-century point averaged 34% per decade, while roughly 50-70% of urban residents in a given decade could not be traced in the next census a decade later. Prentice, et.al. *Canadian Women*, 121.
Vancouver would surpass all other centres in growth by the turn of the century, the years 1881 to 1901 saw the maturing capital city of Victoria drawing many single women to its environs, and in 1901 surpassing both British Columbia and Canada as a whole in the growth of its population of single women.

My core sample of single women in Victoria in 1901 allows me to trace the economic conditions of the urban single woman, teasing out the various factors, including occupation and income, which enabled this population to survive. From this base, I then cross-reference the data through household composition and race to further construct both the many barriers and strategies of survival for single women. And finally, I am able to advance beyond the census to focus on the group of confirmed ever-single women whose obituaries can be traced, giving us a glimpse of diverse additional strategies of survival and how these might have changed over time.

The most important question in front of me when I set out to form a statistical sample of single women was: what age constitutes the line between the ‘eligible’ single woman and the ‘confirmed’ spinster? This issue is vital for two reasons: because of the ideological split between the ‘eligible’ or ‘liminal’ single woman and the ‘adult’ spinster outlined in chapter one, it is important to define just where the line between ‘eligible young woman’ and ‘spinster’ was, to determine which women in the population would be seen (and see themselves) not as liminal but as (relatively) autonomous. This age division should also mark the age at which it is highly likely that a woman will remain ever-single.

This turned out to be a matter of some debate. From the point of view of the compilers of the Statistical Year-Book of Canada (1902), in 1881, 1891, and 1901 the ‘single’ female included all females regardless of age, even infants.9 The Historical Statistics of Canada table for population by marital status and sex measures women over the age of 15, a practical division between childhood and eligibility for marriage.10 Both of these methods of measurement make it difficult to discover the actual numbers of adult single women. Even

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9 See Dept. of Agriculture, Statistical Year-Book of Canada 1902 (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1903), 92.
10 The second edition (1983) of Historical Statistics of Canada (a joint publication of the Social Science Federation of Canada and Statistics Canada) is now online thanks to a StatsCan initiative to make these important tables continually available to the public in a variety of formats. All data from the original paper publication has been preserved without alteration. Historical statistics of Canada, 2nd ed. (online), Series A110-124: Population, by marital status and sex, census dates, 1871 to 1976. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1999. [http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/11-516-XIE/sectiona/sectiona.htm].
more difficult is determining the numbers of ever-single women. An age cut-off is the common method used by demographers to determine the populations likely to remain never-married – this is most often (for reasons of fecundity) at or around age 50. For example, in her study of nuptiality in Canada between 1851 and 1891, Ellen Gee defines the 45-49 age cohort as the key for determining the level of never-marrieds in the population. However, because one of the methodological aims of this project is to follow, where possible, the lead of women’s experiences rather than pre-formulated frameworks, we need to look for clues in the voices of single women as well as prescriptive authorities to see just where the line between ‘eligible young woman’ and ‘spinster’ was.

There seems to be compelling enough evidence to set the ‘line’ for spinsterhood for this study not at 45 or 50, like most demographic studies, but at 30. Senator David’s 1918 comment (from chapter one) that only single women over age 30 should be enfranchised suggests setting the line at this age. Some voices of single women themselves also offer support for 30 as a division. A British Columbia teacher wrote in to the women’s editor at the Family Herald and Weekly Star in 1912: “I am now 28, and the future looms ahead of me, with the sole prospect of teaching from morning til night, the rest of my days. [...] It therefore appears I shall some day be shelved as an old maid.” Additional support was found in the average age at first marriage for women in BC: 20.0 years in 1881 and 22.3 years in 1891, rising to a high of 24.8 by 1931. This trend of nuptiality in the early 20s for women puts into some context the teacher’s lament that at age 28 she was already feeling like she would never marry, if the majority of young women of her community were already well established in marriage and childbearing by her age.

Using age 30 as my division, I then proceeded to develop my ‘Athenas’ sample of single women recorded as single in the census of Victoria in 1901. Thanks to the efforts of historians, genealogists, and the Library and Archives of Canada (LAC), the entire manuscript census for Victoria in 1901 is available in multiple online formats. Individual

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12 ‘Penelope’ (British Columbia) in Prim Rose at Home, Family Herald and Weekly Star October 30, 1912. Rpt. in Lewis, ed., Dear Editor and Friends, 100.
13 Gee, “Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Canada,” 320; Barman, West Beyond the West, Table 12, Average Age of First Marriage in Selected Canadian Provinces, 1891-1981, 370.
14 viHistory (http://vihistory.ca/), a project of historians at Malaspina University College and the University of Victoria offer an online, searchable database of census, city directories, and other records covering Vancouver
entries are also linked to their households, which as will be seen facilitates an important element of my analysis. For heads of household, the Schedule 2 (property) pages were available to be cross-referenced for size and type of dwelling and amount of property owned and leased, and address cross-referencing was also a valuable tool. As well, all women in the sample have been searched in the BC Archives online vital statistics database (birth, marriage, and death certificates).

From this excellent set of research resources, I built a full sample of unmarried women 30 years and older, with a total of 405 entries. This ‘Athenas sample’ contains a complete breakdown of all fields from the census, including occupation, earnings, relationship to head of household, ‘colour,’ country of origin, and religion. An important element of my sample structure is that I not only recorded individuals’ information, but also the names, relationship to head, occupations, and incomes of the entire household. This availability of comprehensive, linked data allows a detailed examination of the varying strategies of survival and success pursued by single women in this frontier city in 1901.

The Athenas sample gives a detailed snapshot of single women in 1901, but the census cannot identify which of those women would remain single all their lives. This particular task necessitated tapping other sources including death certificates, the BC GenWeb annotations of the census, and the online death notices index at the City of Victoria Archives site. The results are encouraging. I am able to confirm marital status at death for approximately 207 of 405 entries – roughly one-half – in the Athenas sample, with most of them (175) confirmed as ever-single and 32 confirmed as married post-census. This also supports my choice of age 30 as a reasonable dividing line for demographic as well as social reasons.

Island and Victoria for 1881-1901. The excellent BC GenWeb site (http://www.rootsweb.com/~canbc/bc.htm) includes a text version of the 1901 census indexed by name and page, with many records containing annotations based on obituaries, cemetery records, and personal information supplied by volunteers. The LAC, through its Archivia.net service, also provides the 1901 census online in its entirety as digitized versions of each page (http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/02012203_e.html). All individual records from the 1901 census cited here will refer to the census year (abbreviated by ‘CC’), district, subdistrict, page, and line from the manuscript census although all three databases have been consulted and cross-checked for each (i.e. CC 1901 Victoria, D9/03/44 Rhodes, Emily).
Between 1881 and 1901 in Victoria a growing proportion of its female population over 30 years were single. In 1901, 405 women or 11.8% of the population of women in Victoria reported themselves as ‘single.’

Table 3: Women over 30, Victoria, 1881-1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All women</th>
<th>Single women</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>2105</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>3439</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately half (200) reported holding one of 47 occupations, including a status that implies they had at one time laboured for wages such as ‘Retired,’ or had some kind of independent means, such as ‘On Income.’ The other half, or 205 had ‘None,’ ‘Not given,’ ‘Illegible,’ and ‘Unknown’ (blank) in their occupation field.

Table 4: Reporting of occupations by women in Athenas sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation listed</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some occupation listed</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired/independent means</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None/unknown</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These two groups – those with given occupations/means and those without – form the main division between the women in this sample. However, this seemingly simple distinction in the census does not produce a simple binary pair of identities for single women: economically dependent women in the family, and independent, self-supporting working women. Instead there was a range of identities that included both of these but also women who adopted a variety of other strategies of survival, including taking lodgings and clustering with female kin and friends.

Even discerning the relationship of women to paid labour from the ‘occupation’ category is problematic, as can be seen in the shape of occupation and income reporting in the census. Information about occupation, income, months worked, or type of work is very often simply missing for women in the 1901 census (as opposed to men, the majority of whom show data

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15 The four records excised from the count include 3 out of town guests included in the census and one woman whose ‘relationship to head’ is ‘wife’ but is recorded as single in the ‘marital status’ column, an issue in the original manuscript.

16 Source: 1891, 1891, and 1901 Census of Canada databases, Victoria, viHistory database (http://vihistory.ca/content/census/).
in these fields\textsuperscript{17}), part of the systematic under-enumeration and under-representation of women’s work noted by many historians using censuses in their work.\textsuperscript{18} Given the relatively high proportion of the sample subjects that report an income but did not record an occupation (or vice versa) – 55 or 13.7\% – it is difficult to make any firm claims about the lack of paid work or independent income for individual women who do not have either income or occupation explicitly reported. (The 20 women who report no income but live in lodgings also indicate a trend of hidden incomes). Fifty-four women (22\%) – all reporting ‘unknown,’ ‘none,’ or ‘retired’ as their occupation\textsuperscript{19} – also reported they lived on their ‘own means’ and five noted ‘retired’ in the ‘Employment’ column, designed to indicate the relation of the respondent to their employment (employer/employee, self-employed, etc).

Traditional female gender roles such as domestic care in the home – not seen as an occupational category – can account for some of this discrepancy, but the census-takers actually had a lot of opportunities to describe employment. There is a column for living on ‘Own Account’ (indicating self-employment in business or farming) as well as columns for being an employer or employee, performing work in a factory/trade outside the home, and work at a trade inside the home. Living on ‘Own Means’ was an acceptable occupation type as well. The census was thus surprisingly flexible enough to accommodate most roles women had – including women who primarily gave care but who did some form of paid labour – so we might reasonably interpret the failure to report this information as an indicator of the expectations of census takers (and reporting heads of households, or simply whomever answered the door to census takers) that women had no economic roles, as well as a possible reticence of women to report such. We need to keep in mind that female socio-economic dependence on the family was a common and acceptable ‘economic’ role for single women, and the maintenance of middle-class status may have prompted some respondents to not declare an occupation or income, to shore up an image of the successful male breadwinner.

\textsuperscript{17} Of 1852 single men at or over age 30 in the 1901 Victoria census, only 95 or 5.13\% reported ‘none’ or ‘unknown’ for occupation – with only one reporting independent means (‘on income’) and none ‘retired.’ 1901 Census of Canada database, Victoria, viHistory Project, (http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1901/victoria/), single males >=30 years. The counts were: 75 ‘unknown,’ 3 ‘none,’ 13 ‘not given,’ 3 ‘illegible,’ 1 ‘on income,’ and 0 ‘retired.’ (Note counts were corrected for database errors, which included 2 women.)

\textsuperscript{18} Kris Inwood and Richard Reid, “Gender and Occupational Identity in a Canadian Census” \textit{Historical Methods} 34/2 (Spring 2001), 58.

\textsuperscript{19} Except for the curious exception of one housekeeper: Isabella McMillan [252] who lived with her brother and possibly was giving an account of her role inside that household rather than an occupation outside of it. CC 1901, Victoria, D10/09/27 McMillan, Isabella.
Women who lived within their birth family home were likely to have little economic information provided – making it difficult to determine if such information had simply not been provided, or that they were indeed totally supported by their families. Women living with their widowed mothers, however, are more likely to report at least an occupation if no other details.

Of course, many single women did not have formal occupations, and depended on their families, kin, or other means for their support. The nature of this dependence was heavily related to the class and the economic means of their families as a whole. The fortunes made by the founding families of Victoria in business, resource extraction and land development gave them a prominent place in colonial and provincial politics and ascendancy in the social hierarchy of the city. The daughters of the second and third generation were able to maintain their social position and financial independence without marriage. Kathleen O’Reilly, Susan and Josephine Crease, and Clara and Mildred Tyrwhitt-Drake all reported neither occupation nor income, but as daughters of some the wealthiest and most socially prominent families in Victoria, the wealth they could access and their expected lifestyles of leisure and comfort set them apart from the majority of single women living at home.

To a lesser degree, women like the Carr sisters (Edith, Alice, Lizzie, and Emily) also benefited from the opportunities found by men like their father Richard Carr in trade in the new colony and city of Victoria. A trust fund paid for Emily’s art education abroad, and later in life Alice, Lizzie, and Emily lived respectable if austere single lives in homes built near each other, on small lots created from their father’s original land. For women without such class and economic advantages, it is apparent that many will have lived in very straightened circumstances, on small means with a widowed mother, or depending upon other strategies such as taking in lodgers. Although it is difficult to determine exactly the economic position of many women for whom no family incomes are given, clearly the ‘dependent’ single woman occupied a range of socio-economic positions.

What about the women who do have a means and amount of income recorded? This data when coupled with household-level analysis will allow a more in-depth look at the

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20 A interesting related problem is the lack of reporting of income by male heads – which helps in part to determine the class and social standing of their single adult daughters – which is missing for the most prominent of Victoria’s families, possibly from a sense of propriety on the part of census takers and/or privacy on the part of these families.
economic circumstances of approximately half the women in the Athenas sample, and give a productive sense of the strategies of survival employed by women through paid work and household composition.

From the list of individual occupations reported by women in the sample (see Table B in Appendix), it is clear that the majority of the occupations held by single women over 30 in the 1901 Athenas sample are in traditional ‘women’s’ work – in fact, single women’s work – domestic service, teaching, nursing, retail sales, clerical work, and the needle trades. There are also a few surprises: a ‘machine operator’ and ‘insurance agent’ held positions traditionally coded masculine. Several women were also employers or self-employed (22 or 5.4%), chiefly dressmakers, private arts teachers, and lodging-house keepers. But the overwhelming majority were employees.

The 47 individual occupations were distilled into 15 categories for easier analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Occupations reported in Athenas sample, by category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>#</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic/household service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle trades (employee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nun/missionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle trades (self-employed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private music &amp; art instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding/lodging house keeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial/administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer (arts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial/manual labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School matron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>193</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1901 Victoria, single/ever-single women were turning to – or mainly restricted to – traditional occupations for their strategies of survival. A comparison with women workers

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21 Journalism, although a draw for educated single women after 1900, was not one of the occupations held by single women in 1901. Married women were not formally barred from the teaching profession in 1901 (as several married women reporting teaching occupations indicates) but their numbers were low and it was a common practice of local school boards to required women to resign their posts upon marriage.
across Canada reinforces this concentration in traditional female occupations (see full breakdown in Table C in Appendix).

Table 6: Comparison: Distribution of women by leading occupational groups, Canada 1901 & Single women 30 and older, Victoria 1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All women, Canada</th>
<th>Single women 30 and older, Victoria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal service</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing and mechanical</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial and financial</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (incl. Managerial)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The inclusion of nuns in the professional category is probably not usual; however, because all of the nuns in the sample were actually performing professional occupations such as teaching and nursing, they are justifiably included here. The school matron and missionary in the sample both acted mainly as a social worker—a category otherwise absent in the sample—so are included in the professional category as well.

Here, single professional women in the sample greatly outstrip the national participation levels of women in professions, while manufacturing and personal service are lower by 10% and 16% respectively. The lower manufacturing level is not a surprise, due to BC’s economic makeup as a primary resource extraction province. The higher-end commercial and financial occupations have a high participation rate for single women, possibly a reflection of the higher wages and job stability attractive to this group of women most likely to need independent means of support; or, equally, the high numbers of women using such occupations to enable a choice of remaining single.

The difference in ‘personal service’ might be explained in several ways (including the low numbers of women as percentage of total population), but more likely in the drop-out rate of younger women from domestic service. Although domestic service occupations (servant, housekeeper, cook, governess) include the highest number of women in the Athenas sample, the percentage of women over 30 in domestic service was low. As we can see from Table 5, single women 30 or older make up less than a fifth of general domestic servants and under 30% of housekeepers. Only the more responsible and autonomous positions of cook and governess reach parity, but the number is quite small in any case. Although domestic service was considered an eminently respectable female occupation and generally offered the security of room and board (and thus less need for a large income) the conditions of work,

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Source: Prentice et al., Canadian Women, 475, table A.7: Distribution of women by leading occupational groups, 1901-1993 (percent); 1901 Athenas sample.
including long hours, isolation, lack of personal space, and the potential to be ‘on call’ 24 hours a day made service the least ‘independent’ of occupations and it was likely a less attractive choice as long as other options were available.\textsuperscript{23}

Table 7: Proportion of single women in domestic service, 1901 Victoria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>all</th>
<th>under 30</th>
<th>age 30 or over</th>
<th>age 30 or over as % of all single women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic/General Servant/Housemaid</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeper</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governess</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>222</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidently, single women who would not marry pursued – and required – professional and/or high-paying, traditionally female jobs. It should not be a surprise that they would concentrate in teaching and nursing; in fact, because single women were the great majority in all waged work before the Second World War, and married women were actively dissuaded from taking paid occupations, we need to see these occupations as \textit{single women’s work}. Thus women who chose or were compelled to be ever-single would simply keep working in them.\textsuperscript{24} The choice of an occupation that yielded security, survival, and even advancement should be seen both as an enabling condition and as a conscious strategy for the financial independence to remain ever-single.

\textbf{\textbullet} income and survival

Although wages in BC across these main sectors of women’s employment were usually higher than in eastern centres, systemic economic factors such as incomes pegged lower than a ‘living wage’ and discriminatory hiring/promotion practices could hamper the working

\textsuperscript{23} Helena Gutteridge, the Vancouver Correspondent to the Labour Gazette of 1916, named long hours and lack of leisure time as reasons why women avoided domestic work when other work was available. Department of Labour, \textit{The Labour Gazette: The Journal of the Department of Labour}, vol. XVI, May, 1916, 1191. The isolation and vulnerability of domestic service also carried a high risk of sexual harassment and assault. Karen Dubinsky finds that the numbers of domestic servants assaulted by their employers in her Ontario study was ‘striking’ and accounted for over half of workplace assaults in her sample. Dubinsky, \textit{Improper Advances}, 52-3.

\textsuperscript{24} Teaching was especially understood to be a single woman’s career; in 1925, 91 percent of women teachers in British Columbia were single – some 650 women. J.Donald Wilson, “Lottie Bowron and Rural Women Teachers in British Columbia, 1928-1934” in Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds. \textit{British Columbia Reconsidered} (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1992), 349.
single woman’s ability to stay independent. There was a great disparity in income earned by women in the sample, weighted toward the lower end with 121 women (29.9%) making 600.00 per year or less.

Given a minimum income of 300.00 as a baseline for a single woman living alone to survive (for details on this calculation see the Methods section in the Appendix), it is possible to look at the earnings of the 1901 Athenas sample with some context. With our baseline in mind, a re-arrangement of the earnings table to reflect increments of 300.00 would look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 300</td>
<td>53 36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-599</td>
<td>54 36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600-899</td>
<td>28 19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900 or more</td>
<td>12 8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The great majority of the sample had incomes that ranged from precarious to merely comfortable; only 8.2% had incomes that could be considered ‘affluent’ in terms of the baseline cost of living (three times larger). How did the set of 64 women who only just made the baseline (11 women) or less (53 women) survive?

Identifying high-earning occupations would seem to be one way to determine which women had better opportunity to make ends meet and who were likely to live precariously on or under the 300.00 baseline. Yet measuring income by occupation is not so straightforward when all women in the sample are polled for incomes, rather than calculating a simple mean wage. Most of the occupations had a wide range of wages reported. For example, the teachers ranged from 155.00 to 1200.00 for an average of 676.54. Yet this does not well reflect the actual incomes reported: all were over 600.00 except for two (both under 200.00); one, Isabel Ferguson, turns out only to have worked 5 months of the year, perhaps as a substitute or other special category. If these anomalous cases are removed, the mean is raised to 718.33.

Because the discrepancy was so wide in some areas, the mean is not very effective as a means of determining the economic viability of some occupations. Key individual occupations (along with all Retired/Not given/Unknowns giving incomes, for comparison) are highlighted with both mean and median in the following table to offer a clearer picture.
Table 9: Top 15 individual occupations reporting income plus 'Retired/Not Given/Unknown,' ranked by highest median income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th># in sample</th>
<th># reporting income</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school principal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1200.00</td>
<td>1200.00</td>
<td>1200.00</td>
<td>1200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding/Lodging House Keeper</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>900.00</td>
<td>900.00</td>
<td>900.00</td>
<td>900.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>155.00</td>
<td>1200.00</td>
<td>640.00</td>
<td>625.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milliner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>480.00</td>
<td>1000.00</td>
<td>692.00</td>
<td>600.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired/Not given/Unknown</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>1080.00</td>
<td>622.50</td>
<td>550.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stenographer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>300.00</td>
<td>600.00</td>
<td>480.00</td>
<td>480.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse/Trained nurse</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>720.00</td>
<td>424.17</td>
<td>465.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaker</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>200.00</td>
<td>1000.00</td>
<td>440.29</td>
<td>400.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saleswoman</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>300.00</td>
<td>500.00</td>
<td>395.00</td>
<td>390.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk (retail)a</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>180.00</td>
<td>480.00</td>
<td>353.64</td>
<td>360.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor/ess</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>275.00</td>
<td>450.00</td>
<td>365.00</td>
<td>360.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>240.00</td>
<td>400.00</td>
<td>320.00</td>
<td>320.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeper</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>120.00</td>
<td>500.00</td>
<td>265.50</td>
<td>260.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>120.00</td>
<td>900.00</td>
<td>355.00</td>
<td>240.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic/General Servantb</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>96.00</td>
<td>600.00</td>
<td>242.31</td>
<td>190.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caretaker/Janitor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>120.00</td>
<td>150.00</td>
<td>135.00</td>
<td>135.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes all iterations of ‘clerk.’

b Includes ‘housemaid.’

We can see that some occupations had a large income spread. Some occupations, like stenographer and saleswoman, had a better lower threshold but cap out earlier, at about half the top wage of teachers, milliners, and dressmakers in the sample. And other occupations, like teachers, actually had a high wage across the board (with the exceptions noted above). Although we have only one income given for boarding/lodging House Keepers, it would seem reasonable that the number of boarders would determine income and at an average of 20.00-24.00/month\(^{25}\) three to four boarders could offer a high income, depending on outlay for board and expenses.

If we look at the same data sorted by highest wage earned, we can get a better idea of each occupation’s potential for comfortable living. Again, a few anomalies (like the 600.00 wage – recorded as 50.00 per month – paid to domestic servant Josephine Newburger, employed at the Oriental Hotel) can skew the data somewhat, but it is possible to get a general view of how well certain occupations could support single women.

Table 10: Top 15 individual occupations reporting income plus 'Retired/Not Given/Unknown,' ranked by highest income reported

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># in sample</th>
<th># reporting income</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Highest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>155.00</td>
<td>640.00</td>
<td>625.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school principal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1200.00</td>
<td>1200.00</td>
<td>1200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired/Not given/Unknown</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>622.50</td>
<td>550.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaker</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>200.00</td>
<td>440.29</td>
<td>400.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milliner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>480.00</td>
<td>692.00</td>
<td>600.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>120.00</td>
<td>355.00</td>
<td>240.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding/Lodging House Keeper</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>900.00</td>
<td>900.00</td>
<td>900.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse/Trained nurse</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>424.17</td>
<td>465.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic/General Servantb</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>96.00</td>
<td>242.31</td>
<td>190.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stenographer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>300.00</td>
<td>480.00</td>
<td>480.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeper</td>
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<td>265.50</td>
<td>260.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saleswoman</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>300.00</td>
<td>395.00</td>
<td>390.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td>180.00</td>
<td>353.64</td>
<td>360.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor/ess</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>275.00</td>
<td>365.00</td>
<td>360.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>240.00</td>
<td>320.00</td>
<td>320.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caretaker/Janitor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>120.00</td>
<td>135.00</td>
<td>135.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Includes all iterations of 'clerk.'
b Includes 'housemaid.'

We can also see that the women who report an income but no occupation fare generally well amongst the reported occupations here, indicating for some, independent means was also a viable strategy of survival open to some single women.

In terms of pursuing survival or even prosperity, the incomes achieved by the women in the Athenas sample reflect the potential of some occupations to render a decent wage across the board, and others to fluctuate wildly. Even in careers such as teaching, nursing, and dressmaking, which offered a potentially high wage, some women made substantially less, making entrance to even these traditional, high-paid female occupations not a guarantee of survival for single women. Thus it is crucial to examine the strategies beyond income that women might have employed to survive. Because the 300.00 baseline used here is based on a single person’s support and maintenance, the issue of earnings and relative affluence becomes much more complex when dependents, partners, room-mates, and kin enter the equation, as they do in most households in the sample.
• household analysis

The use of household-level analysis gives us considerable insight into the economic means of wage-earning single women, beyond a simple measure of income level. Although I have relied on the census definitions of household for the sample, I also adopt Jane Wheelock and Elizabeth Oughton’s definition of the household as a basic social unit that is not coterminous with the nuclear family, “a unit that is bounded by common agreement on the management of its resources.”26 I have split the different living situations into categories reflecting the setting: familial, place of employment, institution, and lodgings. Women who were heads of household can be further broken down based on their situation, as independent (living alone), or living with (and possibly responsible for) kin and/or unrelated women (none with unrelated men who were not boarders).

It is through relation to head that we can begin to see the strategies of survival pursued by single women. Living with kin or roommates, finding affordable lodgings, or taking service in a home or institution were various means of providing shelter (and in some cases board as well) and relieving the need to provide independent housing from an often inadequate income. We also need to keep in mind that for single women living outside their birth families, living with kin (or other ‘respectable’ people) was not only a strategy of economic survival, but also of social survival. Living arrangements might also reflect ties of obligation, such as responsibility to give economic and/or care support to family members, especially aged parents.

Table 11: Relationship to head of household, Athenas sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of Household</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with kin</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarder or Lodger</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with employer (private home or institution)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inmate of care institution</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>405</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the full sample, we can see that there was a wide range of household arrangements (for a full breakdown by individual category, see Table D in Appendix).

Although ‘living with kin’ is much larger than any of the others and is responsible for over half of all cases, it breaks down into four significant categories: daughter of head, sister of head, sister-in-law of head, and other cognates (aunt, niece, cousin).

**Table 12: ‘Living with kin,’ Athenas sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daughter of Head&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister of Head</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister-in-law of Head</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognates&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>225</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Includes adopted and step daughters.

<sup>b</sup> Aunt, niece, or cousin of head.

‘Head of household’ would seem at first glance to denote independent living. Sixteen of 47 heads (34.0%) owned their own property, most often the house itself but in a few cases they owned large or multiple parcels of land and houses, supporting this image of independence. In fact, most heads lived with at least one other person, although that may have been a boarder or dependent kin. Kin relationships, especially between sisters close in age, may or may not have been that of equals. Emily Carr framed her family’s living and financial arrangements after her parents’ death as fully, even tyrannically, controlled by the eldest sister Edith, who was the head of the household in 1901. In some households, however, the distinction of one sibling ‘heading’ the house instead of others might be illusory. And non-kin shared arrangements were possible, such as pairs of female ‘roommates’ (or, possibly, partners) - although this was not a formal census category and can only be inferred in those reporting an ‘unknown’ relationship to head rather than ‘boarder’ (although ‘boarder’ could also conceivably mask more equal or intimate relationships).

Sixty-seven of 129 daughters of head (51.9%) lived with widowed parents (one lived with her father and his second wife). Only 32 daughters reported income (24.8%). Forty-one sisters-of-heads lived in a cluster with single or widowed siblings (in 13 cases all sisters), suggesting a retention of the family unit after the death of parents, or, depending on the date of immigration, group or chain migration as a family unit. It is also likely that in some of these households, sisters came out to take a domestic role in the households of bachelor brothers (which was precisely the case with Alice and Edith Ravenhill, who in their 40s came

---

to Vancouver Island to help their brother get established on a farm before the Great War.⁴⁸
Seventeen sisters lived with their siblings’ own families (spouse and children). Again, this
could have reflected an arrangement of respectable and affordable housing, and/or a role of
caregiver in the household, particularly with young children.

Interestingly, it turns out that for all three women who lived with sisters as heads, these
sisters were widowed with several adult and/or teenaged children (and one with another sister
listed as married). In Emily Rhodes’ case (age: 47, occupation: ‘retired lady,’ income:
500.00), she had previously lived with her mother (she can be found in her mother’s
household in 1891) and apparently joined her sisters’ household on her mother’s death.²⁹ The
other two women in this group can be found in the same respective households they occupied
in 1891, and thus this was likely a circumstance of a woman coming to live with sisters with
young children, in a caregiving and/or economic support role. Maria McDonald (39, not
given, 1080.00) had been living with her sister and her sister’s kids since at least 1891; her
sister was already a widow in 1891, with two small children.³⁰ It is likely that McDonald’s
salary, likely as a dressmaker (she was noted as such in 1891 but not 1901), was essential
economic support for the household, along with the income from several boarders.

The fourteen women who lived with brothers’ families can likely be grouped in two
categories – those needing the support of their brothers, and those supporting brothers
economically or domestically. (There is of course no reason why both could not be true in
some cases.) Neither Laura Bowden (44, 240.00) nor Mary Watson (31, 225.00), both
domestic servants, made a high enough income to live independently in comfort.³¹ Johanne
Behnson (54, unknown) lived with her widowed brother and his family. Behnson immigrated
in 1894, the same year that her brother’s wife died – it is likely she came out explicitly to
help care for the four children, then ranging from newborn to age 15.³² Both Gertrude
Woodward (30, teacher) and her sister Josephine (a 28 year old artist) lived with their

⁴⁸ Alice Ravenhill, Memoirs Of An Educational Pioneer (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1951), 170-1.
²⁹ CC 1901 Victoria, D9/03/44 Rhodes, Emily. 1891 Census of Canada database, Victoria, viHistory database
(http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1891/), Rhodes, Emily.
³⁰ CC 1901 Victoria, D1/03/09 McDonald, Maria. 1891 Census of Canada database, Victoria, viHistory
database (http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1891/), McDonald, Maria.
³¹ CC 1901 Victoria, D20/13/17 Bowden, Laura; CC 1901 Victoria, D19/02/29 Watson, Mary.
³² CC 1901 Victoria, D11/09/27 Behnson, Johanne. A death certificate for ‘Lizzie Behnson’ in 1894 is likely a
match for Elizabeth Behnson, her sister-in-law, which also matches the year of birth for the youngest child.
brother, his wife, and 10 children aged 1 to 16. Gertrude’s teacher’s salary likely fleshed out his income as a florist. The help the two sisters could give in domestic matters was likely important as well. It is not possible to determine whether Gertrude immigrated in 1898 for the better opportunities for teachers, or to help out in her brother’s household – or both.

It seems clear through this analysis of household composition that *interdependence* is the model that we should rely on here, rather than a traditional one of independent residence based on a White middle-class, married male breadwinner experience. And this bears out when we compare single women and single men over 30.

**Table 13: Single people over 30, relationship to head of household, 1901 Victoria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Household</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with kin</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarder or Lodger</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with employer (private home or institution)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inmate of care institution</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>405</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>1812</strong></td>
<td><strong>97.9%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For men, two other distinct categories completes the list: [Business] Partner of head, 27 (1.5%) and Other, 12 (0.6%).

It turns out that not a great deal more men were heads of household (11.6% women, 19.1% men). And an almost comparable percentage of heads (44.7% women, 49.9% men) actually lived alone, as opposed to with kin, boarders, or other arrangements such as in an institution (a head with servants was counted as living ‘alone.’)

The main difference is in the large category of ‘unknown’ for the men that seems to represent a gap in categories for census-takers. The near majority of these households are either ship’s crews or working-class men living together in groups. The lack of a clear category for either seafaring crew or ‘roommates’ seems to be reflected here. Only nine women are in this unknown category, several of whom could be considered a ‘roommate’ (though this is impossible to confirm). The lack of a category that does not hierarchize household members hampers our understanding of the mutuality of these relationships, and renders invisible a possible category of survival relationships for single women.

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33 CC 1901, Victoria, D5/13/31 Woodward, Gertrude.
34 Source: 1901 Census of Canada database, Victoria, viHistory Project, (http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1901/victoria/).
35 This ‘unknown’ group could better be described as the core itinerant male population studied by Bob McDonald in *Making Vancouver*, 105-6, 224.
- earnings and household composition

The dynamics of household composition reveal even more when cross-referenced to income. (See Table E in Appendix). Here we will take a closer look at the low and high ends of the earnings scale in particular. The lowest earnings category deserves special attention, because it can tell us much about how women with inadequate wages both survived, and by implication, managed to remain single.

Four women with incomes under the 300.00 mark were heads of households. Lena Brandson (45, janitor, 150.00) and Charlotte Cameron (47, caretaker, 120.00) both lived alone. Strategies for survival in Brandson’s case are unknown, as she leased her small 4-room house; Cameron however leased 8 acres with 2 barns or outbuildings, suggesting she farmed or kept livestock for income. The other two women in this group shared their households with ever-single sisters. Georgina Davey (47, unknown, 200.00) shared the 6-room house on 200 acres she owned with sister Mary (37, unknown, no income reported), employing a Japanese servant for 180.00/year – indicating some external funds coming into the household, from rents, produce, or other sources. And Harriett Fox (41, music teacher, 120.00) lived with sister Catherine (38, teacher, 155.00) and had a boarder in the nine-room house Harriett owned, another source of income to top up their combined 275.00 per year.\textsuperscript{36}

Five women in this lowest income category were boarders. Boarders would generally pay a flat fee for room and board, avoiding the expenses of maintaining a household on their own. Depending on the rate, a woman with a relatively low income could, as a boarder, have her basic needs taken care of. Mary Mitchell (30, dry goods clerk, 240.00) lived in a large boarding house where the majority of the 21 boarders who reported employment were clerks and merchants, including Maud Elliott (30, dry goods clerk, 480.00), suggesting this was a typical and respectable living arrangement that was affordable within Mitchell’s salary. It is not known how much of her 20.00 per month went to the boarding house – she may have had little left for personal items, clothing, savings, or leisure. But at double Mitchell’s salary, Elliott was probably quite comfortable if she paid a similar rate.

Sixteen women in the low-income bracket lived with kin – daughters, sisters, cousins or nieces. The nine daughters-of-heads may have found themselves on some sort of spectrum

\textsuperscript{36} The 1902 city directory entry beside their address at 36 Mason Street is “St. Catherine’s Home for Old Ladies, Miss Fox, matron” – another hidden source of income? 1902 Victoria Directory, viHistory Project (http://vihistory.ca/content/bd/1902/streets/market.aspx).
between not earning enough for independent support and contributing support to their parents. Ella Conlin (32, tailoress, 275.00) lived with her widowed mother, sister Catherine (unknown occupation, age 23) and brother Thomas, a policeman earning 750.00 per year. In the circumstances, her income likely merely contributed to a collective comfortable status that she would have been hard-pressed to replicate on her own. Similarly, four other women lived with one or both parents, with adult brothers and/or boarders contributing to a comfortable to large family income.

Four of these women appear to have a more vital role to play in the family economy. Minnie Lakin’s (32, dressmaker) 240.00 income was likely vital to the household, with aged retired parents and a brother making only 360.00 as a teamster. Ella Nelson (31, nurse, 60.00) was the only visible means of support for her widowed mother and 28-year old sister Louise; it is possible that the notation for income here meant per month rather than year (or 520.00, within the average of nurses in the sample) but just as likely there was another external source of income, in rents or from her father’s will. Ida Roper (35, dressmaker, 240.00) is also the sole visible source of income for her aged parents (her father a retired carpenter) – interestingly, she married in 1917 after both her parents had died, hinting at daughterly support in domestic as well as economic terms.

Of the five women listed as ‘sister to head,’ two appear to have lived in a dependent situation, living in their brothers’ homes with their brothers’ young families. Three could perhaps be seen to have more of a situation of shared responsibilities than dependence. Catherine Fox (38, teacher, 155.00) and Emily Woods (42, art teacher, 200.00) lived with sisters who owned property - Catherine with Harriett as mentioned above, and Emily with Lillie (49, income unknown). Josette Tolmie (31, nurse, 85.00) was part of the large Tolmie farming household on the family estate, with her five siblings. It is possible her very low salary reflects some sort of training wage, as her older sisters May and Jane show no income, perhaps indicating their role in keeping the domestic side of a farm operating. In any case, as heirs of an old Hudson’s Bay Company family (which also produced their brother, prominent Victoria doctor and later premier Simon Fraser Tolmie) and its large estate, this household would have been at least quite comfortable if not affluent.

And the one woman listed with an ‘unclear’ relationship to head, Agnes Gibson (music teacher, 240.00) appears to have lived with another ever-single woman (Abbie Gardiner,
teacher, 800.00), possibly as a roommate or companion – both such definitions outside of the parameters of the census.

Women living in an institution (as employee) or in an employer’s home only appear in earnings categories of 600.00 or less. Their lower wages would be compensated by no or few living expenses, although the trade-off in restricted living space, heightened surveillance of leisure time and activities by employers, and tendency to be ‘on-call’ beyond a regular working day resulted in a less than ideal situation and contributed to the numbers of women who left domestic service for the expanding clerical and retail sectors. Of the 25 women in the under-300. group who lived in their place of employment, five were housekeepers, four were nurses, and 15 domestic or general servants. Two women whose relationship to head was ‘unknown’ had occupations of nurse and housemaid, making them likely live-in help as well. In the 300.-599. group, 13 women lived with their employers, either within the institution in which they worked or in family homes as domestic servants. Two nurses and a governess lived in the homes where they gave care, and eight women were listed as ‘servant or domestic,’ with three having ‘housekeeper’ as their occupation, one ‘housemaid’ and four ‘domestic’ or ‘general’ servants. The two women who lived in their institutions included one ‘employee’ who was a missionary at the Chinese Rescue Home, and a ‘matron’ who lived and worked at a private boys’ school. The more specialized and higher-status work indicated by ‘housekeeper,’ ‘governess,’ ‘missionary,’ and ‘matron’ was reflected in the wages earned.

Similar class distinctions start to emerge across the 300.-599. and 600.-899. categories. The household composition of daughters-of-heads also reflects a class division in the occupations held by household members as a group. In the 300.-599. category, the daughters-of-head included clerks, tailor/dressmakers, and a music teacher. Their families consisted of a widowed mother or both parents (usually retired) with adult siblings. Family members were clerks or hotel proprietors, or in the construction trades, mining, or needle trades.

Above them, in the 600.-899. group, all the ‘daughters of head’ lived at home with a widowed or both parents, with one or more adult siblings and more than one income earner in the household. Generally, they present a middle-class profile in types of occupations in the household and incomes reported. They were teachers, nurses, and bookkeepers, and in the case of Florence Goward (38), an occupation of ‘Private Labour’ was noted for an income of
600.00. Their families included law students, teachers, librarians, bookkeepers, retail and financial clerks, and small business owners.

The heads of household in these two categories either reveal independent (lone) residence, or a clustering of women. Of the three heads in the 300.-599. group, two lived alone – Margaret Holmes (62, nurse, 400.00) and Amy Sweet (55, nurse, 500.00). The age of these women is an interesting possible factor in their ability and/or decision to live alone: perhaps they were without living siblings, or perhaps they had amassed some capital over their careers to enable independent living. The third, Alice Williams (36, tailor, 450.00) lived with a boarder who is also in the sample (Bertha Davis, 32, tailor, 450.00). The similarity in age, occupation, and income indicates perhaps a relationship of companionship as well as economic contribution.

For the 600.-899. group, Ethel Duffie is the only one who lived alone. Fanny Archbutt (45, music teacher, 600.00) lived with one boarder, fellow teacher (and cousin, as revealed in her obituary) Mabel Messenger. Ann Calder (61, unknown, 600.00) also had female boarders, a widow with an adult daughter. Abbie Gardiner (33, teacher, 800.00) lived with her ‘roommate’ or companion Agnes Gibson (see above). And four lived with their sisters (one also with a younger brother, though she remained the head of the household).

We might expect the highest-earning women to have the highest incidence of truly independent living arrangements. But this is not the case. Obligations rather than economic dependence seem to have shaped many of the living arrangements of this group. Significantly, none of these lived in an institutional setting or in an employer’s home (although Dolly Grooms, an actress living with the theatre group at the Savoy Theatre, might fall under this category). Of the 12 high earners, only one was head of household – Grace Beira (30), a lodging house keeper (900.00) who lived alone with one young male Chinese servant, Sing (144.00) – oddly enough, no boarders were reported in her household.

The four boarders all lived at good addresses with other boarders of similar class and incomes, indicating a strategy of respectable, even genteel living, with perhaps an eye to lessening isolation in a group environment. Dolly Grooms, whose listing was ‘unclear,’ should be considered a boarder, as she was an actress living with other performers in the Savoy Theatre complex (though it is likely she was only sojourning in Victoria with the theatre group). In the case of Annie Glass (48, insurance agent, 1200.00) who lived with her
nephew and his young family, it is hard to say what motivated this living arrangement – perhaps close emotional ties to this nephew, or a desire for respectable accommodation amongst family (or – this could be in reality her house, rather than that of the 28 year old carpenter making less than she did – 900.00). Perhaps she was an important source for income for the family.

Both ‘daughters’ in this group lived with widowed mothers and siblings. Selina Frances Smith (39) made a good income (900.00) as a music teacher to the elite of Victoria, yet both her mother’s and brother’s work in the commercial bakery business founded by her father was the primary means of support in the household. (Smith continued to live in the family home, Seaview, for the rest of her life, inheriting it on her mother’s death.) In Agnes Deans Cameron’s case (37, high school principal, 1200.00), she was the primary economic support for her mother and ever-single sister Jessie. Elizabeth McCallum, although apparently possessing a fine independent income (her occupation was ‘retired lady,’ 1000.00), lived with her uncle and aunt – as she was the same age as her aunt (60) and only 10 years younger than her uncle, this may have been a relationship of compatibility and mutual support. Maria McDonald (39, not given, 1080.00) lived with her widowed sister and two kids, a second sister listed as ‘married,’ and several boarders. It seems likely McDonald was a key supporter of the household, which continued after the sister’s death in 1902 (the 1902 directory had Miss McDonald as head at the same address).37

One group that offers only a shadowy presence in the Athenas sample is prostitutes. It is impossible to tell from the census which women in the sample, if any, might have made money offering sexual services, as no occupation such as ‘prostitute’ or the contemporary term ‘sport’ or ‘sporting woman’ is reported.38 But there are some clues as to who might have been in the sex trade. No less than nine single women from the sample occupied two blocks of Chatham Street in the heart of Chinatown. This section between Shore Street (right on the water of the harbour) and Douglas Street (where it turned into a street of working-class homes) had a high number of young (mostly under 30) single women living alone, or in pairs, among houses with multiple Chinese and Japanese bachelors. All nine women from the

37 Elizabeth Fraser, died 28 Feb 1902, San Diego, CA, USA, 48 years of age. Ross Bay Cemetery plot P114EF. Ross Bay Cemetery database, City of Victoria Archives (http://web.city.victoria.bc.ca/archives/rosssearch.asp).
38 However, many ‘sports’ can be found in Vancouver’s Dupont Street in 1901, and I will be discussing prostitution in more depth in chapter three.
Athenas sample that lived here leased houses from two to six rooms, but all lived alone except Marie Burman (30, unknown), who lived with her 21-year-old single sister. Five were listed in the 1902 city directory; they all had arrived before 1896 (with one exception, Katherine Lee, 35, arrived 1900), leased houses of six rooms (suggesting that some might have had unlisted employees or ‘inmates’), and were the five oldest women as well (aged 34 to 44). Interestingly, the four not listed in the city directory were only recently arrived (between 1898 and 1900) and others were listed as living at their addresses in the 1902 directory. This indicates to me a transience typical of younger women in prostitution, while the more-established women may have been madams or at least found a stable position in the sex trade.

race, class, and household composition

Clearly, household-level analysis reveals some of the strategies of survival for single women, and the class hierarchy that single women fit into. However, an equally crucial factor in these women’s lives was race. The fluidity of census categories that expressed ‘race’ between 1881 and 1901 renders a complex picture for women who can be traced through all three census years. Born in Victoria in 1862, Seraphina Montero’s ‘origin’ was listed as African in the 1881 census, her father’s birthplace as Portugal/Azores in the 1891 census, and her ‘colour’ as Black and ‘race’ as Negro in the 1901 census. Thus the racial categorization of the women in this sample could fluctuate over time. The 1901 census gave several fields under which racial and national origin could be expressed. ‘Race,’ ‘Colour,’ and ‘Birthplace’ used in combination give us a good look at the racial/cultural origins of the sample. The field ‘Nationality,’ although it sounds useful, was given as ‘Canadian’ for 381 of 405 entries despite the fact that only 186 women claimed Canada as place of birth. It seems this field was mostly used to indicate a permanent resident status (or intention to be so), even for those who had arrived in the county only a year or two before.

The ‘Colour’ field gave one of four choices: Black, Red, Yellow, or White – for people of African, Aboriginal, Asian, or European descent. As Constance Backhouse reminds us, these indicators were highly value-laden and artificially pre-determined the categories of
people to be encountered. The ‘one-drop’ paradigm (enumerators were instructed that any non-White heritage made the individual that ‘colour’) and incredibly limiting schema of the colour determination renders a realistic count of Métis and mixed race (let alone non-Asian, Black, White, or Aboriginal) individuals impossible. However, it does help identify individual women who – even if in the second or third generation of White intermarriage – may still carry the signifiers and social stigmas of Aboriginal ancestry in particular.

Table 14: Place of birth, Athenas sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe/Russia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Possessions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Sea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>405</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Starting with ‘place of birth,’ we can see the sample is overwhelmingly of Canadian/British background (for a full breakdown by country and by province see Tables F & G in the Appendix). At first glance, the vast majority of women in the sample come from British states, either the United Kingdom itself or its colonies. European heritage generally appears to predominate, with only six women listing their place of birth in South America, Asia, South Asia, Africa, or the south Atlantic. However, even this small number is misleading – in fact, only the two women born in Asia (China) and the one born in St Helena were not also ‘White’ in the ‘Colour’ field. Except for the latter, the women born in the various British possessions and Africa (which was likely also from one of the British colonies) were all White and all listed their ‘Race’ as ‘English,’ suggesting they were daughters of British colonists or officials in these states. The woman born in Argentina, Mary Baillie, was of Scots descent, suggesting her origin from a similar sojourning family, although Argentina was a Spanish colony at this time. With the exception of the two women born in China and one in St. Helena, all women of colour in the sample were born in Canada or the United States.

Table 15: ‘Colour,’ Athenas sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>405</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the ‘Colour’ field, given the ‘one-drop’ rule, any Aboriginal ancestry, however distant, would determine the field as Red. Thus Simon Fraser Tolmie, a future BC premier certainly accepted as ‘White’ in political affairs, was listed as ‘Red’ in the 1901 census, along with his sisters May Fraser Tolmie and Jane Work Tolmie, all grandchildren of pioneer immigrant John Work and his Mètis wife Josette Legacé. Their mixed White-Aboriginal heritage made them ‘Red.’

Table 16: Race (descent)a, Athenas sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>83.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern European/Russian</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>405</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Either fully or partially that heritage, as reported on census.

In the census ‘Colour’ was further refined through the ‘Race’ field, with “persons of mixed white and red blood” to be indicated by the European origin of the father (i.e. ‘Scots breed’) or in the case of a wider origin, ‘Other breed.’40 (For a full breakdown see Table H in Appendix.) Thus the female descendants of the Work family were listed as ‘Scots breed,’ presumably from the original pairing of the Scot John Work and Mètis Josette Legacé rather than an accurate description of their own paternity. The tendency to trace origins through the father – as was done in the 1881 census – is curiously reversed here, with even the least Aboriginal ancestry from grandmothers causing these women to be counted as non-White. The Tolmie sisters, Sarah Finlayson, and Lillias Grahame, who could only claim one-eighth Aboriginal descent through their common grandmother Josette Legacé Work, were designated as ‘red’ and (all but Grahame) as ‘Scots breed’ – meant to denote the ethnic mix

of Métis individuals. Self-declaration (or declaration by others in the household) might have determined Selina Frances Smith’s notation under Race as ‘English’ and Lillias Grahame’s as ‘Scot,’ although they came from Black and Aboriginal families respectively.41

**Black women**

The majority of the seven Black women in the sample were born in the US, with one from St Helena, one Ontario, and one born in Victoria. Jennie Weeks (50, general servant, 96.00), Helena Maria Timms (84, general servant) and Clara White (37, domestic servant, 336.00) all lived in their employers’ homes. All worked for prosperous families.42 Timms can be traced through three successive censuses, remaining with one family through its various permutations – first with a widow and her daughter in 1881, then in 1891 in the daughter’s home with husband, child, and mother; then in 1901 still with the daughter’s household (and she is 84 at this point, so the nature of her ‘service’ seems likely to have been minimized from earlier years and her position more that of an old family retainer). She passed away in 1905 in the Aged and Infirm Women’s Home in Victoria.

Minnie Williams (30, unknown) and Georgia Scudder (36, unknown) were heads of households, and both lived alone in small, three and six room leased houses on Chatham Street, the street identified earlier as likely to be the red light district of the city.43 From the racial and class profiles of this one street, it would seem that these two women lived in a cheap, even ostracized section of town, possibly as prostitutes, or with prostitutes as neighbours, but in any case within the means of working-class single women and (usually Asian) men.44

The two women living with kin both enjoyed better socioeconomic circumstances. Seraphina Montero (38, unknown) lived with her brothers and married sister (and the sister’s family). Her brothers held railway jobs traditionally open to Black men – Joseph was a CPR porter, and Francis was a teamster and expressman; her brother-in-law George Carter was a

41 CC 1901, Victoria D15/22/26 Grahame, Lillias M(ary); D02/26/42 Smith, Selina Frances.
42 Timms’ and Weeks’ employers made 1800.00 and 2000.00 respectively, and although White’s employer gave no income amount, she could afford to pay White and a Chinese cook 300.00 or more each.
43 CC 1901 Victoria, D14/16/23 – Williams, Minnie; D14/16/42 – Scudder, Georgia.
baggage man. Only George’s earnings (400.00) were given, but it is likely that a combination of the male earnings sustained a decent standard of living for this household.

Selina Frances Smith (39, music teacher, 900.00) was one of the most prosperous women in the Athenas sample. Not only did she make a very good income as a private piano instructor to the elite families of Victoria, her family also ran one of the pioneer manufacturing concerns in the city, an industrial bakery begun by her father Moses Roe Smith in the 1860s. Smith lived in the family home ‘Seaview’ on toney seaside Dallas Street with her mother (who took an active part in the business) and her younger, single brother Hamilton (who reported 2000.00 in earnings). Smith, who had been educated at Victoria’s private girls’ school Angela College and then conservatories in Toronto and Leipzig, clearly had the wealth and status to access the education and social contacts to become a prominent music instructor whose recitals attracted the cream of Victoria society.

Asian women

Tracing women of Asian descent is particularly problematic. For example, the 1901 census missed Lim Soo, who claimed in 1966 to have lived in Victoria all her life. The two women of Asian descent in the Athenas sample found themselves in very different circumstances – Ah Yut (38, unknown) was an inmate of the Chinese Rescue Home and Lang Lin Ying (51, unknown) lived in the home of her brother-in-law, a successful merchant. Both were fairly anomalous situations for Chinese women.

Ah was the oldest of five women, four Chinese and one Japanese, who lived at the Chinese Rescue Home, a shelter and school established in 1888 by Methodist missionaries to ‘rescue’ Asian girls from prostitution and slavery, and to inculcate Christian conversion and European domesticity as routes to new lives as Christian wives and mothers.

45 See notations in the 1901 Census of Canada database, BC GenWeb (http://www.rootsweb.com/~canbc/1901vic_cen/div09/d09p04.htm). In 1901 Joseph, the head, had ‘crazy’ listed under ‘infirmities.’
47 For the 1967 Centennial of Confederation, the BC Centennial Committee awarded Pioneer Medallions to B.C. residents who were either born in Canada or were a resident of Canada prior to 1 January 1892. Lim Soo was a single woman born on or before this date (her birthdate is not given). Canadian Confederation Centennial Committee (1966-1967), Pioneer Medallion Application Forms, BCA GR-1489, box 16 file 11, Lim Soo.
Lang immigrated to Canada in 1892 at the age of 42, at some point joining her brother-in-law Quan Leong and his wife Ng Moi, who came in 1858 and 1866 respectively (it is unclear whether the wife is her sister). The gap in years between their immigration dates is interesting – was Lang caring for parents or relatives in China (although traditionally daughters-in-law were expected to take up that duty)? Was she a member of one of the marriage resistance sisterhoods?49 Why would she – or Quan – go to the expense of paying her passage to Canada? Although no earnings are given for anyone in the household, Quan’s status as a merchant implies relative affluence.

**Aboriginal and mixed-race women**

What is striking about the women reporting Aboriginal descent is that more than half of them were daughters and granddaughters of Hudson’s Bay Company officials who settled in Victoria during the fur-trade era with their Aboriginal or Métis wives and aspired to the status of landed gentry as part of the colonial elite.50 Lillias Grahame, Sarah Finlayson, and Jane, May, and Josette Tolmie were all granddaughters in the large Work clan, granddaughters of Josette Legacé and John Work, HBC chief factor and largest landowner in early Victoria. Jane Fraser (42, unknown) was the daughter of Paul Fraser, another HBC chief factor. Only Kate Pamphlet (34, unknown) and Cecilia Thomas (35, servant, 180.00) are listed as ‘North American Indian’ – the rest are ‘Scots Breed’ or ‘Other Breed,’ denoting mixed-blood heritage (with the exception of Lillias Grahame, who lists her race as ‘Scot’ but is also listed as ‘Red.’)

Only three of the seven reported occupations and incomes – Caroline Reed (31, housekeeper, 500.00), Cecilia Thomas (35, servant, 180.00), and Josette Tolmie (31, nurse, 85.00). Both Reed and Thomas lived in their employers’ homes. The rest all lived with their families – five with widowed mothers, one with father and mother (Lillias Grahame, 31, unknown), or (in the case of the Tolmie sisters) on the family estate with their brothers. Sarah Finlayson (40, unknown) lived in a privileged household with two Chinese servants, and the Tolmie sisters – Josette, Jane (38, unknown), and May (40, unknown) – lived first at the


family estate ‘Cloverdale,’ and then their own residence of ‘Cloverbrae.’ Josette Tolmie’s low income could reflect a training wage (or possibly a monthly rather than yearly amount), and her nursing work was unlikely to have been needed by the family but rather the family circumstances allowed her to pursue this occupation while her sisters likely held roles of domestic supervision.

Certainly in the case of the Tolmie sisters (and presumably the rest of the Work clan) comfortable means can be assumed. The question then is the extent to which these women felt the effects of racism in their marriage choices, at the same time that the wealth of the founding families of Victoria could enable comfortable single lives. Sylvia Van Kirk contends that in the second generation of the families of HBC and Aboriginal marriages such as the Work clan, the daughters (the mothers of the Tolmie sisters, Sarah Finlayson, and Lillias Grahame) had a distinct advantage over their brothers (who faced problems making successful careers and marriages in their class), on the whole making successful marriages to White elites. Colonial demographics worked to their advantage; their fathers’ positions and wealth and their own training in elite British colonial homes allowing them to overcome racial prejudice and make a 100% marriage rate in this second generation.\textsuperscript{51} Van Kirk notes that in the third generation (the one that appears in the Athenas sample), who “in terms of blood and socialization” had little left of their Aboriginal heritage, the Tolmie and Finlayson sons made greater successes in professional and public attainments, while the marriage rate of the daughters was not as high as the second generation.\textsuperscript{52} Whether this was a result of some lingering note of racialization, the vagaries of the marriage market, or the security that allowed a single life, is unknown. The very use of ‘Red’ for the third-generation Work descendants suggests that some consciousness remained, if only in the minds of those reporting to census-takers.

Without diaries or other autobiographical sources, we cannot know the daily and enduring effects of racialization in the lives of women of colour identified in the Athenas sample. Although some working-class women occupied niches in domestic service traditionally open to women of colour, others were more conventionally middle class. In the

\textsuperscript{51} Van Kirk, “Tracing the Fortunes,” 178.
\textsuperscript{52} Van Kirk, “Tracing the Fortunes,” 178 n53.
end the range of socio-economic statuses among women of colour in the Athenas sample is similar to White women, as is the range between choice and necessity to be single. But intangible is the effect of race discrimination on their ‘prospects’ – for secure employment, for supportive networks, and for marriage.

Instances of erasure of racialization in the census and other sources reflect the fact that passing was a key theme in many of the lives of women of colour in the Athenas sample. As Van Kirk notes, “there was little room for a middle ground: these children could not build an identity that acknowledged the duality of their heritage.” In their obituaries, the race of women of colour was almost never referred to or even made possible to infer – principally by the erasure of mothers and grandmothers for women of Aboriginal descent. Sarah Finlayson’s obituary is filled with an account of her father’s life, with no mention of her mother’s history or origins, or even full name. May Fraser Tolmie’s obituary mentioned that she was, on the maternal side, granddaughter to John Work. No hint of the Aboriginal ancestry in these families is made, unless the reader might have understood that many pioneer members of the HBC had made strategic and personal alliances with Aboriginal trade partners through ‘country marriages’ with Aboriginal women. Kate Pamphlet is mentioned as being “connected with the early history of this city, her parents having been residents of the Province from the earliest times.” Selina Frances Smith’s father is noted as a pioneer manufacturer without mention of his African-Canadian origins. In the census, Smith – like Lillias Grahame – gave her ‘race’ as something that denoted whiteness (‘English’), possibly due to the fact her parents were Ontario-born and thus possibly of Black Loyalist roots. Only Helena Maria Timms’ obituary mentioned something that would indicate her racial status – her birth in the south Atlantic island of St. Helena, a British possession with a large population of African descent.

The social and economic success of Selina Frances Smith demonstrates how performance of middle-class/elite values and the money to do so can mitigate the negative effects of racialization. The Tolmie sisters also enjoyed the status and social connections to

53 Van Kirk, “Tracing the Fortunes,” 150.
55 Obituary, Kate Pamphlet, Victoria Daily Times, 16 June 1923, 9.
be successful socially – but did they encounter a declining ability to marry well? It may be that increasing numbers of ever-single children amongst subsequent generations of key Victoria pioneering families formed by White-Aboriginal marriages could be read as a factor of growing racism as Victoria matured; women of Aboriginal background that did not have the wealth and connections of the Work descendents might have found their prospects dwindling by 1901. However, the high esteem that Victoria apparently held for women like Smith and the Tolmies (demonstrated by May Fraser Tolmie’s front-page obituary in 1934) lends weight to the argument that prosperity for some women could offer enough room for choice.

Beyond the census: ever-single women

The Athenas sample as a whole offers us a snapshot of the conditions under which single women were living in the spring of 1901. But for those women who can be confirmed as ever-single, obituaries and archival materials offer some further insight into their strategies for survival. Several women’s obituaries uncovered occupations and enterprises not visible from the 1901 census records. As suspected, many women with ‘unknown’ occupations may have indeed had pursued formal employment outside giving domestic services to their families. Sarah J. Murton (1870-1926) had been a teacher since at least 1892. In her obituary, Rebecca Groves (1845-1925) was revealed to be a music teacher and pianist. Coming to Canada from England in 1893 to join her niece and her niece’s new minister husband (likely upon the birth of their first child), Groves followed the family through various parishes on Vancouver Island, teaching music and likely handling the music for church services and events.

Some women operated businesses, a fact not made clear in the occupation notation for at least one woman. Rose Jane Soper (1862-1933) was apparently one of Victoria’s “pioneer business women,” having opened the Marvel Millinery Store upon her arrival in the city in

58 CC 1901 Victoria, C2/02/41 Groves, Rebecca; Obituary, Rebecca Groves, *Victoria Daily Times* 23 September 1925, 9.
1896; her 1901 census record listed her as a ‘Dry Goods Store Employe[r].’ In 1901 she was the head of the household, with her widowed brother and young nephew living with her, and she owned a seven-room house as well as a store (presumably the Marvel or another business). According to her obituary, from 1921 until her death in 1933 she conducted a ‘dry goods business.’

Other women may have switched professions after the census. Catherine Cossar (1865-1926), a ‘general servant’ in 1901, was named a “highly esteemed member of the nursing profession.” Julia Devereux (1826-1920), whose occupation was appropriately yet somewhat irrelevantly listed as ‘Living on Own’ in the 1901 census, was revealed to have operated an employment agency “for many years” by the time of her death in 1920. And at least two women became business owners after the census. Fanny Archbutt (1855-1933) established the successful Poplars School for Girls in 1905 with her younger cousin Mabel Messenger, who was living with her in 1901. Born in London and educated in private schools in England and on the Continent, Archbutt was well travelled and an accomplished pianist and singer. “Many members of the present social set” were pupils at the Poplars School, which Archbutt ran for 28 years. After the death of her grocer father in 1901, Fanny Elizabeth Ward (1851-1937) established a general store with residence above, living with her two sisters. She was still proprietor of the business when she passed away suddenly in 1937, aged 85.

As age and infirmity advanced, it is reasonable that ever-single women would seek the assistance of networks of kin and friends for physical as well as social support. A few looked to institutional solutions to their needs, but the majority lived out their lives in their own or others’ homes. Of the 67 women whose obituaries give this information, 16 (23.9%) remained in the same homes they occupied in 1901, but 51 (76.1%) did not. And 27 women

59 The entry is unclear but given that she owned a store property, ‘employer’ makes more sense than ‘employee.’ CC 1901 Victoria, D13/04/28 Soper, Rose T.
61 CC 1901 Victoria, D2/22/22 Cossar, Catherine; Obituary, Catherine Cossar, Victoria Daily Times 3 April 1926, 10.
62 CC 1901 Victoria, D6/05/09 Devereux, Julie; Obituary, Julia Devereux, Victoria Daily Times 10 March 1920, 17. ‘Living on Own’ only appeared twice in the census, the other for a widow.
were identified as living with various kin, usually brothers and sisters, but also nieces and
nephews. One lived with a friend. It would appear that the interdependence found in the 1901
households continued to be a primary strategy for ever-single women.

Several women sought institutional solutions for housing, care, and community. Although the overwhelming majority of women whose obituaries can be traced died at home
or the home of relatives, 10 women were recorded in their obituaries as having lived in care
institutions, seven in the Aged and Infirm Women’s Home, two in private nursing homes,
and one at Tranquille Sanatorium. Although neither their dates of entry into these homes nor
their personal circumstances (such as illness) is known, some patterns do emerge in a closer
look at the women who entered the Aged and Infirm Women’s Home. In 1898 the Aged and
Infirm Women’s Home (AWH) opened on McClure Street, moving to larger facilities on
Rupert Street in 1907.65 The AWH was the first institution caring exclusively for women in
Victoria, earlier philanthropic efforts having been focussed on the elderly remnants of the
bachelor miners that thronged BC in the gold rush years. Entering the AWH was likely a
strategy for the frail, the ill, and those without kin support.

Most of the women who can be traced to the AWH did not live at home with family even
in 1901. Helena Maria Timms (1816-1905) and Teresa White (1825-1911) both servants in
1901, lived in the AWH in the first decade of the century.66 As long-time domestic servants,
both over age 75 in 1901, the Home was perhaps a good place for these women, who likely
had few means, had no homes of their own and no apparent kin in Victoria, and would seek
retirement from the demands of service with advanced age.

A second group lived in the home in the late 1920s and early 1930s. As a self-employed
dressmaker who boarded in 1901, Annie Jenkinson (1861-1934) may have found the AWH a
similar and amenable living situation.67 Margaret Holmes (1838-1932) a nurse making
400.00 (and the only one of this group reporting income in 1901), lived alone in 1901 in a

65 City of Victoria Archives website, The Reference Desk, Frequently Asked Questions
[http://www.city.victoria.bc.ca/archives/archives_reffaq.shtml]. There is also a history of the AWH in the City
of Victoria Archives Library: Mrs. I.A. Gould, “History of the Aged and Infirm Women’s Home,” City of
Victoria Archives L0205.
66 CC 1901 Victoria, D10/16/49 Timms, Helena M.; Obituary, Helena Maria Timms, Victoria Daily Times, 25
September 1905, 8; CC 1901 Victoria, D12/23/48 White, Teresa; Obituary, Teresa White, Victoria Daily Times,
8 May 1911, 18.
67 CC 1901 Victoria, D06/19/31 Jenkinson, Ann; Obituary, Annie Jenkinson, Victoria Daily Times, 29
November 1934, 13;
small four-room house which she owned; because she had some property at her disposal, her move to the AWH might have been a strategy for comfort and security in advanced age. At the time of the census, Julia Saunders (1835-1930, lodging house keeper) headed a house with her nephew and six boarders. Already 65 in 1901, she may have soon found the work of a boarding house was no longer tenable, and as her nephew had died in 1913, she may have had no kin to reside with.

Only two women in the AWH group lived with kin in 1901. Alice Miller (1849-1932) lived with her sister and a niece in 1901, as well as several boarders. Alice Miller’s sister passed in 1907, and her niece is difficult to trace. It is likely that Miller had no other kin to call upon for support in Victoria. In 1901 Sarah Carlow (1853-1929) lived with her newly-widowed mother and newly-married brother, as well as a sister, a cousin, and a boarder. Her mother died in 1907, and her cousin in 1912, while her sister had likely married by then. However, both her brother and sister outlived her and died in Victoria, suggesting that they lived in the city at the time of Carlow’s tenure in the AWH. It may be that the ties of kinship were not sufficient for Carlow to find a place with them, they were unable to accommodate her for economic or other reasons, or she preferred the Home.

It is possible that some of these women sought the potential community in a collective care institution such as these. The advantages of community life were also found by the striking number of nuns (25) in the Athenas sample, nearly all members of the Sisters of St. Ann, who played a vital role in education and medical services in Victoria. As a lifelong personal commitment and survival strategy, the convent offered many opportunities for women: professional training and employment in teaching, the arts, and nursing; the opportunity for community service; religious vocation; and as a collective, the benefits of communal living and support. Sister Mary Bridget (1847-1933) came to Victoria in 1866,

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70 CC 1901 Victoria, C1/07/20 Miller, Alice A.; “Aged Resident Dies” (Alice Miller), Victoria Daily Times, 2 December 1932, 15.
71 CC 1901 Victoria, D13/05/05 Carlow, Sarah E.; Obituary, Elizabeth Carlow, Victoria Daily Times, 31 July 1929, 15.
taking up duties as a teacher at St. Ann’s convent. She then was sent to the US for nursing training, returning to Victoria to be the first superior of the new St. Joseph’s Hospital, founded by the order in 1874. She then gave up the position to another, and she would be superior again from 1904 to 1918, when age and infirmity caused her to retire and become a patient herself, cared for in the religious community she built.73

Property ownership was also a traditional strategy of creating income and security pursued by ever-single women. It is also likely that many women who had ‘unknown’ occupations and earnings derived income from property: inherited, shared with kin, or purchased themselves. Sixteen women (4%), all heads of households, owned property in the Athenas sample; 10 of those were confirmed ever-single and one confirmed married post-census. Several more were likely to have inherited family property on the deaths of their parents or siblings, or to have purchased other properties with those resources post-census.

Women who were ‘daughters of head’ and had ‘unknown’ occupations and income in 1901 – in other words, an apparent image of dependence – could transition upon the deaths of parents into independent heads of household or take on responsibilities for siblings. Pauline Lange (1860-1933) either purchased or inherited from her parents a block of stores in the main business district, with her residence above. The income from the rents was sufficiently large to allow her many acts of anonymous philanthropy, providing fuel and food to needy families.74

The four ever-single Carr sisters all employed various property holding strategies that reflect some of the varied uses of property for ever-single women. Heirs to their merchant father’s modest six-acre estate, the sisters divided the original family property into parcels for their own use in close proximity to each other, breaking up the pastureland into city blocks. In 1913 the two eldest sisters, Edith and Lizzie, built a substantial-sized house at 231 St. Andrews Street. The third sister, Alice, built a small house at 218 St. Andrews Street, which she put to use as a schoolhouse for her private teaching business.75

73 “Pioneer Sister Called to Rest,” (Sister Mary Bridget) Victoria Daily Times, 11 January 1933, 1.
74 “Victoria Woman Philanthropist Died Yesterday” (Pauline Lange), Victoria Daily Times, 20 March 1933, 15.
Emily, the youngest and most well-known of the sisters, built a house with suites to set up as a boarding house in 1913 (known as the ‘House of All Sorts,’ chiefly from her stories about the fifteen years she spent as a landlady there). The plans included a studio to support her work as an artist, although the vagaries of being a landlady in slow economic times meant she spent many years barely scraping a living, even turning part of her original living space into another flat to rent and renting her studio and personal rooms out during the Great War. She eventually sold the house in 1936 in partial trade for a small private residence for herself. Poor health prompted Emily to move in with Alice in 1939, taking over the old schoolrooms as a studio. Although her sisters appear to have spent out their lives in their respective houses, at the end of her life Emily switched from home and kin to an institutional solution for her care, moving to St. Mary’s Priory home for seniors which was located close to Alice’s house.

Some women also held properties as investments, often looking outside urban boundaries. Some two-dozen BC single women appear as owners of land on the tax rolls of the Abbotsford-Sumas-Matsqui district between 1900 and 1919, most of whom lived in urban areas and held rural land as investments. The speculation fever in Vancouver that fuelled its pre-Great War boom also attracted single women looking for profit and security. In a study of Crown land purchases in 1912 at the height of the boom, Robert A.J. McDonald noted a ‘surprisingly high’ number of female speculators, including nurses, clerks, and stenographers as well as single women giving no occupation.

Victoria women also sought rural land purchase as a potential home and source of self-support. Agnes Deans Cameron owned a fruit farm in the Kootenays and advocated the purchase of small landholdings in BC’s interior for single women: “To the woman of small

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79 McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 139. ‘Unmarried women’ applied for 7.8% of the land, nurses 0.8%, and clerks and stenographers (listed as ‘partly women’) 8.6% for the week of 3 October 1912. Table 5.5, Occupations of land purchase applicants in British Columbia for the week ending 3 October 1912 (by quantity of land applied for), 140.
capital and big brains, the fruit lands of British Columbia to-day offer an ideal career.” In 1921 the Victoria Local Council of Women echoed Cameron’s assessment, recommending the purchase of “the small British Columbia farm of from three to five acres” for “women, who, through force of circumstances, are obliged to fight life’s battles alone and are looking for some occupation or investment that will provide an income for the future.” This suggests a fluid boundary between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ for some ever-single women. Although I found high numbers of ever-single women who are recorded as dying in Victoria (132 of 175 or 75.4% – which does not confirm but would imply a high number of women who lived in Victoria since 1901), some women could look beyond the city limits for some of their strategies of survival.

For many of the ever-single women who can be traced, no one occupation or source of income formed their livelihoods. Instead, a cluster of strategies was used by these women, from property ownership to small business ventures to bringing in boarders. Others, notably those privileged enough to access professional training in nursing and teaching, attained something closer to the ideal middle-class male life model of youth, training, and career in a single profession. And still others did live out their lives within the homes of their birth families, in some cases the very same house. Many of these women may have been ‘dependents’ in the classic sense of not bringing any income of their own into the family; but the contributions they made to the household of a less tangible or measured sort, including domestic work, caregiving, and entertaining, should not be dismissed. What the household-level analysis of the Athenas sample reveals is that rather than a simple dichotomy of total dependence on family or total independence from family or others, ever-single women pursued multiple strategies of survival that together are better characterized as a model of interdependence that is a valuable framework for studying single women in the past.

The class of single women

Although it is clear that the snapshot of the 1901 census does not tell the whole story of all single women in Victoria, it does offer many insights into how mature (ever-)single women survived outside marriage, and many outside the support of their birth families. The

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80 Vera Webster, “Superfluous Women,” interview with Cameron in London (UK), incomplete news article, no provenance, ca. 1910-11. BCA, Newspaper clipping files, Agnes Deans Cameron.
81 “Can Women Farm Here Successfully?” The Victoria Daily Colonist 23 February 1921, 4.
multiplicity of occupations held and households inhabited by these single women invites questions about their class identification.

As David Camfield notes, “class formations develop from the relations people have to the conditions of production and other classes” and that “class relations are anchored in the places where paid work is done but are also very much present in the community and household spheres of social life.” Although a full construction of the class relations of ever-single women, especially those that flow from the community and household, cannot be undertaken here, I do want to offer some brief comments on the possible hierarchy of occupations that ever-single women pursued, as well as some insights into how women might have seen their occupational identities. In the next chapter (‘Making it in Vancouver’), we will be able to look further at some potential relations between women structured by class and status.

Although clearly there was a hierarchy of income and working conditions experienced by the women in the Athenas sample, how that compares to historians’ classifications of male occupations merits consideration. For example, Robert A.J. McDonald constitutes the male ‘professional’ class of Vancouver as including lawyers, judges, doctors, clergymen, architects, notaries, and teachers. Of this list, the only cross-over in the Athenas sample is teachers; female lawyers and doctors do not appear, though they would start practicing in Vancouver after 1910 (Mabel Penery French was the first to be called to the bar in BC in April 1912 and several doctors appear in the city directories), and Janet Gilley could still be heralded as the first female lawyer in New Westminster to set up her own practice in 1924. The female proportion of the ‘male’ professions – especially doctors and lawyers – would continue to be small through the Second World War and beyond. The ‘female’ professions into the interwar period are usually seen as the triad of teaching, nursing, and (office)

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83 McDonald, Making Vancouver, 125
84 The Sunday Province (magazine section), 1 February 1925, 5. In fact, Gilley was the 15th woman called to the bar in BC, but one of only seven (out a total of 23) called before 1930 that practiced for an extended period. Joan Brockman and Dorothy E. Chunn, “’Imagine That! A Lady Going to an Office’: Janet Kathleen Gilley” in Jonathan Swainger and Constance Backhouse, eds. People and Place: Historical Influences on Legal Culture (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 153.
85 Female doctors and lawyers only reached 30% and 34% of their respective professions in 1993. Prentice, et al., Canadian Women, 357.
clerical. In fact, these can be seen as the top tier female occupations, even though in a male occupational hierarchy they would be considered middle-class at best. This shift is one of the vital differences in assessing the class positions of ever-single women.

What would a specifically ever-single female occupational hierarchy look like? At top of the scale, arguably, is the privileged ever-single woman who does not work for wages at all, enjoying her family’s wealth and substantial inheritance when parents are gone. This group of ever-single women can be related more directly to male-based measures of class and status, as their livelihoods are linked to their family’s (father’s) class position. I see this group as a kind of shadow of the ‘business leaders’ — in effect, owners of the means of production — that comprised Vancouver’s upper-class economic strata as well as the highly-placed entrepreneurs, magistrates, and former HBC factors who formed Victoria’s elite.

The best correspondence of the top tier for ever-single woman who worked for wages was the middle-class to upper-middle-class professional, a ceiling if you will based on the limits of pay, authority, and capital accumulation available to women, even in the most lucrative and high status professions. These would include teaching, nursing, bookkeeping, social work, and journalism (the last two also not yet formally present in Victoria in 1901, although the missionary at the Chinese Rescue Home offered services akin to social work, and the nuns also would have had larger institutional roles in spiritual and charity work). Women in managerial positions ranging from supervisors of hospitals to state institutions can also be slotted here. The key to this stratum, I argue, is not only education and the drive to professionalization but also some direction over the conditions of work.

Entrepreneurs and small businesswomen, such as self-employed dressmakers, held ownership of the means of production and direction over their working conditions, although their businesses usually clustered in the labour-intensive retail sectors, and so could be

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86 This group numbered 1484 (23%) of Vancouver female wage earners in 1911. The breakdown of 6452 female wage earners also included: domestic and personal service: 2720 (42.2%) and trade and merchandising: 1075 (16.7%). McDonald, “Working Class Vancouver,” 41.

87 Although some single women did hold property and pursue capital loans and investments, their numbers were quite small; for example, hovering between 4.2% and 4.6% of all women over 19 before 1901 in Victoria, and 6% of all female investors over late nineteenth century Victoria. See Peter Baskerville, “Women And Investment in Late-Nineteenth-Century Urban Canada: Victoria And Hamilton, 1880-1901” Canadian Historical Review 80/2 (1999), 205, Table 6, and 211, Table 9. Baskerville notes that with the relaxation of the bar against married women controlling property in the 1880s, single women might have gained in contributions from inheritance and family assets: “Parents of single women may have been more willing to bequeath assets or contribute to a single daughter’s financial needs without worrying as much about the possible predatory control of a future husband.” Baskerville, “Women And Investment,” 195.
vulnerable to economic downturns. Parallel are the private arts instructors whose position in the community could vary based on their skill, social connections, and fees.

Clerical work as a broad category straddled the line of respectable self-support. Although highly trained stenographers could be well paid, the general run of clerks and other white-collar workers hovered at the edges of the middle class, and their paths for advancement were sharply truncated into ghettoized pools of labour. The distinction between a typist, a retail clerk, and a skilled industrial worker had more to do with conspicuous consumption, image, and working conditions than pay. Retail work, notoriously badly paid and demanding long hours, was also particularly about personal dress and comportment, encouraging the “the dilution of working-class behaviour and appearance” and requiring a blending with middle-class and elite clientele.

Other working-class occupations in the service industry and small-scale needle trades industries (such as those in Victoria) saw a range of conditions and wages. However, the majority of women in ‘unskilled’ industrial occupations experienced the worst conditions and income. These were the occupations targeted by reformers, who were “heavily reliant on language and imagery that reduced women to perpetual girlhood” while they called for wages that “included almost nothing beyond the barest sustenance.” Employers used the excuse of the non-self-supporting female worker to pay women in these occupations even less than a subsistence wage. These conditions made these occupations the least desirable or even possible for a self-supporting ever-single woman to take.

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89 Sangster, Earning Respect, 64-6.
90 Suzanne Morton, Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 146.
91 Prentice et al., Canadian Women, 132-4.
93 Kessler-Harris, A Woman’s Wage, 15-18. Creese, “Politics of Dependence,” 369. The 1907 Toronto Bell telephone operators’ strike commission found that although “almost half of the workers were self-supporting
And domestic service, that paean of the middle-class reformer, should be seen as distinctly at the bottom of a scale of class distinction and support for independent single lives. Yet that did not mean that domestic service was also the bottom of respectability. Here, the problem of not being able to make enough to meet living expenses was solved (nominally) by the live-in nature of domestic service, and its character as household-based domestic work matched precisely the core definition of respectable: the subordinate domestic female. That this was the occupation least likely to create economic stability and independence for single women was part of its appeal to reformers; it is more likely that the steady demand for domestics and the guarantee of subsistence was the draw for the many single women in domestic service in the 1901 Athenas sample.

Notions of respectability, comportment, and ‘suitability’ (in veiled or overt race and class criteria) hover as constitutive elements throughout this proposed scale, modifying access and opportunity to class mobility. Kathryn McPherson notes that entry to nursing programs through this period was highly classed and raced: “the young, single White women from a range of class and ethnic backgrounds who filled the apprenticeship programs were expected to embody the social standards of bourgeois femininity.” Dionne Brand notes that up to the Second World War, 80% of Black women in Canada worked as domestic servants, as they were on the whole barred from the more well-paid middle-class occupations such as clerical work. Added to this was the vitally important element in any occupation for the ever-single woman: its potential for self-support. This generally equated to the ‘middle-class’ occupations that paid well and looked well. Notably, the most stable occupations required levels of education and support normally available only to middle class or elite women: professional (teacher, nurse) and office-clerical occupations required secondary or other specialized training; ‘accomplishments’ teachers such as private music and arts teachers (as

and that most of the remainder supplemented household incomes with their earnings, [management] maintained that there was no cause to increase their wages, since the operators were ‘ready to get married’ after a short period of employment.” Strange, Toronto’s Girl Problem, 41.

96 Katrina Srigley notes that many single women in the interwar period who did not attend high school used Shaw’s Business School to move into ‘business’ work. Katrina Srigley, “Help Wanted – Single, White and
well as governesses) required education in the arts – a classic elite female course of study – and respectable social credentials; and small business opportunities through self-employment in a respectable women’s line of work (dressmaking, millinery) required some capitalization as well as training. The very ability for some women to train for and work at a ‘respectable’ job or vocation should be considered an important class privilege, especially for those who could access professional training. The support of family was also a crucial element, both in allowing and paying for a daughter’s training for some kinds of work.

◆ occupational identity

An important correlation to occupational position is occupational identity. Alice Kessler-Harris notes that an orientation “based on work-related consciousness rather than on domestic concerns, may have been typical of female workers who did not believe their work status was temporary.”97 Given the numbers of single women not reporting occupations in the 1901 census (even when occupations or incomes can be determined in other sources) suggests that, unlike men, working ever-single women might not automatically craft their identities around their occupations, and instead we need to look for a spectrum from indifference (or reticence, even shame?) to strong identification.

Some findings from an earlier census may help frame the issue. In their study of the industrial workforce in the 1871 census returns for Ontario, Kris Inwood and Richard Reid compare individual returns from the population schedule with the industrial schedule that reports ‘proprietors’ of industrial establishments.98 This method uncovered a large number of women who were considered proprietors but reported no occupation on the population schedule: only two-thirds of single women proprietors reported their occupation.99

Two contrasting types of female proprietors offer some insights into why single women might or might not identify with their occupations. The high correlation of single

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97 Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage*, 64.
98 The definition of ‘proprietor in the enumerators’ instructions state, “where one or several persons are employed in manufacturing, altering, making up or changing from one shape into another, materials for sale, use or consumption.” Inwood and Reid, “Gender and Occupational Identity,” 59.
99 Two-thirds of singles and widows, and one-third of married women reported an occupation, unlike male proprietors, who had nearly 100% reporting occupation, with the small exception of some of the oldest men, who presumably saw themselves as retired. Inwood and Reid, “Gender and Occupational Identity,” 65.
dressmakers (average age 30) reporting an occupation (92%) is attributed to dressmaking’s potentially sustainable output, undertaken over a large part or whole of the year; its status as a definable occupation outside family subsistence production; and its potentially independent income and living. In contrast, weaving was a very rural occupation; was mostly a part-time, seasonal activity often undertaken as part of a diverse family economy; and was done between tasks to run the household and farm. These reasons, the authors speculate, contributed to why weaving, with the exception of high-output weavers, was not as well-reported as an occupation (44%).

These factors contributing to a distinct occupational identity for single women suggest some insights to the patterns of occupations reported in the 1901 Athenas sample, as well as bring up questions of how single women’s class identities might have been structured. As we have seen, unlike most men, single women might very well report no occupation – fully 50.4% of women in the Athenas sample report no occupation, while only 5.13% of single men at or over age 30 report ‘unknown’ or ‘none.’ And as noted before, discerning the relationship of women to paid labour from the ‘occupation’ category is problematic, given the trend of ‘hidden incomes’ that I uncovered as well as the systematic under-enumeration and under-representation of women’s work across most censuses in this period.

To identify those women that might have had strong occupational identities, I cross-referenced the women who did report occupations in the 1901 Athenas sample with the 1902 Victoria city directory (compiled in 1901) and available as a searchable database at the viHistory site. We should note that this directory was not comprehensive, for not all heads of household in Victoria were listed, as is clear when surveying the heads of household in the Athenas sample: only seven of 25 heads with ‘unknown’ occupation (28%) are listed. Instead, it is a valuable tool for assessing who might have desired their names and occupations to appear in the directory, although it is impossible to determine – much like the census – how and by whom such information was reported. So we can assume that those who actually made it into the directory were there from a combination of support, recognition, and/or inclination to identify with their occupational identities.

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100 Inwood and Reid, “Gender and Occupational Identity,” 64, 68.
101 1901 Census of Canada database, Victoria, viHistory Project, (http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1901/victoria/), single males >=30 years.
Eight of 22 women (37%) listed as ‘Employer’ or having income ‘On Own Account’ (generally meaning self-employed) had entries in the 1902 directory. They were employed as dressmakers, milliners, music/arts teachers, and lodging house keepers. Not surprisingly, they were all heads of household but two – one with her sister and brother-in-law’s family; the other, Emily Woods (42, art teacher, 200.) lived with her older sister (thus more likely shared the house). Of the self-employed needle trades and music/arts teachers, four of eight self-employed dressmakers (50%) are listed, one of one milliners (100%), and two of three music/arts teachers (67%). In other words, the majority were listed in the 1902 directory, indicating a strong identification with their occupational identity as independent business or cultural producers – as well as a need to advertise.103 Again, heads of household predominate.

For the professions of teaching and nursing, the numbers reveal a differential. Only six of 26 nurses (23%) were listed, and nine of 19 teachers, including principals (47%). Aside from private-duty nurses, few of these women would have the need to advertise their services, removing that reasoning from any decision to be included.104 And only one is head of household out of the whole set – Amy Sweet (55, nurse, 500.) – an interesting finding.105 In fact, only two teachers in the entire sample are heads of household and neither is listed. The listed teachers were all boarders (three) or daughters (six). The acceptance of teaching as a proper middle-class female profession, its visibility in the community, its standard steady months of work, and its high pay must have contributed to these women reporting their occupations. The lower reporting for nurses may reflect its lower status and community visibility.

And for retail and clerical occupations, three of 15 retail (including all types of clerks and sales – 20%) are listed, and two of 5 for office-type clerical (stenographer and ‘Agent

103 Interestingly enough, the one person I would have assumed would be in the directory – Selina Frances Smith – was not, although her brothers and her mother were present. Her strong identity with her occupation in her archival fonds indicates that perhaps this was a case of elitism: so well-known that she did not require an entry in a city directory? Or were other mechanisms of propriety (or again, who reported the household to the directory takers) operating here?

104 It appears that teachers were listed by independent canvass like other occupations, as listings by school do not have nearly enough entries to have been taken from the school board or other staff registers. However, judging by the numbers, it appears as if someone listed all the nurses at the Provincial Royal Jubilee Hospital. 1902 Victoria Directory database, viHistory Project (http://vihistory.ca/content/bd/1902/).

105 Relationship to household for listed nurses and teachers: 7 daughters, 2 nieces, 3 boarders, 2 ‘nurses,’ and 1 unknown.
Insurance’ – 40%). Again the numbers were lower for the group with a more tentative claim on middle-class respectability, image, and pay.

It is also interesting that for all ‘daughters of head’ reporting an occupation and listed in the directory, all but one had other family listed as well – the exception is Georgina Richardson (40, dry goods clerk, 400.) though her father’s hotel (and her residence), the Windsor, is listed. This suggests a certain family outlook of acceptance of these daughters working, as well as a sense of their own social standing, to have reported (or been included) in the directory. Overwhelmingly, family members whose occupations are listed were teachers, business owners, or in higher-status clerical and sales positions – indicating a middle-class standing for the entire household that might support the occupational identity of these single women.

As we have seen, a simple of examination of occupation and income does not tell the whole story of ever-single women’s strategies of survival. The household in particular was a crucial site for economic and social support and class identity, especially for underemployed or non-employed women. At the same time, the ever-single woman who did not live with kin needs to be studied as a participant in class formations in her own right.

These comments offer an interesting picture of class identity that is neither constituted as flowing only from males nor compromised by assumptions of women’s ‘eventual’ marriage and domesticity that leads scholars to miss considering the full implications of a lifetime of waged work and self-support for women. Clearly, it is possible, with a great deal of cross-referencing, to identify whole cohorts of ever-single women; to start to understand the class situation of single/ever-single women, what is sorely needed is research that looks at the conditions of ever-single women’s work and survival over time and in comparative Canadian centres with different economies. The systemic structural dependence built into Canadian labour relations - the deliberate use of the figure of the ‘dependent daughter’ to not pay a living wage to women - meant a border around occupations that could allow women to live single (and allow women who stayed single to live). How this operated, or was mediated and resisted, across the major self-supporting occupations for women is a much-needed study. Such a longitudinal and comparative study must look specifically at ever-single women’s work, taking the single woman worker not as the ‘marrying woman’ - and thus attending only
to the conditions and consciousness of those that eventually married - but the ever-single woman. At the same time, we need to see how some ever-single women were participants in the structured dependence of other single women, as employers and managers, as social reformers calling for surveillance of single women’s activities, and civic authorities shaping the legislation that governed wages and conditions of work.

This brief attempt to envision a class structure for single women underlines the importance of status. The class of a single woman can be measured in great part by her economic means and occupation - the data captured by census takers - but also needs assessment through hierarchies of education, family, association, and, importantly, moral standing - which requires a different empirical approach. The next chapter turns to this question of status - the element of community approbation so vital for single women in particular, especially in regards to perceptions of their moral/sexual conduct, that governed their access to the training, jobs, and housing that enabled their strategies of survival and success.
Three: Making it in Vancouver: Respectability, status, and the single woman

Fewer welcomes await the prodigal girl than await the prodigal son. No pretty clothing to replace her out-dated gown, no coveted ring, no feast of friends and neighbors who stand by ready to help her to a new start in an honourable and better way of life.

– Margaret Bayne, *Roses in December*, 185.

Two women in the 1901 Athenas sample exemplify an interesting problem in determining the class and social status of single women. Maud Murphy was a 32-year-old dressmaker making 800.00 per year in 1901, and lived at a good address, a boarding house shared by other young single women with relatively lucrative occupations (actress, milliner, typist), all of whom made more than herself. And Alice Seymour was a 39-year-old boarding house keeper (no income given) who owned her own 11-room house on a respectable lower middle-class street as well as other property. Her lodgers were similar to Maud Murphy’s housemates: single, under 30 years, they included a student, a nurse, an actress, and a dressmaker – the last two making 1000.00 each. Both these examples seem to present the ability of single women to access good incomes and maintain respectable, comfortable living conditions – signs of stable or even upwardly mobile class privilege.

Until, that is, I discovered that Maud Murphy was also/actually a prostitute, her home one of the finer ‘parlour house’ brothels in Victoria, and Alice Seymour one of its elite madams.¹ This knowledge interrupts the vision of the comfortably-situated single woman; now, while still possessing the outward signs of class privilege, she was vulnerable to police harassment and incarceration and was an object of vitriol as the source of sin and immorality in society – the ‘social evil.’² A mere change of occupation – not residence, income, or consumption – embeds these women in an entirely different matrix of social relations than I had assumed. The power of sexualized norms of respectability to determine social status is one that had unique capacity to shape the social, legal, and material conditions of single women’s lives.

² Valverde, *Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 77.
Thus in this chapter, I turn from an examination of material conditions to questions of status. And for that, there is no better place in British Columbia to investigate this than Vancouver, the booming, status-conscious young city that had surpassed Victoria in population in 1901, and by the First World War had established itself as the permanent economic and social hub of British Columbia. Vancouver society was structured as much around systems of association and prestige as relationships to the means of production, as Robert A.J. McDonald argues in his important study of the city, *Making Vancouver.*

A classic Weberian definition of status includes “an effective claim to social esteem in terms of positive or negative privileges” founded on ‘style of life,’ education, occupational or hereditary prestige, privileged modes of acquisition, and status conventions or traditions. Class and status greatly influence each other but are not identical; high income or occupational attainment may not bring status prestige, and high status can be held without wealth. How status might function in specific sites of social interaction important to single women is the aim of this chapter. Using Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of the ‘field’ (*champ*) and ‘symbolic capital,’ I will discuss two very different – but inextricably linked – sectors in the social matrix of Vancouver: Vancouver’s ‘High Society’ and Vancouver’s *demimonde* or criminal underclass where resided the prostitute.

As Toril Moi explains, a field is “a competitive system of social relations which functions according to its own specific logic or rules”; it is a game, “a competitive structure, or perhaps more accurately a site of struggle or a battlefield.” Participants evolve and uphold personal habits, tastes, and standards appropriate to the field – what Bourdieu calls *habitus* (“a system of dispositions adjusted to the game”). Vancouver ‘Society’ is a good example of such a field, and as we shall see, ever-single women play a key role as legitimizing agents in its structure.

In Bourdieu’s theory, there are “two kinds of wealth circulating in society – economic wealth and symbolic wealth. Both forms can be inherited and accumulated and both are

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3 McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 149.
highly unequally distributed.” Economic wealth “imposes invisible constraints by systematically structuring people's access” to symbolic capital; however, sheer attainment of economic capital does not deliver symbolic capital. ‘Symbolic’ capital includes the possession of symbolic values that operate as “mechanisms of selection and consecration” to a particular field such as credentialing, comportment, consumption, and cultural competencies (“the stock of cultural goods which are socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed”).

Toril Moi notes that “powerful possessors of symbolic capital become the wielders of symbolic power” and are able to shape the boundaries and composition of their fields: the doxa.

The right to speak, legitimacy, is invested in those agents recognized by the field as powerful possessors of capital. Such individuals become spokespersons for the doxa and struggle to relegate challengers to their position as heterodox, as lacking in capital, as individuals whom one cannot credit with the right to speak.

As we will see, well-placed ever-single women were spokespersons for the doxa, not just of the specific fields in question here, but also the wider field of gender.

Moi argues that gender itself is a field, or more accurately, a part of the ‘whole social field’ – one that overlays and interlocks with others, and one that has its own rules, capital, and habitus deeply shaped by heteropatriarchal norms. Gender is also always a socially variable entity, one that “carries different amounts of symbolic capital in different contexts” and modifies the effects of other kinds of symbolic capital. Thus while women circulating in a field of high status such as Vancouver ‘Society’ might have amassed the symbolic capital appropriate to membership, their participation was shaped by the demands of an intertwined or overlaying field of gender. And the key symbolic capital of the gender field was respectability.

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11 Moi, “Appropriating Bourdieu,” 329
For all women, the essential element of respectability was adherence to heavily policed sexual norms. ‘Respectable’ was the vital category that encompassed a web of classed, gendered, and racially-construed behaviours, comportment, dress, residence, occupation, and public activities that summed up a ‘reputation’ that was to be explicitly nonsexual while properly feminized: potentially available to men, attractive to the male gaze, and subordinate. While economic capacity structured a woman’s ability to survive without marriage – and to make lifestyle choices about consumption, residence, and leisure – reputation and respectability mediated her access to economic and social opportunities, including social networks and associations that made up the fabric of social life in Vancouver.

Respectability shaped who could remain single (including access to respectable employment and housing), and who must remain single (significantly, the ‘fallen’ woman). Race, class, and reputation intersected in determining who had access to opportunities for ‘respectable’ singleness, and who escaped stigmatization and why. Definitions of respectability also modified who was more vulnerable to rape or harassment. Aboriginal and Black women have been historically constructed in Western industrializing societies as already, always-sexualized beings, while White middle-class women have been generally seen as icons of ‘purity’ and meriting legal and social protection – “dependent upon their willingness to personify a narrow vision of respectable white femininity.” Economic privilege could offer respectability to racialized women such as Selina Frances Smith in the Athenas sample, while (as we will see in this chapter) other women of colour with few economic means were relegated to the standing of prostitute.

Joan Sangster reminds us that the terms of ‘respectable’ could also change over time: “increased consumerism after the 1920s set more materially based standards of respectability,

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14 Such protection was not to extend to women’s relations with their husbands, however, and magistrates were reluctant to step in on domestic violence cases in BC’s early history. Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 174. Jean Barman notes the discursive regime erected around Aboriginal women “so profoundly sexualized aboriginal women that they were rarely permitted any other form of identity” and that, “by default, Aboriginal women were prostitutes or, at best, potential concubines.” Jean Barman, “Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900” *BC Studies* 115/116 (Autumn/Winter 1997/98), 264.
over which women had less control.” Sangster also cautions that “even though notions of appropriate gender roles and symbols of status changed, one constant remained: women had a tremendous responsibility for protecting respectability but often had limited means and resources to do so.”

Ultimately, the dilemmas and rewards of social status based on respectability depended greatly on outside acknowledgement of one’s status by peers and social and state authorities. This discursive regime surrounded single women especially, and was particularly powerful in Canada, the UK, and the US in the decades between the first incursions of women into higher education and industrial work in the 1880s and the end of the Great War. But single women were not merely recipients of regulation and objects of the reforming gaze. As we will see in this chapter, ever-single women professionals also took roles of discursive leadership, from the (literal) policing of morals on the streets to the shaping of the highest echelons of the social elite.

This chapter explores the discursive mechanisms of status for single women, concentrating on two representative fields in Vancouver for which extant individual-level historical records exist with which to construct critical case studies: Vancouver high Society at the eve of the Great War, and the ‘sporting women’ of Vancouver’s demimonde concentrating on the turn of the century. I will begin with a discussion of Vancouver high Society, that exclusive group of high-status individuals that maintained its own boundaries through discursive regimes that some single women penetrated and also helped maintain. At the other end of the social spectrum was the ‘sporting woman,’ the prostitute on the margins of urban life – or was she? An interesting question I will discuss in this section is the possible effect of economic success and community stature for (ever-)single women in the sex trade at the turn of the century.

A close look at these diverse status groups in Vancouver reveals interesting conditions, even contradictions in how single women might negotiate the status hierarchy in a growing urban centre. Most significantly, this chapter emphasizes the centrality of single women to (all levels of) society and the leadership that single women bring to both crafting and policing

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the borders of status groups. Like the previous chapter, this study again relies heavily on group data at certain points in time (police records, the census, and directories), so the analysis will discuss the ‘single woman’ generally as a metacategory, with a look, when possible, at every single woman within each group.

High Society and the single woman

In 1914 the Welch & Gibbs publishing company produced the *Vancouver Social Register and Club Directory*, a 137-page publication that not only lists the socially prominent families of Vancouver (with address and days for receiving visitors) but also the memberships of 35 prestige clubs and organizations. In their foreword, the publishers argue that ‘social life’ is the very lifeblood of the city:

> Largely by this means the standards of culture and refinement are developed and maintained, art is encouraged, the finer kinds of craftsmanship sustained, merchants supported in their desire to make the best offerings to their patrons, ambitions for success stimulated, and the joy of living increased.17

These ‘standards of culture and refinement’ were the symbolic capital crucial to the formation of the social field that was Vancouver’s highest social level, or simply ‘Society.’ Into this matrix of social interaction and material consumption came the single woman, who played leadership roles in the clubs and organizations that were vital to Vancouver Society’s functioning. Ranging from important business and networking private clubs like the exclusive Vancouver and Georgian Clubs, to open recreation-oriented associations such as the Connaught Skating Club, the clubs appearing in the *Club Directory* (combined with the individual and families listed in the *Register*) give us an important framework of the boundaries and membership of this field.18

The development of Vancouver Society echoed that of urban centres of the United States and Great Britain in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, where social changes from the rapid mobility resulting from industrialization created a more self-conscious social elite which employed specific instruments of definition, from the social pages in newspapers to restrictive policies for elite club memberships. Similarly, the key to Vancouver’s status elite

18 For convenience, I will refer to the social registry section of the *Vancouver Social Register and Club Directory* separately as the *Register* and the club directory portion as the *Club Directory*.
was ‘voluntary and associational,’ with prominent individuals and families building boundaries through select prestigious clubs, associations, and other vehicles of recognition to forge a “lifestyle based on shared values and intimate access to one another.”\(^{19}\) By 1914 this status elite was cohesive enough to have produced two directories of Society members.\(^{20}\)

Although many independent single (and confirmed ever-single) women were included inside these boundaries, discussions of status elites usually privilege male and familial structures – but a closer look provides some valuable insights into single women’s access to this social echelon. The family was a key unit of social association for scholars such as Robert A.J. McDonald, whose work on (male) business and professional leaders in *Making Vancouver* demonstrates that membership alone in such elite organizations as the Vancouver Club did not guarantee the professional or business man admittance to the circles of Society. As McDonald notes, “he would remain on the social margins of the upper stratum unless connected by ties of family and home to men of comparable prestige.”\(^{21}\) ‘Family and home’ is of course where women most obviously come into this picture of elite self-consciousness, yet there also was a vital leadership role for women to play in forming Society. As Julia Bush notes for the elite social circles of England, “the style and decisions of powerful women helped to define their parameters.”\(^{22}\) And the same can be found for Vancouver, when the perspective is flipped away from men’s associational and professional ties to women’s. In doing so, what emerges is a more complex view of the composition of Society elites, demonstrating the roles single women played in the highly discursive character of high status attainment in this period in Vancouver.

The associational character of Vancouver Society allows us to identify its broader group composition through the use of club memberships, and a valuable resource for this is the 1914 *Vancouver Social Register and Club Directory*. McDonald uses the *Register* to calculate the broad membership of Vancouver’s highest social stratum, as well as determine who the leaders of Society were and their correlation to his list of business and professional leaders for the same period. McDonald’s count of the 2,491 entries found that 2,270

\(^{19}\) McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 152.

\(^{20}\) A less comprehensive version than the 1914 *Vancouver Social Register and Club Directory* was issued in 1908.

\(^{21}\) McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 165.

consisted of married couples and 221 single men or women for a total of 4,761 people (this count does not include the children or other household members named in some families’ entries). From this measure, and taking into account an average of 1.5 children or close relatives for each couple, he estimates that the total ‘upper stratum’ approximated 8,000 people. 23 Taking only the 32 single women listed independently in the directory 24 as indication of the measure of adult single women’s presence in Society would lead us to conclude that single women had a marginal role and that entrance to this group was very difficult for single female aspirants to elite status.

McDonald goes on to determine the Society leadership – Vancouver’s ‘400’ – by cross-referencing the membership of certain prestigious clubs and associations in the Club Directory with the Register. His study measured participation of ‘husbands or wives’ over the 1910-14 period in two ways: membership in three of the city’s eight most prestigious clubs; or inclusion in the Register, along with membership in the Vancouver Club and one other prestige club. 25 The eight clubs chosen (based on participation by the six families most likely to be Society leaders, such as the Tappers and Bell-Irvings) were: the Vancouver Club, the University Club, the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club, the Vancouver Rowing Club, the Vancouver Hunt Club, the Shaughnessy Heights Golf Club, the Connaught Skating Club, and the Georgian Club. All met criteria of education, wealth, or prestige that make them good resources from which to compile a list of social elites.

But a closer look at this list of prestige clubs reveals that their choice privileges men and male associations. Seven of the eight are open to men and only three to women; with the exception of the Georgian Club, no prestigious women’s club appears and the only other clubs open to women are mixed-sex athletic/leisure clubs (Shaughnessy Heights Golf Club and Connaught Skating Club). The business, professional, and single-sex recreational clubs on the list are all for men only or had only male members in this period, severely limiting the possibility of detecting a corresponding web of women’s networking, conspicuous consumption, and upward mobility.

23 McDonald, Making Vancouver, 163.
24 The count would be 34 with the inclusion of two doctors whose marital status I could not confirm. McDonald’s count is 36, but this most likely includes these two, plus two other doctors I have confirmed as married. For this discussion I will leave all doctors out, though their existence in Society and in Vancouver generally needs to be studied further.
25 McDonald, Making Vancouver, 164.
Making Vancouver is thus successful in its focus on the social formation of male business and professional leaders, but less successful in capturing Society leadership as a whole, as it mostly excludes the complex female networks that were crucial to its functioning. The male-focussed model for determining Society leadership also distinctly disadvantages single women, since in the first formula, a single person must appear in all of the three clubs open to women, while the possibility of married couples adding up three clubs between them (with an extra five open to the husband) is much higher; in the second formula, the requirement of a Vancouver Club membership automatically disqualifies every female candidate. Not surprisingly, not one single woman meets these criteria, yet the presence of at least 32 independently listed single women in the Register as well as at least 260 adult daughters or nieces listed under their families’ entries suggests that single women were not marginal to the functioning of Vancouver Society.

The solution then is to create a new set of criteria that takes women as a focus, while maintaining some of the logic of the previous measure. The first move is establishing a list of prestigious women’s clubs analogous to McDonald’s list. Several entries in this modified list have the right pedigree: membership includes the key Society players such as Mrs H.O. Bell-Irving and Lady Tupper, or have a significant proportion of members also appearing on the Register. All clubs chosen are listed in the Club Directory, which reinforces their place as the prominent clubs of Vancouver social life.

The Georgian Club was an important choice for both the original and modified lists: created by leading Society women, its membership was incredibly restrictive (even more so than the Vancouver Club) and served similar functions as the Vancouver Club for its membership.26 The University Women’s Club (UWC) is an obvious analog to the University Club. The Shaughnessy Heights Golf Club and the Connaught Skating Club (CSC) can be usefully retained, although we will see that the use of these clubs as a measure of independent women’s participation in Society is limited. To this we should add the Women’s Musical Club (WMC), noted by McDonald as including members from only the most prominent of families27 as well as adding a single-sex recreational club to the list. “Cultural

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26 As of 2001 the Georgian Club was merged with the Vancouver Club, which has admitted women since 1994.  
27 McDonald, Making Vancouver, 166.
associations of the socially prominent\textsuperscript{28} included the mixed-sex Art, Historical, & Scientific Association (AHSA).

The Women’s Canadian Club (WCC) also had an impressive percentage of Register members (over 35%) and the Canadian Women’s Press Club (CWPC), as the only specifically professional organization in the 1914 Club Directory (the Vancouver Business & Professional Women’s Club would only be formed in 1922) bears including. The executive of the Local Council of Women is also included, as a powerful umbrella organization that included several of the clubs on the list as well as key charitable and church societies – two important categories of women’s organizations which are (with two exceptions) not included in the Club Directory at all (and which may indicate an important nexus of more middle-class social networks).

Keeping substantially in line with the original criteria from Making Vancouver, and taking into account the lesser likelihood of one individual being in more than two prestige clubs, I have developed these alternative criteria:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Georgian Club + (any) listing in Register
  \item Georgian Club + one other club
  \item Independent listing in Register + one other club
  \item Two or more clubs
\end{itemize}

Inclusion in the 1914 Register remains an important criterion, as 32 women had independent listings. At least 260 women are also listed as ‘dependents’ in the Register (i.e. under their family’s listing) but many of them were clearly adult professionals who happened to live at home but participated in leadership roles in Society, such as journalist Lily Laverock and violinist Margaret McCraney. Several of these women were actually middle-aged or elderly, with some still working professional jobs, such as public health nurse Miss Breeze, or retired and living with kin, such as Miss Edge.

It is quite likely that only those daughters who were adults, or at least considered ‘out in society,’ would be listed in the Register; it is reasonable to assume that most entries would not include young children (as most listings include only individuals or couples), although there is no age criteria listed for inclusion in the Register nor an indication that all or even most daughters ‘of age’ were listed. We must also be wary of assuming that women found in the Register encompass all the single women active in Society circles. The key method in

\textsuperscript{28} McDonald, Making Vancouver, 168.
deciding who was single was by looking for the honourific ‘Miss’ or the same surname in a family listing. In addition, there was a problem in sorting the daughters of Society families from other women with identical surnames, especially when they are listed by ‘Miss’ without a first name (‘Miss Smith’ being emblematic of the impossibility of determining some names – the Register alone has 26 Smith families, and the 1914 city directory several pages of Smiths). So this study is left with a list of 37 names that appear in the Club Directory, often several times, but because they cannot be matched with any confidence to a particular Society individual or family through the 1914 Register, several potential ‘leaders’ must be left out. However, a good list of 27 identifiable women in total (both independently-listed and listed daughters) is still available.

The first thing that is striking about a cross-comparison of club and Register membership is that there is, in fact, little crossover between the Register/Georgian Club, cultural and voluntary associations, and recreational clubs. Although every club had at least one single female member that held a membership in another prestige club or the Georgian Club, the lack of wide crossover between the different ‘types’ of clubs – and the absence of any club membership for a majority of single women on the Register – seems to indicate that there were separate ‘pools’ or networks of high-status single women, and underlines the fact that single women – even in exclusive, high-status circles – cannot be seen as a homogenous group. In fact, single women appear to stream into at least four loose networks: recreational, reputational, self-selecting/cultural, and professional.

It would appear that the ‘recreational’ clubs, although important in wider Society circles, mattered the least in single women’s affiliations. Of the 263 single women with at least one club affiliation, only 16 appear in the Women’s Musical Club, four in the Connaught Skating Club (CSC), and two in the Shaughnessy Heights Golf Club (SHGC). The overwhelming majority of single women appearing in the CSC and SHGC appear to be dependent daughters of Society members with no other affiliation in the prestige clubs, indicating that these clubs were likely much more employed by the liminal single woman – young, marriageable Society debutantes – seeking prescribed social intercourse, rather than a place of sociability and networking appealing to older, potentially ever-single women. Conversely, the much higher number of women in lodgings or as heads of household amongst the single women
listed in the reputational, cultural, and professional clubs seem to indicate these are better places to look for independent/ever-single women’s participation and leadership.

As the most prestigious and exclusive organization for women in Vancouver, the Georgian Club is a vital measure of reputation-based networks for single women. Established in 1910, it had the deceptively simple stated object “to provide suitable quarters for the Members, and refreshments and other things incidental to a club.” With a fixed membership of 260 regular, ‘resident’ members (plus 15 non-resident, temporary, and ‘privileged’ members) and an incredibly restrictive entrance policy, the Georgian club was a locus for that maintenance of exclusivity that was a key component of the formation of social elites in Vancouver in this period. Membership in the Georgian Club was very exclusive – nominations by two members were necessary and only two ‘nays’ of the 260-person ‘resident’ membership would exclude an applicant, as opposed to the 1-in-6 rejection ratio of the Vancouver Club.29 Because the attractiveness of potential members does not seem to have rested on business connections or reputation (not one of the members of 1914 whose occupations can be found was involved in any sort of business or even a profession outside journalism) we need to assume that more exclusively social criteria were applied – i.e. family and other social connections, as well as nebulous personal qualities or *habitus* of respectability and culture (which we should also assume were very dependent on the performance of proper images of femininity). This would make membership in the Georgian Club entirely based on social approbation and perceptions of ‘suitability’ – in other words, highly discursive rather than based on particular economic attainments. Although several single women were charter members of the Club, the numbers of single women were not high in 1914, less than 5% of regular ‘Resident’ members, and 10% if we include the ‘privileged’ (secondary) class of membership (which was set aside for the daughters of married members, or, interestingly, the younger sisters of single members).30 Yet the presence of single women at all in such a carefully policed, exclusive group should be noted as an indicator for high status for these individuals, and evidence that singleness – presented as a stigma in popular culture – was not a barrier to social acceptance for many women. In

30 In 1914, only 13 regular members of 298 were single (4.4%); with the 18 ‘privileged’ members, single women total 31 or 10.4%. *Vancouver Social Register*, 88-90.
short, successful entry into the Georgian Club alone should be taken as a strong indicator of acceptance into Society.

In contrast, the Women’s Canadian Club (WCC) was chiefly a self-selecting cultural club, with membership based on interest in current affairs and performance of imperial hegemony. The Women’s Canadian Club of Vancouver was founded in 1909 as an alternative sister organization to the male-run Canadian Club. Its aims were to foster a progressive, imperial Canadian identity as well as interest in Canada’s culture and history. Although it could be seen as a service club through its promotion of Canadian nationalism, its real impact was as an educational organization, and Club activities revolved around speaking engagements by leading national and international figures.31 Although hegemonic in its foundations and aims, the WCC drew a much broader base of members than the restrictive Georgian Club or University Women’s Club, and had the most single women members of all the cultural clubs examined here (17.5% of the membership). Interestingly enough, eleven members were also found in the Women’s Musical Club (making up fully 69% of the single women in the WMC) and this was the largest crossover between clubs, perhaps an indicator of a group of single women attracted to more traditional women’s recreational and educational activities. The Art, Historical, and Scientific Association (AHSA) can also be pooled here, as well as the Vancouver Local Council of Women (LCW) – both the leading cultural and social reform organizations in the city before the War.32 The AHSA was also a cultural organization that did not necessarily require high professional or social credentials for membership, while the LCW was a voluntary service organization, although membership was actually formed of leaders from other voluntary reform and service groups, and likely a more socially select list.

Two clubs fall under a third category: key professional associations for single women seeking networking, support, and/or social and professional mobility. The University Women’s Club (UWC) and Canadian Women’s Press Club (CWPC) were based on educational or professional attainments – a university degree or status as a writer/journalist. Predictably, the UWC had such a high proportion of single women because of its mandate to serve women with high educational attainment, typically the same class of women who were

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31 See Women’s Canadian Club of Vancouver fonds, CVA MSS.437.
more likely (and able) to remain unmarried and pursue successful careers. The UWC was established in 1907 (with five of eight charter members single women) and had a membership of 30 by the end of that year. In 1914, single women comprised over 60 percent of the membership, and nearly the entire executive was composed of single women. According to the Club history, the club objectives at founding were:

- to stimulate intellectual activity; to promote interest in public affairs and to afford an opportunity for the expression of united opinion; to assist in the developing of a sound concept of educational values; to facilitate fellowship and co-operation among university women.

These objectives seem very specific to serving key needs of professional single women: a forum to meet other women with similar educational attainment and aims; a safe space for discourse and identity for women who were still very much a minority; a means to promote their intellectual attainments as legitimate, valuable, and desirable for women; and one of the few alternatives for networking amongst professional women before the founding of the Vancouver Business and Professional Women’s Club in 1922.

Like the UWC, the Canadian Women’s Press Club (CWPC) had a high proportion of single women, owing to its function as a professional association – of the 20 members in 1914, 7 were single women (35%) – all of whom were active journalists. Founded in 1909, the CWPC mandate aimed:

- to protect the interests of its members; to improve their status; to encourage a higher standard of excellence in writing; to encourage an understanding and love of Canada and to foster a spirit of good will among women writers of all lands.

The scope of the membership included “all sisters of the pen, whether newspaperwomen, authors, journalists or poets.” According to a club history compiled in 1957, the aims of the pre-WWI period were clearly those expected of a professional association – concern with the low-status and pay of women journalists, as well as barriers to positions “outside the society

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33 Dolly Kennedy, View from the Hill: The University Women’s Club of Vancouver (Vancouver: University Women’s Club of Vancouver, 1990), 2.
34 Of 127 total members, 78 were single, or 61.4%; if we include the four women listed as “Doctor” but whose marital status is unknown, the total is 64.6%. Vancouver Social Register, 109-10.
35 Kennedy, View from the Hill, 2.
37 Quote from the account of first meeting published in The World, 5 October 1909, 5, qtd. in Baker, “Pages,” 2.
The club seems to have combined the effects of the UWC in networking, legitimation, and positive space for women who pursued highly professional but still marginal identities.

Aside from the three streams most favoured by potentially ever-single women – reputational, cultural, and professional – what can we say about women independently listed in the *Register* without a prestige club (or any club) affiliation? Mabel Penery French, barrister and solicitor, had her own entry but was not in any club; and Grace Goddard was also without any club affiliations but actually advertised for her services as a ‘physical culture’ instructor in the Club Directory pages. In fact, 21 of 32 independently listed women (65%) had no affiliations in any prestige club. This strongly suggests that inclusion in the *Register* was not a simple derivation of the membership lists of the clubs – especially since even multiple club memberships did not guarantee entry into the *Register*, neither for women who may have been excluded for their class origins and political activities like Helena Gutteridge (working-class labour activist with several club memberships), nor for those who appear to have impeccable Society credentials like Mabel Durham (charter member of the Georgian Club and social page editor).

There is a more complex acknowledgement of status in a person’s inclusion in the *Register*, most likely from Society commentators and hostesses, which should be taken into account, especially for single women living independently from their families or those who immigrated to the city, who should not be seen to take their status only from their families of origin. Simply judging from the entries in the *Register* alone, we can see that single women played an important part in Society. Some single women’s entry into the Society network was certainly familial, especially in the cases of daughters listed under their parents’ entries. But as McDonald notes, Vancouver Society was also associational, open to the influx of socially mobile aspirants through membership in prestige clubs; this allowed another path for emigrant or upwardly-mobile single women to Society membership.

It is interesting that of the 27 ‘leaders’ determined through the modified leadership formula, only eight can be attributed an occupation – one clerk, four journalists, and three musicians/music teachers. This is an interesting split, between a traditional female activity (music), and the new fields of journalism and clerical work being opened up by women in

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this period. The women who held musical occupations likely reflect the privilege for training in this traditionally female accomplishment, and would not be a departure from the skills expected of Society women. Their occupations as musicians are likely incidental to their social positions, and their situations (besides reporting actual paid work) are probably very similar to the majority of women on the leadership list who report no occupations. The musicians were all listed in the Register as well as having one or more club affiliations. The presence of the clerk (Jean Dickson at the Dead Letter Office) demonstrates that single women who pursued jobs in the fast-growing and rapidly feminizing field of clerical work could still acquire – or maintain – high social status. Her membership in the Georgian Club affirms her social suitability.

Margaret Farron is the only woman who fits all four revised definitions for Society leadership: her own entry in the Register, a charter membership in the Georgian Club, and membership in the Women’s Musical Club and the Connaught Skating Club.\(^\text{39}\) Farron is a good example of the privileged single female Society leader. Her social credentials appear to have been impeccable, and she is emblematic of what could be considered a more traditional stream of single women into high Society through peer approbation and traditional feminine accomplishments.

A second type of leader, Winnie Cameron, may also fit all four definitions (if we could be sure that the ‘Miss Cameron’ who was a charter member of the Georgian Club was actually Winnie Cameron). There is a hint that it might be so, since Cameron was a member of the Women’s Canadian Club and the Art, Historical, and Scientific Association, and on the executive of the Local Council of Women. She also had an independent entry in the Register. It would make sense that she was also a member of the Georgian Club. But even without this connection, it is clear she played a strong role in Society and is emblematic of another strand of leadership by single women, through self-selecting affiliation and leadership in cultural and social reform organizations.

Lily Laverock represents a third ‘type’ of single women’s access to high status and leadership, through their professional activities and attainments. The status of Lily Laverock as a Register member herself (as an adult daughter under her parents’ entry) and both a

\(^{39}\) For the ‘Original Members’ of the Georgian Club see the Constitution, Rules and Regulations of the Georgian Club.
University Women’s Club and Canadian Women’s Press Club member indicates the multifaceted roles she likely played. In the same vein, Mabel Durham’s status as charter Georgian Club member, secretary-treasurer for the Canadian Women’s Press Club, and society page editor marks her as another key leader in this category.

These three strands of access to Society – reputational, self-selecting, and professional – reflect the varied interests, attainments, and perhaps most importantly, social status of single women. Although confirmed ever-single leaders such as Lily Laverock, Mabel Durham, and Miss Edge can be found in every category, many names are too difficult to trace through marriage and death records to establish the proportion of ever-single women present in Society at this time. However, it seems clear that there were opportunities for ever-single women to flourish in Vancouver’s highest social circles, and that their marital status was not a barrier to even the most exclusive social field – or a barrier to a full social life.

**Sporting women of the demimonde**

At the other end of the spectrum of social status and reputation in Vancouver was the world of the prostitute or ‘sporting woman’ living in the marginal world of the demimonde in the red light districts of the city. Although many women from the exclusive ‘parlour house’ trade had the economic means and the manners to mix in at the best Society functions, their status as prostitutes and madams – forever and irretrievably sexually/morally compromised – meant that they could not aspire to breach the discursive barrier of such elite organizations as the Georgian Club (though many would be on intimate terms with members of the Vancouver Club).

In “Bumping and Grinding on the Line: Making Nudity Pay,” Becki Ross contends that in twentieth-century psychological and criminological discourse,

> dismissals of sex work as work have afforded legions of medical, legal, and moral experts the licence to pathologize the working-class female supplier of erotic goods as nothing but a congenital type predisposed to sexual degeneracy, immorality, and innumerable societal transgressions.40

In doing so, we fail to see the sex trade worker as a worker, but instead as “an symbol filled from the outside with the debris of the modern body/body politic” and a pathologized other to

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the normal heterosexual (maternal) female. Yet prostitutes were single women too – even as they were seen as the single women, the logical end of women’s unfettered control of their own bodies and sexuality.

Prostitution has been an integral part of Vancouver’s social fabric since at least 1884, when ‘Birdie’ Stewart, Vancouver’s first madam, worked out of her “small shack with verandah” next to the Methodist Parsonage and just down the street from the Sunnyside Hotel in Gastown. Vancouver’s sex trade continued to flourish around that original boundary, driven by the high male-female ratio in the city as well as the cyclical influx of sailors and loggers into this major port.

An excellent snapshot of the sex trade is available in the 1901 manuscript census for Vancouver, where against the grain of the practice in other census districts (such as Victoria), an enumerator took care to list the occupations of all the women found in the red-light district of Dupont Street/Market Alley – with 86 women listed as ‘sport,’ a term for prostitute. The social reformers’ focus on the younger, liminal single woman makes sense when we are able to take a good look at the composition of the sex trade at the turn of the century. Prostitution in Vancouver’s main red light district was not a career of older women. Single women made up 55 or 64% of the 86 ‘sporting women’ in Dupont Street and Market Alley areas in the 1901 census, but only eight single women were aged 30 or over (and all were White); the mean age of single women was 24.6. (The majority of all sporting women in the Dupont sample were in their 20s, with a mean age of 26.25. Six of these eight women over 30 or 75% were heads of household, a great contrast to the 1901 Athenas sample, where only 11.6% were heads. (A total of 20 or 62.5% of the 32 heads of household

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41 Shannon Bell, Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 64-72.
42 George Cary, recollections, CVA MSS 54, Major Matthews Collection, AM0054.013.01836, Granville B.I. 1884. Cary’s account, describing who lived in each building in a picture of Granville in 1884, is one of the few places that Birdie Stewart’s name appears; most people simply don’t mention the shack beside the parsonage. Since Cary, a logger, continued to call the town by its colloquial name of ‘Gastown’ rather than Granville, this indicates a familiarity with the wilder side of early Vancouver that more ‘respectable’ middle-class residents would not know or admit.
43 A long line running down this occupation column, crossing out every instance of ‘sport,’ indicates the inadmissibility of prostitution as an occupation to census-takers, which renders the sex trade worker invisible in other census areas, including 1901 Victoria. This still-readable ‘sport’ designation for the Dupont area, then, leaves us with a valuable resource. CC 1901 Burrard (Vancouver City) D17/2, 3, 31, 32.
44 The sample also included 8 widows, 13 married, 7 divorced, and 2 unknown/not given. Only three wives and one divorcée were over 30, while five of eight widows – all heads of household – were firmly over age 30 (ranging in age form 38 to 52).
of all ages were single.) I would suggest that this was not an unusual Vancouver phenomenon, but a function of income and the model of brothel-style prostitution common throughout urban centres in North America and utilized on Dupont Street at the turn of the century.

The race and class attributes of these sporting women raise some interesting questions. Only one was born in BC (she was the sole Aboriginal woman in the sample), and only three total born in Canada. Compare this to the 38 born in the US (including all four Black women) and 12 in France. The White women in the sample also soundly outnumbered the group of five women of colour – four Black and one Aboriginal. Once the staple figure of the prostitute in colonial BC, the Aboriginal woman appears to be almost completely absent from the trade in Vancouver in 1901.45 Women who can be identified as Aboriginal almost never appear in the police charge books for prostitution offences in this period; instead, they were much more likely to encounter the legal system for alcohol-related offences such as ‘drunk and disorderly.’46 In contrast, although there were few Black women in the Dupont trade in the 1901 census, they appeared in the police records way out of proportion to their numbers (four of six Dupont women of any marital status who appear for any charge between 1898 and 1905).47 Three of the four single Black women lived in the two all-Black houses (and one lived alone), possibly indicating a raced division between brothels. And no Chinese women appeared at all in the Dupont/Market Alley brothels, and only one of a handful of Chinese women marked as ‘sports’ in the area of Chinatown was reported as single: Tia Hoe (46) leased the rear of a house on 12 Hastings, where she lived alone.48

Interestingly, according to their entries in the language column, many of the ‘sporting’ women could not speak English, or well enough to say so on the form. Typically, they lived in the house of an older woman who could speak both English and French, which was the

46 Given that the sale of alcohol to aboriginals was criminalized in this period, any use of alcohol by an aboriginal woman would leave her vulnerable to arrest, fines, and incarceration, as well as literally being removed from the streets by being placed on transport out of town. See the Vancouver Police Charge Books (1897-1900), Vancouver Police Court fonds, CVA 37-C-14 1897-1900.
47 This trend would continue into the next decade: Greg Marquis cites John McLaren’s findings that 28.5% of women arrested on morality charges between 1912 and 1917 in Vancouver were Black, out of proportion to their numbers. Greg Marquis, “Vancouver Vice: The Police and the Negotiation of Morality, 1904-1935” in Hamar Foster and John McLaren, eds. Essays in the History of Canadian Law, Vol.VI: British Columbia and the Yukon (Toronto: Osgoode Society by University of Toronto Press, 1995), 254.
48 She had immigrated to Canada in 1876 at the age of 22. CC 1901 Burrard District (Vancouver City) D17/28/46.
common non-English tongue they shared. All but one were fully literate, commensurate with the image of cultural attainment that the high-end parlour houses were required to maintain. As Madeleine Blair (a pseudonymous former prostitute and madam) describes in her autobiography, in one Chicago house she was employed in, the girls “were of good American stock and possessed some degree of education” and Miss Allen, the madam, “conceded that it was necessary to have some one who could entertain the serious-minded men” who wished to speak of politics, science, and philosophy – which Madeleine gamely attempted to brush up on by purchasing books on the subject.49

The foreign birth, literacy, and mostly recent arrival dates for the majority of the sporting women on Dupont suggests a model of in-migration of professionals to the Dupont Street area rather than a collection of the ‘fallen women’ of Vancouver. Their dates of immigration were heavily clustered in the years between 1897 and 1901, although one had entered the country as early as 1883 (interestingly enough, she was one of the most stable residents of the area, as will be seen below). It may have been that Vancouver’s late development and high number of single male transients (creating a high client base and low percentage of ‘home-grown’ competition) made the city a potentially attractive place to work and formed part of the strategies of survival and success for single female sex trade workers from other urban centres. In her biography of successful Victoria madam Stella Carroll, Linda Eversole notes that Vancouver was part of an ‘unofficial circuit’ of prostitutes that included Victoria, Seattle, and San Francisco.50

Another interesting phenomenon is the lack of criminal charges for most of the sporting women in the 1901 census. Exposure to the criminal justice system does not appear to be an inevitable condition of participation in the sex trade at the turn of the century. As Charleen Smith notes for the Kootenays at this time, “policing prostitution involved a system of standardized charges and penalties that seemed to exist at some level outside of criminal trial procedures and thus not within the realm of criminal activities nor part of the process of

50 Eversole, Stella, 61. This appears to be similar to the circuits of strippers that Becki Ross has studied for post-war Vancouver; see for example Becki Ross and Kim Greenwell, “Spectacular Striptease: Performing the Sexual and Racial Other in Vancouver, B.C., 1945-1975” Journal of Women’s History 17/1 (Spring 2005): 137-164.
reporting criminal statistics.” Of the 20 women in the Vancouver Police Prisoner’s Record Book (which recorded women actually charged and incarcerated awaiting trial or after conviction) only six correspond to the 1901 census list, and only two of these were single. Prostitution only figured in eight of the charges (40%), and theft (25%) and vagrancy (30%) formed the other common offences for which women appeared as prisoners. This low incidence of prostitution offences reflects the police department’s preferred method of fines rather than imprisonment for prostitution offences, a pattern that would hold until 1906, when a cycle of prosecutions fuelled by reform fervour began that would eventually destroy the protected brothel system, shifting the restricted district several times until its abolition in the 1920s and the dispersal of sex trade workers across the city.

But in the first two decades of Vancouver’s history, the police, having to deal with the community at the level of the street, preferred to regulate the sex trade by enclosing it in a bounded ‘restricted’ area or red-light district, which contained both the people involved in the trade and their clients in one, easier-to-monitor location. Although the incredibly vague and open ‘vagrancy’ legislation of the period allowed for nearly complete discretion on the part of police to determine a woman’s criminality, this major tool to regulate the presence and activities of women on Vancouver’s streets was in fact a charge used mostly for Aboriginal women for alcohol-related offences between 1897 and 1900.

Instead, a different regime of regulation and surveillance for the sex trade seems to have been in place in Vancouver at the turn of the century. Control was exerted through the levy of summary fines (almost a pseudo-licensing process – if the accused did not appear in court, the fine was automatically levied) which were much more common than formal trials and incarceration (although procurers and women up for other offences such as theft could see

52 Vancouver Police Department (hereafter VPD), Prisoners’ Record Book (1900-1902), Vancouver Police Department fonds CVA 37-C-9.
54 See the Vancouver Police Charge Books (1897-1900), Vancouver Police Court fonds, CVA 37-C-14 1897-1900. The charge of ‘Vagrancy’ contained several subcategories (10 by 1930); category ‘I’ encompassed most women charged with vagrancy and was defined as “Being a common prostitute or night walker, wanders in fields, public streets or highways, lanes or places of public meeting or gathering of people, and does not give a satisfactory account of herself.” Vancouver Police Department (VPD), Manual, 1932, 136. Vancouver Police Department fonds, CVA PDS 25.
jail time). Because of the less rigid legal climate and officers’ daily contact with the realities of life in the brothel districts, the identification of the prostitute lay less in formal legal evidence than in the discursive power of police officials.

The potential for abuse inherent in this system is outlined in an 1889 case of police extortion of two Chinese women who claimed to not be involved in the sex trade. In October 1889 a Vancouver Police Constable, Havelock Fyfe, stood trial for extorting money from ‘Chinese prostitutes.’ The complainants, Wee Hee (single) and Mary Sam (married), both claimed to be seamstresses/needleworkers who had no connection to the sex trade. According to their testimony, Fyfe came to their homes late at night and extorted money from them – $5.00 per month for first few months, then $8.00 after that, for about a year. A customer who came to order some mending witnessed the payoffs in Wee Hee’s case and urged her to go to the police. Speaking through an interpreter, Wee Hee gave this account:

Fife [sic] said he saw men coming to my house. He would not take my denial. He told me he knew men were going there. He told me he wanted money from me. I am a seamstress. […] Fife told me not to say anything. I did not know it was wrong. Fife told me he saw white men going in my house. And he told me if I paid him it would be all right. […] Fife said “You pay money to me, he say you good woman.”

Mary Sam reported she was at home ‘cutting tobacco’ and Fyfe wanted to have sex with her, which she refused; he then extorted money, saying he would arrest her.

The balance of the case seemed to rest on whether the women were indeed prostitutes. The defence seemed intent to change the image of the crime: to recast the extortion as a designing woman’s strategy of paying money to avoid prosecution rather than an honest woman preyed upon by Fyfe. John McLaren, the officer on the case, significantly refused to label either woman as a prostitute. He reported that their houses were not one of note to police and the women did not have any convictions; he did not see anyone “making any dresses” but the houses looked like a “half-dozen more houses in Chinatown.” On cross-examination, the counsel for Fyfe wanted McLaren to say that these were houses of ill-repute and confirm the women were sex workers, and McLaren refused to do so. Constable William Haywood, who reportedly “eats with Fyfe” stated that he could not say what the women did

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56 Mary Sam testimony, 14 Oct 1889. Police Department – Police investigation at Vancouver, fourth day, City Council and Office of the City Clerk fonds, CVA 594-A-8 file 25.
but “of course I have an idea how they live,” and when asked about the reputation of their houses: “Well, houses of ill repute of course; or so they claim.”57

Fyfe was convicted of both charges, but Wee Hee was also left ‘convicted’ of being a prostitute. The final report of the judge to the Mayor and Council in October 1889 was titled: ‘In the case of Officer Havelock Fyfe charged with accepting bribes from Chinese prostitutes since January 1888 and from Mary Sam since September 1888’ (my emphasis). Mary Sam escaped the designation ‘prostitute,’ primarily because of her marital status: once her marriage was established as fact, the court record stopped referring to her as a prostitute, but continued to do so for Wee Hee. The casual manner with which Constable Haywood labelled the women as prostitutes, and the continued perception of Wee Hee as one despite the lack of evidence, underscores the vulnerability of some single women, especially racialized women, to discursive regimes that imperilled their ability to claim a respectable status in the community, and thus conduct their affairs in peace and live free from fear of prosecution and police surveillance or extortion.58

This is one episode in a history of Chinese women and work that was interlaced with exploitation. In addition to the ‘slave girls,’ bought and sold as unpaid servants in merchant homes and as prostitutes in Vancouver and Victoria at the turn of the century, working-class Chinese women engaged in paid employment in several sectors including laundries, restaurants, and the needle trades. Their class and race made them vulnerable to perceptions of immorality and vice. Women who worked in restaurants and especially tea houses were commonly seen as prostitutes, even by their own communities, as their job was to serve and be attractive to men; whether they also engaged in sex work was irrelevant to their status as ‘bad’ women.59 Wee Hee’s race, language barrier, and emplacement on Dupont Street was a key factor in her unsuccessful claim to respectable status, regardless of the evidence.

By the turn of the century, the police used a more systematic method of naming the sporting women of Dupont than the (conflicting) observations of street officers as seen in the 1889 case. Large handwritten sheets for each month from November 1899 to October 1900, listing each sporting woman and grouped by address, attest to some sort of monthly check-in

58 Similar cases of extortion were discovered by Smith for the Kootenays: Smith, “Boomtown Brothels,” 144-6.
with the residents of the various identified brothels on Dupont. Whether this was kept for surveillance purposes, for an orderly collecting of ‘fines,’ or some other reason is unknown. (Interestingly enough, in the 1889 extortion case, Fyfe also said if Mary Sam paid up she would not have to “take out a license” and no one would bother her – the single reference to licensing of prostitution in the police files, and perhaps an indication that the methods of regulating the trade on Dupont Street were at one point more formally organized.) What the sheets offer us is a list of precisely who was understood to be a prostitute on Dupont (between November 1899 and October 1900) and who was not. Because these do not appear to be lists of women actually charged or convicted (although a small number of names match those in the police charge books for this period), the presence of these lists suggests a discursive construction of the sporting woman, a naming that worked to define the disreputable woman by criteria other than formal assaying of legal evidence or criminal convictions (observation? information from community members? asking the women themselves?).

We also need to think about the interaction between the enumerator(s) of the 1901 census and the ‘sporting women’ of Dupont. As I noted earlier, 86 women on Dupont Street and Market Alley had ‘sport’ recorded for their occupation. How the enumerator decided who was to be named such is an interesting question. It seems that one whole section was done of a piece, canvassing just the prostitutes all in a row, as if using a list (from the police one assumes). When he uses ‘sport’ for their occupation, was this their reported occupation – thus a term used by the women themselves – or his assumption? Did they get to name an alternative occupation for themselves, and if they gave one, was it accepted (as several Victoria prostitutes are known to have done)? Did they (proudly, ashamedly?) announce their occupation as ‘sport’ to him?

Perhaps a more important question is how single women in the sex trade could negotiate a condemned identity. Although the conditions of work for some prostitutes were extremely

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60 These lists are on a sheaf of handwritten legal sheets tucked into the Vancouver Police Prisoners’ Record Book for 1900-1902. VPD, Prisoners’ Record Book (1900-1902), Vancouver Police Department fonds, CVA 37-C-9.
61 CC 1901, Burrard District D-17, pages 2, 3, 31, 32. Page 2 was done in house-order (so lists non-sporting households too), but page 3 runs through a list of sporting women without taking intervening households.
62 Eversole, Stella, 72. Eversole names several madams in Victoria, all of whom gave ‘landlady’ as their occupation in the 1901 Victoria census, and their employees gave various occupations such as dressmaker, typist, or singer.
harsh, especially the Chinese ‘crib’ prostitutes and women who solicited in the streets, for others in the cleaner, safer ‘parlour house’ end of the trade, conditions could be quite comfortable and good money could be made.63 Ruth Rosen notes from her survey of prostitutes’ earnings in several American cities before WWI, “the average brothel inmate or streetwalker received from one to five dollars a ‘trick’, earning in one evening what other working women made in a week.”64 Although only one sporting woman on Dupont gave an income – Maggie Gerrard (45, widow) – her declared income of 1200.00 was not out of line with the declared incomes of Victoria madam Stella Carroll (1800.00) and the incomes of Carroll’s household, ranging from 800.00 to 1300.00.65 It is likely that women in the sex trade on Dupont could make something close to this range, a very good wage for a single woman and made only by those in the Athenas sample with professional careers or owning businesses.66

Beyond economic gain were the work and living conditions experienced by women in the upscale end of the trade. Although the account below is from after the First World War, it illuminates the choice many young single women faced in the systemic economic and social factors that drove (or beckoned) women to the sex trade. Margaret Bayne, the ever-single superintendent of the Girls Industrial School in Vancouver from 1918 to 1929 (whose inmates were sent primarily for delinquency and moral offences), recalls a dialogue with one girl at the School about domestic work vs. sex work:

“On the job you will get for me, I will have to get up in good time and get the boss his breakfast and take a tray up to his wife who prefers her breakfast in bed. Then I

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64 Ruth Rosen, The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 148. In a medium-priced ‘one dollar’ house, a prostitute could make about 20.00 per day. Rosen, 76.
65 Eversole, Stella, 72. However, given the high prices charged by the better parlour houses, it is entirely possible that madams at least were reporting incomes that would seem commensurate with their visible consumption (as well as the alternate occupations they might have claimed) rather than their actual incomes. Alternatively, they may be reporting their net rather than gross income, after operating expenses, fines, and graft payments.
66 The 1200.00 made by Gerrard matched the second-highest earnings for women in the Athenas sample, earned by a teacher, high school principal, and insurance agent; the highest was 1440.00 for actress Dolly Grooms.
spend most of the day at housework, cleaning and scouring. Get evening dinner for both of them. Then sit around in my own room or the kitchen til bedtime.”

“On the job I can get for myself, I can sleep till noon, then have my breakfast sent in to me. Go uptown every afternoon, then go to a restaurant and eat a good dinner that someone else has cooked for me. Afterwards, go somewhere with my boy friend before I go back to work.”

Here we get a glimpse at a highly idealized lifestyle for a sex trade worker, albeit from someone who likely had some experience with the *demimonde*. Not only does this picture pit the hard work and isolation of the domestic servant against the free movement and social life of the prostitute, it also demonstrates a sense of class difference: one takes up the meal, the other is served it. In fact, economic privilege is the clear advantage of the sex trade here; interestingly, the conditions of the actual work are not mentioned, rather it is the higher conspicuous consumption enabled by the work that is its draw. (One that, I argue, mimics that of the image of the highly-paid female professional, able to purchase domestic services in lodgings, eat in restaurants, and ‘go downtown.’)

And this picture of a comfortable life is not at all complicated by the putative social ostracism of the prostitute. This account clearly does not recognize the deleterious effects of the naming of sex trade workers as disrespectful and immoral (and thus outside the social pale), nor the exposure to disease, pregnancy, and violence that many prostitutes experienced. Instead, the high wages enable a higher status lifestyle, one that might well have attracted many single women as a career choice or an escape from grinding labour and poverty. It is likely that this account could have been accurate for women in the parlour house trade, such as those on Dupont Street at the turn of the century. Depending on the nature of the business arrangement set up by the parlour house owner/madam, a comfortable living and even good money could be made for both brothel workers and madams. Some women would pay only rent and board, a ‘boarding house’ arrangement that allowed them all their profits and gave the house the revenue from food and liquor sales as well as rents. In ‘percentage’ houses, the madam supplied all amenities for a percentage cut of the fees, up to 50%. In the better establishments, frequented by upper class men, fees could be high and the

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comforts of the house – well-furnished parlours with live piano music, good food, fine liquors, a Chinese servant – could make for a pleasant working atmosphere.\(^{68}\)

However, the trade was certainly more lucrative for madams than workers, as the fine clothing necessary for parlour house workers was expensive and often purchased at inflated prices through a kickback scheme between local businesses and madams – in turn creating other positive bonds between brothels and their neighbours.\(^{69}\) And the fines pressed by local police and magistrates were a kind of high income tax that both madams and workers had to bear. Madams in Rossland at the turn of the century paid an average of nearly $1300 per year in fines for each house (an average of $360 for the Madam and $900 for four ‘inmates’). Smith’s research found that fines were paid with such regularity that “most women likely considered the fines as one of the costs of doing business.”\(^{70}\) Madeleine Blair highlighted in her autobiography the economic benefit that accrued to the municipal coffers in communities with a ‘toleration’ policy.\(^{71}\)

Timothy J. Gilfoyle argues that we also need to explore the relationship between prostitution and various informal economies that emerged in nineteenth and twentieth-century cities.\(^{72}\) Money flowed through the brothel district, in rents, in liquor and food consumption, laundry and cleaning services, and goods purchased. Judith Walkowitz makes the point that “although these streets were notorious as brothel districts, in reality a more diverse social and economic life was present there.”\(^{73}\) Economic necessity determined a residence in brothel areas for people not directly involved in the trade, and seamstresses that did dresses for the girls and retail establishments that did business in the area would have

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\(^{68}\) Eversole, *Stella*, 58-9. Several houses appearing in the Vancouver police records employed piano players and sold liquor to customers, indicating a wider range of services than simple contractual encounters with the house inmates. Rosen notes the upscale five- and ten-dollar parlour houses were used by clients as a kind of gentleman’s social club. Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 86-7.

\(^{69}\) Eversole, *Stella*, 59-60.

\(^{70}\) Smith, “Boohtown Brothels,” 127.

\(^{71}\) Madeleine Blair, who became a brothel owner in Alberta before WWI, recalls that there were other hidden costs of doing business: “In common justice, I will say that I never paid a dollar of graft money to the Mounted Police, although they levied other forms of tribute; and the amount of money which I gave to the town authorities was small and always a voluntary offering. But the amount of graft exacted by the citizens of the highest standing would have put a Tammany alderman to shame.” Blair, *Madeleine*, Book III – Chapter IV, para 17. [http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/madeleine/madeleine/bk3_ch4.html].

\(^{72}\) Gilfoyle, “Prostitutes in History,” 138.

derived some livelihood from the custom of brothel keepers, inmates, and clients.\textsuperscript{74} Because of this, Walkowitz asks the crucial question of whether a prostitute “was rendered a social outcast in her own neighbourhood.”\textsuperscript{75}

Although it is difficult to determine with any accuracy the attitudes of single women in the 1901 Dupont sample to their own participation in the sex trade, Rosen sees the subculture amongst prostitutes as a valuable marker of identity and shield against social ensure, especially in the closed world of the restricted district. Rosen notes: “Fragmentary evidence suggests that red-light districts, although in a state of transition, still offered women a certain amount of protection, support, and human validation.” In addition, most American madams viewed themselves as serious businesswomen and “most madams seem to have viewed their achievement with pride and satisfaction.”\textsuperscript{76}

There is also some evidence that some women found a community and close relationships with other women in the trade. Communal living and work arrangements were key strategies of survival amongst single women in the trade. In her study of the trade in English port cities, Walkowitz notes that unmarried working-class prostitutes “tended to live together in clusters of three or four in a few residences” forming “the basis of an important and supportive female subculture.”\textsuperscript{77} Smith finds that although some relationships between prostitutes “were characterized by violence, jealousy, and competition” the bonds of companionship formed from their common isolation and work could create solidarity:

In the Kootenays, instances of this type of bond are difficult to identify but may be inferred through evidence that shows that prostitutes travelled together over long periods of time, protected each other from the hazards of the trade, provided charity to coworkers in time of need, and responded emotionally in times of extremity.\textsuperscript{78} Rosen concurs that American prostitutes formed close relationships with other prostitutes and madams; some of these relationships could also develop into deeper romantic connections: “nearly all accounts of prostitution, particularly those written by madams, refer to the sexual and/or loving relationships that developed between women living in the same household.”\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{74} Walkowitz, \textit{Prostitution and Victorian Society}, 200.
\textsuperscript{75} Walkowitz, \textit{Prostitution and Victorian Society}, 197.
\textsuperscript{76} Rosen, \textit{The Lost Sisterhood}, 90.
\textsuperscript{77} Walkowitz, \textit{Prostitution and Victorian Society}, 201.
\textsuperscript{78} Smith, “Boomtown Brothels,” 138.
\textsuperscript{79} Rosen, \textit{The Lost Sisterhood}, 104.
In turn of the century Vancouver women in the sex trade also lived in community, commonly in houses of two to four women. The police ‘brothel sheets’ for Dupont between 1899 and 1900, city directories for 1900-1902, and the 1901 census all show clusters of women at the same addresses on Dupont and Market Alley. Yet there appears to have been an incredible amount of movement between houses on Dupont – only a few women (mostly heads) appear in the same house on the October 1900 list (the closest in that series to the census), as in the April 1901 census or the 1901 city directory. Yet most of the women still resided on the street, but in different houses, moving frequently between 1899 and 1901 – perhaps indicating workers’ tendencies to frequently change employers, or madams’ strategies to produce ‘fresh faces’ for regular clients in each house.

The high mobility in Dupont Street might indicate also a movement of sex trade workers through other centres, such as Seattle or San Francisco; it might indicate decimation from jail time, disease, and death; it may also reflect the number of women who moved in and out of the sex trade as the economy expanded and retracted. Deborah Nilsen analysed 577 profiles of Vancouver prostitutes taken from the Vancouver Police Prisoners’ Record Book from October 1912 to November 1917 to produce a table of occupations reported by women charged with prostitution offences.80 Her findings do confirm that women in the lowest-paid and most vulnerable jobs had the majority of arrests for prostitution-related offences, yet the wide variety of occupations she discovered (including two nurses, nine office workers, a teacher and even a police matron) signal both a reason for some women to move into the trade, and a potential for others to move back out of it once economic times improved.

It is also possible that some women acquired the capital means for class mobility, through building ‘legitimate’ businesses or other ventures. Perhaps some women were able to invisibly practice in other areas of the city, or to amass enough wealth and property to move out of the profession entirely. Or advancing age diminished their ability to compete in the more prestigious and comfortable parlour house trade, and drove older single women out of the trade into institutions, (invisible) vagrancy, or other strategies.81

81 Judith Walkowitz notes that in port towns in England some older prostitutes would take up permanent relationships with sailors, perhaps supplementing their sailor’s support with casual prostitution. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, 197.
Two single women who appear in the 1901 Dupont census, Frankie Preston (36) and Jennie Manning (35), seem to have enjoyed relatively secure careers as sporting women through the turn of the century. Both Manning and Preston lived at the same address through the entire series of police lists (November 1899 to October 1900), as well as in 1899/1900 and 1901 city directories. In fact, the census record placing Preston at 119 Dupont could be some sort of mistake, as “Miss Frankie Preston” appears back at her usual house at 121 Dupont in the 1910 city directory – apparently she was not moved in the police sweeps of Dupont Street starting in 1906 that moved the restricted district closer to the waterfront (and by the First World War had abolished it altogether), an interesting fact in itself.\(^{82}\) Both leased large houses in 1901 – Preston a house of 12 rooms, and Manning one with eight. Neither appears to have had more than four members in her household at any one point, so this must have been potentially luxurious in terms of living space as well as space for entertaining customers.

In terms of encounters with the criminal justice system, only Preston has any records in the Police Charge Book (not to be confused with the Prisoner’s Record Book, the Charge Book recorded all charges, regardless of whether the accused sojourned in the city gaol): one in a brothel sweep in December 1897 (for which she paid a fine), and the second a fine for selling liquor without a licence on her premises in July 1898. Jennie Manning had no charges whatsoever.

Although neither can be traced with confidence through death and marriage records, they might have had the means to successfully remain ever-single. It would appear that these women both had a potential for a stable household and community life. Unlike most of the women on Dupont, they maintained their own establishments at the same address for several years in a row; despite being named as sporting women both in the police lists and on the census, their encounters with the law were infrequent to non-existent.

Their position as the older, well-established members of a transient community of young women in often troubled circumstances at the edge of society may also have made them community leaders of some kind – or they may have ruled Dupont with an iron fist. We cannot know for sure. We can only speculate that these women were most likely to have experienced some measure of success and stability in the city’s underworld, success that

brought economic gain and the ability to purchase some of the material comforts of class privilege. We should consider the advantages that Margaret Bayne’s student noted for the trade: conspicuous consumption, leisure, the ability to purchase services; all of these indicate a privileged economic position. And the requirements of the parlour house end of the trade, which included fine furnishings, good food and alcohol, sumptuous dress, and witty conversation, all reflect the symbolic capital possessed of their elite clients and were thus also in the command of (successful) madams and workers. The difference between a madam of a high-priced brothel and a matron in Shaughnessy was less material or even cultural than the naming that set them apart.

The potential of the sex trade to offer some women economic advantages as well as community may have diminished with the political ascendancy of the social reform movement after 1906, focusing on the abolition of the restricted brothel district and disrupting the communities single women built for themselves inside the trade. However complex the nature of naming at the level of the street was, after the turn of the century this process was increasingly trumped by the external discursive regime headed by social reformers, intent on cleaning up the ‘social evil’ in the persons and practices of women in the sex trade. Deborah Nilsen notes that “along with the dispersal of prostitutes in the city came changes in the structure of prostitution,” measured by a rise in solicitation arrests after 1912, as decentralization and crackdowns on brothels made individual soliciting – and ultimately, reliance on pimps – more attractive and necessary.83 By 1912, a series of crackdowns and house closures, and the closure of the last restricted district, marked the end of the protected world of the parlour-house street and the beginning of the diffusion of prostitution throughout the downtown eastside.

Securing femininity

Between the poles of the socially prominent and the (apparently) social outcast, was the space where most single women lived their lives. Much energy and ink was spent by the doyennes of the one field to prevent the average single woman from ‘falling’ into the sphere of the other.

The discourse around the single woman from the 1880s to the inter-war period focussed in large part about a particular type of single woman – young, considered ‘eligible’ for (and expected to focus on) marriage, and often living apart from kin while earning wages in working-class, urban industrial and retail occupations. Carolyn Strange deals with the anxieties and regimes built around this liminal single woman in Toronto's Girl Problem (1995). The ‘girl problem’ was the construct of moral reformers intent on re-building the regulatory bonds of family around young working women, whose forays from the home to work and especially to play caused great apprehensions about their unsupervised activities, and ultimately their heterosexual encounters amongst the pleasures of the city. State agencies and social reformers were preoccupied with the moral meanings of working-class wage-earning women in particular, rather than industrial conditions and wages: “The issue of sexual morality loomed like a dark cloud over discussions of women’s work in the industrializing city, casting waged labour as a test of chastity rather than an economic or political issue.”

Powerful here was the perception of prostitution as the logical endpoint of all women’s unregulated lives. Timothy J. Gilfoyle notes: “Because the ‘whore’ was also a metaphor, commercial sex was transformed into a vehicle by which elites and middle classes articulated their social boundaries, problems, fears, agendas, and visions.” The young working-class woman was especially vulnerable to the effects of these fears, situated as she was at the intersection of negative conceptions of young women and the working-class as possessing inferior moral capacity, and both in need of tutelage and discipline from middle-class reformers (exacerbated in the case of women of colour). Working-class women excited middle-class angst when they sought the excitement of ice cream parlours, moving pictures, and dancehalls rather than the sober pursuits of quiet reading and bible study offered by such organizations as the YWCA. The consequences of young liminal single women negotiating

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84 Strange, Toronto’s Girl Problem, 22-3, 28.
86 In 1895 the Victoria YWCA offered “To All Young Women” affordable hot beverages at lunch, a reading room, and “a very fine piano,” as well as classes in English, bookkeeping, penmanship, needlework, and Bible study. Victoria Daily Times 27 May 1895, 3. The Vancouver ‘Y,’ against the trend of YWCAs across the country, downplayed non-domestic training, in the aim to push young single women into domestic service positions much in demand by the Y’s patrons. Anderson, “Domestic Service,” 320-1.
their own path through prescription could be extreme, including invasive supervision, legal restrictions on their movements through urban spaces, and incarceration.87

Yet these public anxieties centred, not surprisingly, on the liminal single woman. The adult spinster was not a source of apprehension. At the same time as the liminal single woman was creating such alarm, ever-single women professionals in social work and other branches of the justice system held key roles in the surveillance and regulation of the ‘girl problem’ – in short, the tutelage of the ‘liminal’ single woman was in the hands of the mature, ‘citizen’ spinster. The spinster-citizen envisioned worthy of the vote in the 1880s is here evolved. Having passed the transitional stage where most young women pass into marriage, she passes instead into the fully adult independent actor, and her most public roles are those of securing femininity – the supervision and training of young women to normative female roles and performances: the doxa of gender. Ever-single women whose positions as Society leaders, journalists, police, social workers, and other professionals played key roles in the surveillance and support of single women and built successful careers – and symbolic capital – out of securing femininity.

◆ arbiters of Society

Ever-single women were vital in the formation and policing of the social field that was Vancouver’s Society – discursively shaping it through their roles as journalists for the society pages of Vancouver’s newspapers. The journalists’ inclusion as leaders in my formula reflects their position as shapers of Society boundaries. All were members of the Canadian Women’s Press Club, and each had at least one other prestige club. This aspect of single women’s participation in high status circles deserves closer attention. What has been defined as a ghettoized field within journalism – the society or women’s page – reveals itself to have more power than previously acknowledged.

Female journalists found an expanded role in the new society and women’s pages developed in the explosion of newspapers in Vancouver in the city’s first 30 years. According to historians Marjory Lang and Linda Hale, the development of “sophisticated and

87 Strange notes for Toronto that “Young women who freely – or wilfully – sampled the city’s pleasures could find themselves summarily tried and convicted of delinquency and incarcerated until they reached the age of twenty-one.” Most of the girls who were sentenced to the Vancouver Girls Industrial School entered under similar conditions. Strange, Toronto’s Girl Problem, 132.
diverse urban settings” for specialized news or small pioneering communities that offered fewer obstacles to the “enterprising woman” were both conditions in Vancouver that benefited newswomen. In the first quarter of the 20th century over 50 women wrote for Vancouver newspapers and periodicals, and many (such as Lily Laverock) founded periodicals as well. Although married women were employed as reporters and society/women’s page editors (some also Society hostesses themselves like Julia Henshaw) or were even newspaper owners like Sarah McLagan, single women generally outnumbered married in the business.

Lang and Hale note that one part of the job of the society editor in “the fluid social topography of a new city” was to identify the local elites: “merely by naming them, she created interest in their comings and goings, soirées and fêtes and confirmed their status.” McDonald notes: “The social visibility of women in city newspapers, where long lists of names served to place families within spheres of influence, was especially important in marking the coming together of a status elite.” Lang and Hale state that society editors without excellent social credentials needed the favour of local elites to do their job; this vulnerability could extend to manipulation by hostesses eager to promote their own status. However, this dependency was balanced by their power “to advance the careers of some and banish others into the obscurity of ‘also attended.’”

The roles played by journalists such as Mabel Durham and Lily Laverock encompassed more than reporting on Society functions; they helped to define the boundaries of the social elite by who and what they chose to report. As a society page editor and as founder of the Chronicle, a high-end women’s magazine (founded 1911), Lily Laverock’s professional activities revolved around defining and reporting what and who was important to Society. And groups of journalists even held Society functions themselves, such as the ball held by the Canadian Women’s Press Club in 1911 that was a major Society event. The account of the ball in the CWPC history of the period reflects the press women’s consciousness of their special role in Society: “It was a real society affair with most of the prominent social and

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89 In 1912, of 13 newswomen recorded in the CWPC history, only 2 were married. Baker, “Pages,” 5.
91 McDonald, Making Vancouver, 165.
club leaders turning out to help the press girls to whom they were certainly indebted for generous publicity” and the ball was a social and financial success, raising $500.00 for the club.93

It is also likely that the society editors had a part to play in the composition of the Register itself, as Register membership had no direct correlation with club membership or vice versa – so it is likely that society editors were consulted, in their published pieces, in informal contacts, or even formally retained for the purposes of forming and refining the Register. Clearly, society editors held a key role in the discursive formation of Vancouver’s status elite, and because the vast majority of female journalists right through the period under study were single, we can see that some single women held a vast deal of power within the terms and practices of elite class formation.

◆ professionals securing femininity

At the same time, many ever-single women who were Society leaders played a direct role in securing femininity of women outside of Society circles. Mabel Durham is a key example. As seen in the discussion of Society women, Durham was an important player in Vancouver Society before the war and as a journalist for the society pages helped define and shape who became and stayed the high status leaders of Vancouver social elite. In the 1920s Durham became head of the Canadian National Railway’s Women’s Bureau in London and in that capacity frequently gave recommendations for single women emigrants seeking placements and admission to the Queen Mary’s Coronation Hostel, one of Vancouver’s select hostels and employment bureaus for confirmed respectable ‘gentlewomen.’94 Her role in vetting women for the hostel is an interesting connection and can be seen as a continuity of that discursive leadership in establishing status boundaries in the city.

Durham was joined by ever-single women in middle-class, white collar professions that involved securing femininity: teachers, public health nurses, social workers, emigration assistants, juvenile court workers, supervisors of reformatories, lecturers on domestic science. Even the journalists who set the scope of who belonged and who did not in

94 Under their mandate, ‘gentlewomen’ (defined by character as well as birth and social station) were carefully screened as to their suitability for the British Columbia labour market (especially the upscale version of domestic service – ‘home help’) and upholding British cultural norms. Barber, “Gentlewomen of the QMCH,” 146. See also the Queen Mary’s Coronation Hostel fonds, VCA MSS 55.
Vancouver Society took part, reinforcing the boundaries of respectable female identities at the highest levels of status.

Ever-single women securing femininity prescribed, promoted, and policed ‘proper’ feminine behaviour and roles (marriage, domesticity, dependence) – even as they did not actually embody such themselves. Mariana Valverde contends that social reform in English Canada was not just an outlet of class interest but a vehicle making the bourgeoisie. Ever-single women securing femininity were part of a “larger bourgeois culture”; carrying out the vision and aims of the social reform agenda were both integral to their professions, and in their own class interests.95 As Carolyn Strange states,

This elite sector of women workers, including doctors, lawyers, social workers, and civil servants, pronounced upon the efficiency and morality of young, wage-earning women and consciously separated themselves from their working-class sisters for whom work remained a thin buffer from poverty.96

The discourse on illicit sexuality in particular served not only to divide the prostitute from the respectable working-class woman, it also served as a boundary marker for the middle class. Strange argues that the sympathy of reformers for the working girl rested on “a romanticization of her economic marginality and an identification with her ladylike devotion to feminine propriety” yet the revelation of working girls’ leisure pursuits, expenditure on flashy clothing, and other activities not strictly in keeping with a spartan home-work orientation “assured middle-class readers that working-class women were inevitably too coarse to achieve true gentility.”97 Strange argues that part of the admiration for wage-earning women, then, lay in the assurance that their aspirations for mobility would be confined to marriage and motherhood, not the economic independence enjoyed by the journalists who wrote about them.98 Strange also finds that social issues journalists and female superintendents of girls’ and women’s reformatories were most enthusiastic about domestic training and service as the solution for working-class women, yet “these were independent working women who would hardly have considered donning a servant’s bib themselves, even during lean times.”99

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95 Valverde, *Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 16.
In the end, many middle-class, professional single women built careers – and their own respectable, independent lives – on policing the young and working-class single woman. Further work needs to be done on this axis between the women who ran the various institutions for securing femininity – including private girls’ schools, female reformatories, service organizations such as the YWCA, and psycho-medical institutions like the BC Provincial Hospital for the Insane – and the women who entered them.

◆ policewomen

And then there were the women who literally policed the behaviour of other women: policewomen. After the First World War, pressure from reformers to eradicate prostitution in Vancouver engendered new systems of surveillance and discursive control over the activities of the liminal single women in particular.

Prominent women’s organizations were at the forefront of calls to reform both the social fabric of the city and the attitudes of its police to vice enforcement. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in particular acted as a watchdog over the policing of ‘the social evil,’ and was one of the forces behind the drive to permanently remove the restricted district in 1912; after the war, they were particularly active in calls for close surveillance of morals in beer parlours.100 The WCTU and the Local Council of Women also agitated for a special squad of women to police morals in dancehalls and beer parlours – the new site for vice.

The interwar period saw the emergence in Vancouver of the organized campaign against venereal disease – on the whole characterized as something women (prostitutes) gave to men, ruining ‘decent’ households as well as endangering troops in wartime. This period also saw the increased use of the term ‘amateur prostitute’ for women who had sex with men outside marriage, but demonstrably were not working in the sex trade: the ‘amateur’ took in all women who had sexual intercourse with more than one man, or importantly, were perceived as such and were considered vectors of venereal disease. This linkage between promiscuity, prostitution, and disease gave rise to concerted efforts by moral reformers and civic officials to counteract the lures of immorality, especially at the sites of dissolute leisure that entrapped

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100 Marquis, “Vancouver Vice,” 256, 264.
‘innocent’ single women and where lurked the compromised, infected women who were ‘wilful spreaders’ of disease to men.\textsuperscript{101}

In response to reformer pressures, the Vancouver City Police, after some resistance, instituted a category of constable open exclusively to women, whose main job was surveillance of illicit and immoral behaviours in public venues. Systems of surveillance were attempted, in dance halls, beer parlours, and other places of recreation, to regulate promiscuity and identify infected people. Mere presence at suspect locations could result in a woman being named outside the boundaries of the respectable and thus thrust into the legal and moral regulation arena.\textsuperscript{102}

The available records are sketchy on when precisely the first women were hired in a policing capacity in Vancouver; Freund states there were two policewomen present in 1912, and at least one policewoman was on the force in 1919.\textsuperscript{103} In 1927, several women’s organizations, including the prestige organizations of the Local Council of Women and the University Women’s Club, “feeling strongly the inadequacy of representation of women” on the police force, petitioned the Board of Police Commissioners to establish an official Bureau or Division which would be dedicated to “preventative-protective work, and exercise the functions of the police in all cases of woman and children, whether offenders or victims of offences.” The Director of such a Division, it was proposed, should report directly to the Chief Constable and ideally be a woman with training in social work.\textsuperscript{104}

After an initial resistance on the part of the Chief Constable, the Bureau was formally established by 1929 with Mrs. Ada Tonkin as Inspector – notably, the woman who spearheaded the LCW campaign to establish the Division. At least one group, the Central Ratepayers’ Association, protested Tonkin’s appointment, arguing that Tonkin had a husband (a keen issue for many), had no previous experience, was new to Vancouver, and was appointed over the head of experienced policewomen such as Miss Pelton, who was apparently a graduate of Halifax College and a trained nurse, qualities seen as more in

\begin{footnotes}
  \item[101] Freund, “Politics of Naming,” 237.
  \item[103] Freund, “Politics of Naming,” 248; VPD, \textit{Annual Report}, 1930. CVA PDS 25. (All prewar Annual Reports can be found on microfilm in PDS 25.)
  \item[104] Vancouver Local Council of Women to Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners, 15 April 1933. Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners fonds, CVA 75-C-2, file 1.
\end{footnotes}
keeping with the aims of the Division.\textsuperscript{105} The Women’s Protective Division saw a peak of six policewomen and three matrons in 1930-2. In 1933, due to economic constraints from the Depression, the Division was re-organized and reduced to two policewomen and four matrons.\textsuperscript{106}

Qualifications for policewoman seem to have been less rigorous than for male recruits – in her letter to the Board of Police Commissioners contesting her dismissal in the belt-tightening re-organization in March 1933, Miss Gordon Forbes noted that in a May 1932 examination on law and police methods she passed with a 74\% (and was subsequently made Acting Inspector) while two policewomen failed the exam and one declined to take it. Forbes felt strongly that in light of this performance, her dismissal and the retention of two of the women who did not take or pass the exam was grievously unfair.\textsuperscript{107} Her appeal went unheeded. The Department continued to see the Women’s Division as having a ‘special’ nature through the 1930s; the Board of Police Commissioners recommended in 1938 that future hires in the Division have qualifications in social work and nursing.\textsuperscript{108}

The job of policewoman was literally that: to police women’s crime. This formed its own category of crime, conceived as fundamentally about sexuality; although charges of murder, assault, theft, and arms charges were also brought by members of the Division, these were few in number. The charges of Keeper of a Disorderly House, Inmate of a Bawdy House, Intoxication, and Vagrancy ‘I’ (Streetwalking) were the main charges brought by the Division members, reflecting their focus on disorderly women.\textsuperscript{109} Policewomen had a special beat (besides regular court appearances and investigative work): “public places such as Dance Halls, Beaches, Rest Rooms, Theatres and Moving Picture Houses, Skating Rinks, Beer Parlours, Parks etc.” – all places of potential illicit female sexuality.

Although the position of ‘matron’ (in charge of the women inmates in the police holding cells) appears to have been uniformly held by married or widowed women, at least half of policewomen for whom names can be found were single. Miss E. Pelton had been with the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[105] Central Ratepayers’ Association to Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners, n.d. (ca. 1929). Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners fonds, CVA 75-C-2, file 9.
\item[107] R.W. Gordon Forbes to Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners, 15 April 1933. Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners fonds, CVA 75-C-7, file 16.
\item[109] VPD, \textit{Annual Report}, “Women’s Protective Division,” 1930, 17 and 1932, 10. CVA PDS 25. These four areas encompassed 759 (68.2\%) of 1113 charges in 1930 and 599 (74.5\%) of 804 charges in 1932.
\end{footnotes}
force since 1919 and held the rank of Constable since 1921; Miss B.L. Say, who came to the force in 1921 with seven years experience in Australia, was made Constable in 1929. It is difficult to determine what the class of these women might have been, but it is likely they came from respectable working-class or lower-middle class families that gave them the educational and occupational background to qualify for the role of policewoman. Rhoda Gordon Forbes, whose career with the VPD ended abruptly in 1933, had left the position of Chief Clerk at the Tranquille Sanatorium to join the force in 1929.\footnote{Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners fonds, CVA 75-C-7, file 16.}

The constable’s badge gave these particular single women the authority to literally police the public activities of other single women, securing femininity in the pleasure houses and streets of Vancouver. Yet this status did not mean that they did not also have to answer to standards of proper feminine conduct and aspirations. We can draw useful parallels between the experience of the WPD and the pioneering policing units in England, formed in the First World War for similar aims of policing women’s crimes. As Laura Doan has demonstrated for London, one group of pioneering ever-single policewomen found themselves at loggerheads with the Metropolitan Police and Police Chief in particular, for their masculine-style uniforms and ambition to take on legal constabulary powers.\footnote{Doan, Fashioning Sapphism, 39-49.}

A similar situation might have been at work in Vancouver, looking at the appointments and dismissals that are available in the records. It would seem from this evidence at least that the women hired to watch other women were not to demonstrate clear talent or ambition that might put them on par with the male members of the force. Single women especially seem to have been overlooked for promotion and retention – Pelton’s experience and qualifications could not match up to Tonkin’s impeccable community political connections (and marital status, guaranteeing her respectability); and Forbes’ stint as Acting Inspector and a commendation did not prevent her from being let go when leaner times meant making choices between what may well have been different types or images of female officers, for neither qualifications nor time served appeared to have been criteria.\footnote{On the opposite note, it appears that at the onset of the politically charged Depression era, Ada Tonkin was let go because she had a husband (regardless of the fact that he was unemployed), in May 1932 – thus precipitating Forbes’ appointment as Acting Inspector in June. Board secretary to Ald. Harvey, 18 May 1932. Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners fonds, CVA 75-C-6, file 11.}

Philippa Levine notes that policewomen were essentially
caught in a double bind that underscored gendered anxieties about policing. Their ambitions were realizable only by articulating them within a framework that stressed their specialized feminine attributes, yet recognition of their position was possible only by the adoption of the more typical attributes of policing which necessarily drew them away from identification as women with other women.\textsuperscript{113}

Not only did policewomen cross and re-cross the line between helping other women and persecuting them, their own claims to respectable status could be challenged. Even though they were entering public spaces in the name of law and order, they were still women on the streets – the very figures that alarmed moral reformers. Policewomen in England through the First World War encountered profound social dissonance between their persons and their roles. Policewomen on patrol, especially those in plainclothes, faced bewilderment, hostility, and even in rare cases physical violence in the course of confronting potential suspects in the streets. The resistance these women encountered was not only that of people caught in illegal acts, it was also heavily gendered. It was a Canadian soldier who “articulated one major strand of resentment toward the women”: he stopped a patrol and told them they should go home and stop “walking the streets in a way no decent woman should.”\textsuperscript{114}

It is difficult to know whether a decade later in Vancouver, the officers of the Women’s Protective Division faced a gendered backlash to their efforts. Because they had powers of arrest, unlike the wartime policewomen in England, the effectiveness of their presence on the streets was likely an aid to combating such issues. However, it is unlikely they escaped all frustrations and innuendoes, and their work took them regularly to precisely the places that concerned reformers: dancehalls, beer parlours, and the streets at night. Policewomen were arguably closest to the women they regulated, and this might have created special contradictions for ever-single policing women in their aims of securing femininity, keeping themselves on the right side of respectable and maintaining their authority to police other single women on the streets.

\textsuperscript{113} Philippa Levine, “‘Walking the Streets in a Way No Decent Woman Should’: Women Police in World War I” \textit{Journal of Modern History} 66/1 (1994), 55.

\textsuperscript{114} Levine, “‘Walking the Streets,’” 64.
Respectability, status, and social survival

This survey of the social position of single women in Vancouver exposes the discursive mechanisms of status on both ends of the spectrum. The list of 218 Society hostesses printed in *The World* in October 1901 and the lists of Dupont Street women kept by the police the year before are both evidence of the same phenomenon: the necessity of an outside authority to declare which women belong at the pinnacle of acceptable society, and who are firmly relegated to its most marginal sphere.

Although class privilege would have shielded the women of Vancouver’s elite from the surveillance cast upon the working girl, the prostitute, and even officers of the law, surveillance existed nonetheless. The mere two ‘nays’ which would deny entrance to the Georgian Club symbolize the crucial role that community approbation played in assessing status for all women, but single women in particular, who could not rely on a husband to convey the respectability extended to wives and (married) mothers. Yet the fact that a small but important percentage of ever-single women founded the Georgian Club speaks to the access that ever-single women had to all social fields in Vancouver.

The figure of the prostitute continued to haunt the single woman throughout the period before the Second World War. As the public gaze shifted from the prostitute – the epitome of the unregulated single woman – to the ‘amateur,’ the potential of all liminal single women to disrupt society was highlighted. The key lay in the politics of naming: who was, and who was not, a prostitute or ‘disrespectable,’ in the eyes of social arbiters including the police, the community, and the state. And the ever-single woman had roles to play on both sides of this discursive divide: Society journalists and the women who literally policed femininity; and the women forging strategies of survival and success in the exile field of the sex trade.

The fact that the archetype of the disreputable woman – the prostitute – was also seen as single reminds us that the key at all levels of society was the possession of that elusive and fragile quality, respectability. The deep history of the concept of Woman as either madonna or whore played out in this arena as every other in the West. Between the two was poised the liminal single woman, who could always go either way. Only in marriage and motherhood was she (nominally) secured for one rather than the other. Yet, widowed and deserted wives,
especially those who needed state support, often found themselves re-stigmatized and reinserted into an arena of moral surveillance.115

Respectability was a type of symbolic capital, a currency; those who had it could negotiate the conditions of their lives in the same way that economic or educational capital shaped their chances. Through dedicating their careers to securing femininity, some ever-single women could claim a place amongst the respectable, taking authority as those who name rather than those who are named. This was for many women an effective strategy of survival.

But so was prostitution. Besides the potential to make more than a living wage, brothel prostitution also carried the same securities as domestic service: room and board, and the knowledge that the market for such work was not affected easily by economic downturns.116 And the parlour house madam had other things in common with other successful ever-single women: as a businesswoman, her role as both an advocate and employer also made her a simultaneous “friend and exploiter” of other single women.117

Paradoxically, respectability was a key element of the structured dependence that many single women faced, where employers argued it was grounds for paying less than a living wage while reformers insisted on women’s chaste behaviour at any cost – a recipe for penury that drove many women into sex work. Yet those who could claim authority over respectability – securing femininity – were consequently some of the highest paid female professionals. Again, so were sex trade workers. They could, in effect, sidestep the hold that respectability had on their capacity to earn a living – in short, its limit on women’s independence – and thus their non-respectable labour was tied to the market, not the person. In considering why sex trade workers’ wages “were not depressed like those of mainstream working women” Lindsay McMaster highlights the importance of respectability:

in an industry of great value to the local economy which is nevertheless excluded from the legitimate social order, the women who are the economic agents in that sector find themselves in a very different financial league from that of their mainstream

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115 For the moral regulation of single mothers, see Margaret Little, No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers In Ontario, 1920-1997 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998).
116 And the same insecurities: sexual assault and violence. Nilsen notes that prostitution might have seemed little different and more rewarding to the domestic servant: “A woman may have reasoned that since her sexual services were clearly of value, her present situation differed from prostitution only in being more laborious.” Nilsen, “The Social Evil,” 218.
117 Rosen, The Lost Sisterhood, 87-88.
counterparts. [...] Only in cases like prostitution where the requirements of respectability and propriety have been utterly rejected, did the women therein begin to assume a different kind of economic agency.118

In the parlour house trade at the turn of the century, women controlled the market and its labour. No boundaries of propriety, gendered divisions of labour, or excuses like ‘pin money’ worked to limit what they earned for their labour. And the necessity of offering a milieu of cultural distinction to clients mimics in many ways the symbolic capital attained by members of Society.

In the end, the key difference between the professional securing femininity and the prostitute was that the prostitute could not be a citizen. Just as the prostitute was constructed as the negative identity – the ‘not-I’ – of the bourgeois subject,119 the ever-single woman securing femininity embraced that ‘I.’ So it is an exceptional place that the spinster-citizen ended up in: breaking the binary of prescription (whore or wife) and sharing the respectability of the wife-and-mother without domestic subordination to a man. How she got there was a complex interaction of class, ethnicity, sexuality, occupation, and age. Those ever-single women who could access occupations ranged around the protection and tutelage of the liminal single woman claimed a central place at the nexus of these systems: mature, White, middle-class, and ostensibly straight but asexual. This last was a critical factor – having passed beyond ‘eligibility’ and displaying essentially no sexual nature, the mature respectable single woman passed out of the range of surveillance of her sexuality and could then join the ranks of those whose purview was to perform such surveillance.

Although taking a role in securing femininity was a good strategy for personal status, we should inquire whether ever-single women inevitably bought into gender regimes; their own life paths could have generated dissonance between prescriptions about women’s limitations and reality. As Moi points out, “the traditional relationship between the sexes is structured by a habitus which makes male power appear legitimate even to women [and] it produces women who share the very same habitus which serves to oppress them.”120 However much certain ever-single women might have adopted the habitus of social authority over other single women, the funnelling of women into marriage and domesticity was essentially a

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119 Bell, Reading, 43.
120 Moi, “Appropriating Bourdieu,” 325.
contradiction for the ever-single professional. As the clearest example of securing femininity in this study, Margaret Bayne ran an institution of coercion (the Girls’ Industrial School in Vancouver) to discipline young liminal single women who were deemed in danger of breaching heteronorms. Yet she reformed its practices to allow for a wider range of training, less penal atmosphere, and (for a minority of inmates) chances at non-stigmatized training and access to middle-class occupations rather than simply marriage and domestic work.121 Further work is necessary to look at the possible resistances ever-single women securing femininity made to their roles and attempts they might have made to alter the stringent formula of training for subservience.

Some ever-single women did strive to be part of the field of normative gender relations that respectability embodied, to assume its habitus, to enforce its doxa; others contested it or rejected it outright. Lindsay McMaster argues: “because they were exempted from many social conventions by virtue of their occupation, prostitutes occupied a significantly different cultural position, and their corresponding experiences influenced their social attitudes and insights.”122 It is likely that the prostitute could feel able to gaze back at society through a specialized experience of her own:

Typically, prostitutes maintained an attitude of defensive superiority toward ‘respectable’ members of the rest of society: they joked about the ‘charity girls’ who freely gave away sexual favors, and they derided the ‘respectable’ wives of their customers. In particular, they expressed contempt for the ‘respectable’ domestic and factory workers who worked for subsistence pay, endured poorer working conditions, and often had to submit to sexual harassment by their bosses. Most frequently, they reserved their worst epithets for the ‘nosy’ reformers who wanted to ‘save’ prostitutes by destroying their means of support and running them out of town.123 They may have been by definition heterodox to the respectable, but within their own communities, it is possible that the ever-single women who worked the sex trade had a doxa of their own.

It is important for us to remember, however, that the respectable ever-single women who held crucial roles within the heterosexual system – especially in social work, education, and the legal system – were themselves ‘outside’ of heterosexual relationships. And the prostitute

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121 See the section in her memoir on her time at the GIS: Bayne, *Roses in December*, 169-187.
was herself the ultimate outsider to heterosexual domesticity. So we need to be mindful of the often contradictory ways ever-single women could be enmeshed within heteronormative systems. These women needed to manage the contradictions between promoting heteronormativity and not doing so themselves – for the respectable ever-single woman, being ‘outside’ heterosexuality but having a vital role in policing it; for the non-respectable, the burden (if it was) of embodying female transgression, a parody of the heterosexual order. What ever-single women thought about the paths of their lives and their own identities is the focus of the next two chapters, as I move from the material and discursive conditions of single women’s lives to their relationships and identities.
Four: Emotional geographies

What words are there for these things, solemn big things with joy wrapped deep in their middles?


If we accept that material, psychological, and social conditions can profoundly affect human subjectivity, then it is crucial to ask not only under what conditions ever-single women lived their lives, but also how they built their self-conceptions. Being ever single was a major, defining factor in these women’s lives – not in the sense of a life-long preoccupation with some internalized ‘lack,’ but in the real material frameworks of daily life. Because these women did not have male domestic/sexual partners and had no children, they could not readily embrace a traditional female identity of helpmeet and mother (although as we have seen, a major factor in many single women’s lives was the care of parents, siblings’ children, or other kin). If their identities were different from that of married women and mothers, then there existed a gender category that does not fit well in the binaries that we continue to maintain: masculine/feminine, straight/queer, normal/marginal.

As revealed in part by the close analysis of the nominal census, most ever-single women moved through their lives within a web of relationships, from communal to familial to intimate. Perhaps more important than confirmation of particular kinds of relationships (friend, partner, lover?) are the roles these relationships played in the often overlapping layers of their lives, and what bonds they shared with other women. Crucial to this discussion is the dismantling of the idea that women outside domestic conjugality had inadequate or abnormal lives that should be approached with pity, derision, or suspicion. In this chapter I seek to do just that – challenge the traditional construction of the spinster’s life by examining the voices of ever-single women themselves.

British Columbia archives and libraries have yielded an impressive array of autobiographical works by ever-single women who lived or sojourned in British Columbia before the Second World War. The selection I will highlight here includes the published autobiography of home economics pioneer Alice Ravenhill (1859-1954), the unpublished correspondence of journalist Ethel Bruce (1869-1966), the fragment manuscript
autobiography of nursing pioneer Ethel Johns (1879-1967), and the online digitized correspondence of sojourner Jessie McQueen (1860-1933).\(^1\) The manuscript memoir of suffragist and educator Margaret Whyte Bayne (1865-1946) and the extensive published collections of autobiographical works of artist Emily Carr (1871-1945) are especially highlighted here.

While I look to these autobiographical materials to offer a window into ever-single women’s lives, I also include oral history accounts and letters to the editor in rural newspapers to bring in examples beyond these middle-class, privileged, and mostly urban accounts. However, due to the nature of my sources, the bulk of the autobiographical material presented in this chapter (and the next) is from White, professional, urban-dwelling women who could be counted among the middle-class, high-status women discussed in chapters two and three. So while some nuances from outside this group can be offered, what is sorely missing is the autobiographical perspective of women of colour and working-class women. This is certainly a condition of the lack of available sources rather than a lack of desire to include such on my part, and this remains a necessary avenue of future research.

As we will see in these narratives, the web of relationships that enmeshed ever-single women’s lives was rich and complex. Ever-single women maintained a variety of essential relationships that I argue were as vital and as fundamental as the heterosexual dyad, including family, special mentors, and intimate friends. Although ever-single women have left good evidence of their relationships with family and friends, there is very little discussion of actual intimate domestic relationships between women who lived in partnership amongst the autobiographical materials featured in this study. This was at first disappointing, as I was keenly interested in the potential same-sex intimate relationships forged in ever-single women’s lives. But I have also come to realize that focusing only on the (sexually) intimate domestic relationship as the relationship – and its lack as tragedy or deviance – is missing the point and the reality of many ever-single women’s lives. In fact, I found a much richer and

\(^1\) The correspondence of Jessie McQueen from 1874 to 1893 (both inward and outward) has been mounted online in an excellent searchable database by the Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives (ACVA) project, which had brought together holdings on the McQueen family from four archives across the country: the Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management in Nova Scotia, and the British Columbia Archives, the Nicola Valley Museum Archives Association, and the Rossland Museum & Archives in British Columbia. See *The McQueen Family Letters*, Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives (http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca/acva/en/mcqueen/index.php). Citations for individual letters in this collection reference the actual repository, fonds, and file numbers each letter can be found in, rather than the website, as directed by the ACVA.
varied pattern of relationships in ever-single women’s accounts, one that signals a different model of affective connections.

From the 1901 Athenas sample we know that many single women lived within family structures, with parents or siblings, and others lived in clusters with friends, workmates, and partners, or with tenants or boarders. Some had dependants: their own younger siblings, their adopted children, the children of siblings, or elderly parents. And the range of friendships that these women built, from the homosocial to the homoerotic, deserves close examination. We need to query the multivalent web of relationships that ever-single women enjoyed and struggled with – with kin, friends, even lovers, both women and men.

Veronica Strong-Boag concurs that interpersonal relationships were integral to ever-single Canadian women’s lives, and they “depended on intimate friends for the emotional reassurance and physical assistance in the practical details of life”.² Strong-Boag goes on to argue that “these women might not have found ways to accommodate their aspirations to companionship with a man within marriage [...] but they did not lack compensatory satisfactions.”³ Although this statement is certainly true, it also assumes that aspirations to heterosexual companionship were the norm for all ever-single women – rather than aspirations to intimate female companionship, or simply no aspiration to the company of men – and that other lives and relationships outside the heterosexual dyad were all ‘compensatory.’

Ever-single women did not necessarily see their lives as ‘compensatory.’ ‘Sunset’ relates for those readers of the Family Herald and Weekly Star who “would ask how I enjoy myself here” in her isolated coastal village: “I have my parents, also brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews all around me.”⁴ What to her must have been self-evident was that the ‘absence’ of an intimate companion did not diminish her life. Our continued habit of seeing this ‘absence’ as a problem keeps ever-single women in their place on the margins of ‘normal’ female lifestyles.

We need to explore possible frameworks for mapping out the varied interconnections in ever-single women’s lives, a web that is not an adjunct or substitution for a single, central

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relationship – the heterosexual dyad – but is as legitimate and instrumental. Roona Simpson argues our privileging of the heterosexual dyad limits our perceptions about women’s lives and notes “expanding our capacity to picture varied social relationships extends the possibility of ‘plural paths’ to intimacy.”5 These multilayered ‘emotional geographies’ of ever-single women – the emotional topographies of their lives, the patterns of their relationships, and their ‘structures of feeling’6 – are the focus of this chapter, mapping a model of reading ever-single women’s texts that accounts for layers, phases, and patterns of relationships throughout their lives, rather than seek (in most cases, in vain) for one primary attachment.

Reading for relationships

Yesterday I went to town and bought this book to enter scraps in, not a diary of statistics and dates and decency of spelling and happenings but just to jot me down in, unvarnished me.

– Emily Carr, journal entry, 23 November 1930. Hundreds and Thousands, 668.

In approaching women’s own texts about their lives, we need to begin with the trouble with ‘normal.’ It is important to think of the multiple reasons ever-single women might have to pursue the image of heteronormativity. Becki Ross reminds us that we need to acknowledge, explore, and teach “the depth and scope of fear and hatred directed at people who risked losing employment, their friends and families, and sometimes their lives, in search of homo-love and relationships.”7 We also need to acknowledge the very real privileges of education, employment, professional attainment, personal safety, and legal protection afforded to ever-single women based on their performance of an adherence to heterosexual norms, regardless of their actual identities or sexualities.

The discursive context for ever-single women’s relationships – and thus what was acceptable to discuss in their lifewriting – changed between the last decades of the nineteenth

century and the interwar period. In her important 1975 study, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America,” Carroll Smith-Rosenburg argues that “a different type of emotional landscape existed in the nineteenth century” for White, privileged women.8 Looking at the letters and diaries of middle-class and elite married and unmarried American women from the mid-eighteenth century to the 1880s, Smith-Rosenburg discovered a wide web of female friendships and homosocial networks. She finds that women formed deep and intense friendships that cross modern borders of homosocial-homosexual relations, forming an all-female world of support and affection comprised of female kin, mothers/daughters, and friendships formed at school or through other extra-familial connections and maintained through visits and correspondence.

These women’s relationships with one another were characterized by “closeness, freedom of emotional expression, and uninhibited physical contact,” while heterosexual relations were habitually the opposite.9 Smith-Rosenburg stresses that it is important to understand the normality of these relationships, as opposed to the twentieth-century psychosexual model of deviance: “within such a world of female support, intimacy, and ritual it was only to be expected that adult women would turn trustingly and lovingly to one another. It was a behavior they had observed and learned since childhood.”10 Smith-Rosenburg’s aim is not to take the measure of ‘lesbian’ behaviours in the past, but to challenge the idea of a strict hetero-homo binary that fails to explain most women’s experiences.

The essential question is not whether these women had genital contact and can therefore be defined as homosexual or heterosexual. The twentieth-century tendency to view human love and sexuality within a dichotomized universe of deviance and normality, genitality and platonic love, is alien to the emotions and attitudes of the nineteenth century and fundamentally distorts the nature of these women’s emotional interaction.11

Adrienne Rich notes that Smith-Rosenberg’s study shows us “a profoundly female emotional and passional world” that merits serious consideration. However she cautions that Smith-Rosenberg’s ‘female world’ “is not a social ideal, enclosed as it is within prescriptive

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9 Smith-Rosenburg, “The Female World,” 74.
10 Smith-Rosenburg, “The Female World,” 74.
middle-class heterosexuality and marriage.” The paradigm figure in Smith-Rosenburg’s pioneering study is the privileged, college-educated, and eventually married White woman. Lillian Faderman adds that there were clear structural restraints to romantic friendships, revolving around a privileged class position and the relative lack of economic opportunities for women before the late nineteenth century:

if an eligible male came along, the women were not to feel that they could send him on his way in favor of their romantic friendship; they were not to hope that they could find gainful employment to support such a same-sex love relationship permanently or that they could usurp any other male privileges in support of that relationship; and they were not to intimate in any way that an erotic element might possibly exist in their love for each other.

Within these strictures, romantic friendship could be allowed to flourish as “a respected social institution in America.”

Many women who were part of the first wave of educated professionals in Canada, the US, and the UK experienced ‘romantic friendships,’ and many had access to the economic means to maintain domestic partnerships with women throughout their lives. Coined ‘Boston marriages,’ these partnerships relied on class and race privilege as well as asexuality – though some clearly did engage in genital sexual relations – to maintain social acceptability. Some of the ever-single women in this study, (especially those who appear in the 1901 Athenas sample), would have grown up with the legacy of romantic friendship and silence on lesbian existence, encountering sexology’s popularized prohibitions only later in their lives.

Canadian contemporaries of the BC women in this study enjoyed intimate partnerships with women right through the Second World War. Patricia Rooke sees a continuation of

13 Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, 1-2.
14 See for example Rooke and Schnell, No Bleeding Heart; see also the work of Martha Vicinus, including Intimate Friends.
16 These include Toronto sculptors Frances Loring and Florence Wyle; roaming freelance photographer Edith Watson and her partner Victoria Hayward; and Ottawa social worker and mayor Charlotte Whitton and her partner Margaret Grier. See Rebecca Sisler, The Girls: A Biography of Frances Loring and Florence Wyle (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd., 1972); Frances Rooney, Working Light: The Wandering Life of
romantic friendships and Boston marriages in the partnership of Charlotte Whitton and Margaret Grier, two ever-single Ontario women who shared a partnership and a home for 23 years between 1924 and 1947:

The depth of romantic sentiment, which cannot be said to exclude elements of the erotic, and the fact of a life shared in friendship and cohabitation for almost thirty years, suggests the lasting nature of the “Boston marriage” model as an important part of same-sex support structures in the feminist past.17

Elspeth Cameron points out that the closeness of Anne and Diana in *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) is the quintessential Canadian romantic friendship. The tropes of romantic friendship are clearly present – Anne and Diana pledging eternal (“bosom”) friendship, romantic walks, and declarations of love – and were just as clearly unproblematic for Lucy Maud Montgomery and her readers. Cameron argues that this model of female friendship (though shadowed by the future husband that Anne feared would take Diana away) is one now lost to us, conditioned as we are to sacrifice female friendships for heterosexual romance.18

Smith-Rosenberg traces the slow decline of romantic friendships towards the end of the nineteenth century – due in part from the public anxieties raised about the challenge of the New Woman to traditional norms of femininity and masculinity, and the rise of sexology casting a harsher light on the same-sex relationships that even a generation before would have been considered normal for women of privilege.19

Ever-single women faced conflicting values as they bridged the paradigm shift through the decades between the 1880s and 1930s that saw women’s expanding public roles and civil rights interconnected with the strengthening public prescription on women’s innate heterosexuality. In her survey of fictional representations of the lesbian or ‘female invert’ before World War II, Lillian Faderman notes the consistent means of characterizing such women is their denial of female roles and seeking such masculine pursuits as being a tomboy, riding horses like a man, and being bookish. As she puts it, one character’s chief trait, like the medical “textbook lesbians,” was her disdain to “attend to the domestic needs of a man.”20

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19 Smith-Rosenburg, “The Female World,” 74.
20 Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 56.
Here we can begin to see the true root of the fear surrounding the female invert, the lesbian, the New Woman, the feminist, and the single woman generally: she will not attend to the needs of men, the service role that is at the heart of all constructions of proper femininity. Women who do not marry men fundamentally challenge that construction, proving in their existence that servicing men is neither an inevitable necessity nor the only destiny of women. This mirrors Adrienne Rich’s assessment that a key issue for feminist scholarship is examining the “enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male rights of physical, economic, and emotional access.”21 Rich notes that we cannot assume women in the past “preferred” or “chose” heterosexuality, even if they married:

Women have married because it was necessary, in order to survive economically, in order to have children who would not suffer economic deprivation or social ostracism, in order to remain respectable, in order to do what was expected of women, because coming out of “abnormal” childhoods they wanted to feel “normal” and because heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment.22

This theory of the constructed nature of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ is vital to thinking about ever-single women’s identities, voices, and sexuality.

Because the key autobiographical material in this study was written after the 1920s, it is important to ask what impact the increased bordering of sexualities in this period had on women’s perceptions of themselves and their lives, and what they might have felt unable to express publicly for fear of social censure. Although the decline of the ‘female world of love and ritual’ occurred unevenly over the lifetimes of most of the women studied here, the rise of popular discourse on the lesbian and the growing promotion of the necessity of heterosex for all women’s mental and physical health greatly affected the ability of ever-single women to forge relationships and identities that would not be stigmatized.

We can find a useful comparison for ever-single women in another group of women who struggled with harmful stereotypes centred on sexuality. Racialized women in North America have always faced an intensified imperative to proper performances of femininity. In “No More Secrets, No More Lies: African American History and Compulsory Heterosexuality,” Mattie Udora Richardson describes a “culture of dissemblance” wherein Black women

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through the twentieth century engaged in a “tightly regulated discussion concerning their personal lives” as an “available avenue for political and personal protection against the overwhelming discourse of sexual immorality.”

She asserts: “Black middle-class pleas for citizenship and humanity have resulted in a capitulatory politics of inclusion and respectability that has distorted and suppressed memories of variant genders and sexualities.” In particular, marriage has become the key sign of normative identity within compulsory heterosexuality: “The drive, as DuBois asserts, to be recognized as ‘normal human beings’ has produced an adherence to the trope of marriage as a demonstration of humanity in historical literature.” This discussion has resonance for historians studying the community of ever-single women (which would of course include Black women), who were also under the compulsion to perform and demonstrate ‘normalcy’ in face of proclamations of their inherent deviance (from ‘natural’ female desires for heterosex, for marriage to men, for children).

The discourse on deviant sexualities could have had a bordering effect on the autobiographical accounts of ever-single women, especially those who identified as women-centered or lesbian and had intimate friends and companions who were female. As scholars such as Lillian Faderman, Martha Vicinus, and Rosemary Auchmuty have discovered, many ever-single women in the past have obscured or even completely excised their most intimate companions from their public identities and narratives. Ever-single women often burned letters, buried evidence, and enjoined their closest friends to erase all references to female companions. Several of the women studied here also expunged their records: Ethel Johns ordered all her personal and family letters burned as the first order of business in her will.

For ever-single women writing their own lives, concerns with demonstrating an appropriate measure of heteronormativity and fear of homophobic reprimals could skew the importance of male acquaintances to the detriment of close female attachments. With any...
ever-single woman’s account we need to assess the chance of encountering deliberately distorted relationships and erasures. This cautions us to avoid assuming that, because there is no open account of intimate friendships with women, they did not in fact exist. But if our aim is broader than simply looking for dyads (homo- or heterosexual), a better approach is to trace how ever-single women explained the fact of their remaining single.

Narratives of singleness

What do you think of her dude Jane, or did she send one of his photos home yet? Wait till you see mine! But I haven’t seen him myself yet, so I had better crow low for a while perhaps.

– Jessie McQueen, letter to Janie McQueen, September 20, 1888, Lower Nicola

We need to read women’s own accounts for hints of why they remained single, including their critiques of marriage and female domesticity, rather than focus solely on ‘the romance’ as a marker for their decisions or conditions. All the ever-single women in this study were, on the whole, reticent about discussing their romantic lives and choices. Some, too, appear to have felt obliged to include in their autobiographical writings a seemingly obligatory paragraph outlining some heterosexual romance, however slight, brief, or failed. Alice Ravenhill’s 241-page memoir contains exactly one paragraph on her romantic life.Emily Carr recognized the political importance of bringing out heteronormativity in her own texts. As she explained to Ira Dilworth, “I would like to leave it [love] out altogether, but life wouldn’t be complete, nor me normal without a touch of it I suppose.”

This tension between lived experience and appearance of normality within compulsory heterosexuality fuels this deflection in ever-single women’s texts and the biographies about them. An often desperate search through the evidence for a male as an object of affection and passion is termed cherchez l’homme by Lillian Faderman, who traces this phenomenon in biographies of ever-single women for whom she has evidence of lesbian relationships. Faderman charges that in the face of no discernable heterosexual relationships, biographers accept the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence “rather than acknowledge the power of a

28 Ravenhill, Memoirs, 52.
same-sex attachment.”30 This applies equally well to ever-single women for whom same-sex attachments may not have existed. Many of Emily Carr’s biographers pay a great deal of attention to the (heterosexual) romantic possibilities in her life, speculating on the most shadowy of characters.

The effect of cherchez l’homme is also evident in the assumption that staying single was an abnormality in need of explanation. The biographers of Emily Carr have often spent little time on the conditions and struggles of her singleness, yet some were clearly motivated to seek the ‘real’ reasons Carr remained single. Doris Shadbolt states simply that Carr “declined the wife-mother role her society would have assigned to her in order to pursue the life of her own choosing.”31 In a similar vein, in Emily Carr: The Untold Story (1978), Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher speculates whether Carr could have succeeded as an artist if she had married. Carr’s main identified suitor, ‘Martyn’ (William Paddon), could have protected her “from the hardships of her austere spinster’s life.” But Hembroff-Schleicher believes that Paddon demanded more than Carr could give, and that her spirit may well have been stifled, especially if she made a home with him in America far from her beloved British Columbia forests.32

In contrast, Maria Tippett’s Emily Carr: A Biography (1979) gives a very involved, psychoanalytical explanation for Carr’s singleness: she was made to loathe sex due to a stark ‘facts of life’ talk given by her father when she was a young girl. This is a view shared in part by Paula Blanchard as well, who also pinpoints the ‘facts of life’ talk as a moment of extreme trauma for Carr.33 For Tippett, Carr’s ‘sexual frigidity’ manifested itself in her illness in England (1902-3), brought on by her pseudonymous suitor ‘Martyn’s’ presence, offering a love Carr was incapable of accepting: “a long-term adult relationship that demanded a normal sexual response was frightening to her.” Tippett diagnoses Carr as a hysterical, and her

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32 Hembroff-Schleicher, Emily Carr, 71.
33 Blanchard, Life of Emily Carr, 53.
collapse in England is constructed as a disorder brought on by sexual dysfunction. Most recently, Susan Crean has relied on promises of tantalizing new evidence on the ‘facts of life’ talk to promote her latest addition to the Carr canon, *Opposite Contraries*.

Tippett in particular gives full credence to the mid-Victorian medicalization of female sexuality and condemnation of individual women who did not embrace marriage and motherhood as abnormal, ill, or wilfully deviant. ‘Hysteria’ is a catchall term now recognized by feminist scholars as a complex but very socially oriented condition, employed to reflect and define disorderly female sexuality. For Tippett to uncritically embrace this diagnosis of Carr casts doubt upon her model of repressed sexuality.

It is attitudes such as these that can obscure the study of an ever-single woman’s experiences and identity. Carr offers a simpler explanation for her illness in England. In *Growing Pains* she reports a flurry of study and work that drained her energy, finally driving her to a doctor and rest in the sanatorium – where questionable late-Victorian medical practices kept her confined for 18 months. Whatever diagnosis the doctor may have made (which Carr claims not to have known – perhaps a resistance to such labels as ‘hysteric’?), from Carr’s angle it appeared to be a case of exhaustion. Ultimately, whether she truly suffered from ‘hysteria’ or had a deep fear of sexuality – while certainly interesting – is not as important as discovering how Carr herself explained her life and her choices.

The fragments of historical evidence concerning ever-single women in British Columbia present a variety of reasons for being single, from a simple choice to failed heterosexual

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34 Maria Tippett, *Emily Carr: A Biography* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1979), 45, 59. The very language with which Tippett characterizes Carr’s ‘illness’ is steeped in heteronorms of female submission: the ‘demand’ that she submit to ‘normal’ heterosex that would result in a (passive) ‘response’ - rather than any sense of marriage offering her a positive place to pursue her desires, on her terms.


36 See Wendy Mitchinson, “Hysteria and Insanity in Women: A Nineteenth-Century Canadian Perspective” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21/3 (Fall 1986), 89. Single women were commonly diagnosed with this disorder, in attempts to explain their singleness.


38 Interestingly, although Crean used the ‘facts of life’ drama to promote interest in her collection, that same collection reveals a sensuous and hardly prudish attitude toward sexuality that was excised from Carr’s published journals. See Carr, journal entry, 31 January 1935. Crean, *Opposite Contraries*, 95.
romance to the pressures of family duty; although there is little clear evidence of desire for same-sex intimacy, this too may have been a factor. We also need to keep in mind that the decision to be single did not have to be one decision, but an accumulation of circumstances and choices over time, “a result of a slow accumulation of individual acts rather than one early conscious decision.”39 We can also see that singleness could be a result of an accumulation of circumstances and conditions rather than (or in addition to) conscious choices.

As noted in chapter one, the phenomenon of the ‘man shortage,’ used too often as a shorthand to explain women’s singleness in older colonial and metropolitan centres, was in fact reversed in British Columbia. Yet the over-abundance of BC bachelors did not stop isolated areas of the frontier from having a small to negligible pool of eligible marriage partners for those women who wanted to marry, and prompted one woman to write in to the women’s editor at the Farmer’s Advocate: “Who is coming over forty miles over a rough mountain road to court me?”40 The social stigma of spinsterhood was a real concern for some women. ‘Penelope,’ the teacher whose words helped frame the defining age of 30 for spinsterhood for this study, wrote that the workload and isolation of rural teaching meant the impossibility of meeting a marriage partner: “It therefore appears I shall some day be shelved as an old maid.”41 Regardless of broader provincial demographics, these woman sought marriage, yet experienced a shortage of eligible men. This was also a problem for many middle-class and elite women after the Great War, when many of their sweethearts and fiancés did not return, leading some women to not seek another partner, and others to face a reduced pool of ‘eligible’ men of their own class and status.42

Others experienced similar derailments of their life plans. Tragedy could make its mark, but interestingly, it could also be re-written as a sign of the right path in life. Jessie McQueen lost an important male friend, who seemed to have been moving into a prominent place in her

41 ‘Penelope’ (British Columbia) in Prim Rose at Home, Family Herald and Weekly Star October 30, 1912. Rpt. in Lewis, ed., Dear Editor and Friends, 100. Her proposed solution was to solicit letters from bachelors or widowers through the letters page of the Family Herald and Weekly Star.
42 This was the case for several women of the Gilley family of New Westminster. Paul Gilley, personal communication, December 2002. The ‘fiancés never returned’ narrative seems to be quite a common one, appearing often in my informal conversations with people about their ‘great aunts’ and other family members who lived in the time period of my study and who did not marry.
heart when he was killed in a mill accident. In an uncharacteristically unguarded moment addressing her mother in Nova Scotia, McQueen talked of her sorrow: “And he was my only friend, mother, the only one I had made in the whole Valley, or ever wanted to make.” Jean Barman suggests that with his death McQueen seems to have abandoned ideas of marriage, feeling his death showed her “she was predestined to serve her family” - even as she carried with her for years the little Bible that was her gift to him.

Alice Ravenhill recounts her broken engagement in London, some thirty years before emigrating to British Columbia: “Neither do I care to dwell upon my engagement in 1882 to a young professional man” who was compelled by her family to break their engagement three days before the wedding, as he did not secure equivalent life insurance to match her ‘settlement’ (money promised to the couple upon marriage). “Modern maidens will smile at my submission to such drastic procedures. I was stunned by the shock; debarred from seeing my fiancé or from receiving his letters; and whisked out of London.” Family and class discipline dictated “I must give no outward sign of the ordeal through which I had passed.” Ravenhill maintains that this sharp redirection of her life enabled the lifelong vocation she embraced in public health education: “this painful episode in its results actually set my feet upon the path I was destined to tread in such constructive services in the cause of human welfare.”

Conditions could also militate against choice. The realities of self-support could render remaining single less attractive than the alternative. In a letter to the editor, ‘Young Schoolma’am’ rather cynically notes that teachers sought marriage as an escape from the trials of their profession:

> The chances to marry, happily perhaps, ascinate [sic] their weary work-worn brains until it seems that they would just marry anyone to escape the horrors of anywhere from 50 to 70 “young barbarians” turned loose on them daily.

Other women express indifference to heterosexual coupling. In an oral history interview, Winnie Dixson recalls:

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44 Barman, Sojourning Sisters, 84-85.
45 Ravenhill, Memoirs, 52.
46 Ravenhill, Memoirs, 52-3.
I took a book and went upstairs if there were too many young men around. I left Father and Mother to talk to them. I didn’t have much interest. I didn’t have time. I had about three hundred chickens.48

Margaret Bayne does not mention romance, nor any threshold or moment of choice at all; instead, her singleness is taken as a natural part of her ambition and striving for a satisfying career path.49 And some women, like Norah Denny and Dorothy Geoghegan, did not need (or likely want) a husband, as they shared a household and a vocation, running a private school in Duncan BC.50

Emily Carr’s narratives around singleness centre on her conscious choice to be single, in order to travel her chosen path of an artist. Carr’s works give slight mention to romance, with an arc of early unrequited affections ending in her refusal of an unreturned passion – where the endpoint is her refusal not just of the man in question, but of the putative comforts and securities of marriage in order to pursue her ambition to be an artist. She briefly notes that upon her return from her first trip up the West coast in 1899, “I tasted two experiences for the first time – love, and poetry. Poetry was pure joy, love more than half pain. I gave my love where it was not wanted; almost simultaneously an immense love was offered to me which I could neither accept nor return.”51 This mixing of love and poetry is an interesting tool for Carr to retrospectively interpret her own feelings: “From the underscored passages in my poets, poetry did not touch love as deeply as it touched nature and beauty for me. Marked passages are all earth and nature.”52 Here she suggests that even as she admits to falling in love, that love in the end was never as important to her as expressing nature, her ultimate identity as an artist. This subsuming of love to Art would also explain, for Carr, her romantic entanglements.

In the London section of her autobiography, Growing Pains – and hard on the heels of her rejection of the popular notion that “the aim of every girl was to find a husband” – Carr mentions a couple of exasperating encounters with suitors in whom she was clearly not

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49 See Bayne, Roses in December, passim.
50 See Queen Margaret’s School fonds, BCA MS-1337.
51 Carr, Growing Pains, 346
52 Carr, Growing Pains, 346.
interested. Although she treats these proposals with asperity, their placement in the same chapter as her rejection of husband-seeking does two things: demonstrates her ideal of integrity and self-respect (not taking a man simply because he asked) and shows us she did have men who were interested in her – attending to her own concern that without (heterosexual) romance, she might not appear ‘normal.’

In the chapter headed “Martyn” she puts the issue to rest. She received many proposals of marriage from one young Canadian man, whose ‘immense love’ she did not reciprocate. She narrates her final refusal: “I can’t marry you, Martyn. It would be wicked and cruel, because I don’t love that way. Besides – my work.” When he protested that she need not work if she was his wife, she drove her point home: “It is not support, it is not money or love; it’s the work itself. And, Martyn, while you are here, I am not doing my best.” Mrs. Radcliffe, her London mentor, is flabbergasted at Carr’s rejection of Martyn and asks “What more do you want? Is it a prince you wait for?” Carr replies: “I wait for no one; I came to London to study.” With that Carr wraps up her romantic career, firmly enshrining Art as the better of the two choices.

More clearly than any psychoanalysis of ‘hidden’ sexual traumas, Carr herself brings forth reasons for her singleness. Some of her biographers appear to assume that a woman must accept the offer of any man that comes along, or be in need of explanation by way of trauma, illness, or deviance. Instead, what we see is Carr’s rejection of a man she does not love, and her decision that pursuing art is more important than the economic comforts (and social acceptance) of marriage. Whether these decisions were spurred by some interior workings of Carr’s subconscious is beside the point – they are how she explains to her readers (and to herself?) the paths she takes.

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55 In her journals Carr notes: “There was a note, written forty years and more after the man had been my sweetheart and he loved me still. […] He demanded more than I could have given; he demanded worship. He thought I made a great mistake in not marrying him. He ought to be glad I did not; he’d have found me a bitter mouthful and very indigestible, and he would have bored me till my spirit died.” Emily Carr, journal entry, 9 February 1936. In Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr* (1966) ed. Ira Dilworth, rpt. in Doris Shadbolt, ed. *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993), 815.
◆ critique of marriage

Looking at marrieds, I often wonder how much is love and how much the ordinary needs of life, like when one is in danger of losing their job, being afraid of being without it.


Whether circumstance, indifference, or choice, a key parallel element that runs through all these narratives of singleness is the eligibility of men as life partners. Evidently many of these women had certain criteria about what a husband and marriage were to entail that structured their responses to the conditions and choices before them, and assayed these evaluations in their narratives both as social critique and as another means of explaining their own state. (This would work equally well for women who had no desire for men as those who might have accepted an equal marriage). Thus in examining ever-single women’s lives, instead of asking what is wrong with these women, that they did not marry (or at least, did not have intimate, domestic relationships with men), perhaps we need to ask, what was wrong with marriage?

These narratives, taken collectively, reveal a sustained critique of marriage. Although the ever-single women whose autobiographical voices are available to us on the whole do not say a great deal about their own romantic life and singleness, they often do comment about marriage and ‘marrieds.’ Their critiques of married life may be read for hints to their understanding of singleness and help us speculate further on the possible reasons for their own choices.

As ‘outsiders within,’ ever-single women’s unique perspective on the trials, hardships, and violences of marriage are a valuable balance to assumptions, then and now, that marriage is an essentially positive experience for women, and its failures are due to personal faults of individuals, not endemic to marriage itself. As Rich argues, the “pattern of resistance” created when women avoid or reject heterosexual coupling is “also a kind of borderline position from which to analyze and challenge the relationship of heterosexuality to male supremacy.”

Voices from single women found in oral history collections and in the pages of western newspapers serving rural BC areas concentrate on the practicalities of marriage. Both love and economic stability are key factors in these narratives. Although isolation was a problem for some women who felt trapped on lonely farms or teaching in small settlements, other women found an ample – even too ample – quantity of men. What was lacking was quality. In an oral history interview, Dorothea Walker remembers that “the proposals went like nobody’s business at a dance, or if you were out riding or something. But you didn’t take a lot of them seriously, because you knew perfectly well these men couldn’t buy beans and bacon during the winter.”

The woman calling herself ‘Young Schoolma’am’ notes that beyond economic security was intellectual companionship:

I think a teacher who has educated herself to the work can hardly be happy with such narrow, unenlightened lives as some of our western farm youths live. If she doesn’t marry someone who is very able to give her his intelligent, congenial companionship and good home (and it must be a love affair) she had better remain single and go on teaching and just have one to support.

And for some, a verified good character was essential: ‘Sunset’ seems perfectly happy fishing and hunting in her west coast community, but would be willing to entertain offers from just the right sort of man: “I would correspond with a middle-aged bachelor or widower who could and would gladly produce a sworn statement by a J.P. that he is perfectly respectable in every way and does not drink or use profane language.”

Other ever-single women saw the central problem with marriage as one of subjugation. Veronica Strong-Boag remarks in *The New Day Recalled* that prominent Canadian ever-single women such as Agnes McPhail “refused male suitors because they saw no way of reconciling heterosexual relationships with their need for independence.” She quotes McPhail’s powerful statement: “the person could not be subjected.”

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57 Adele Perry, “‘Oh I’m Just Sick of the Faces of Men’: Gender Imbalance, Race, Sexuality, and Sociability in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia” *BC Studies* 105-106 (Spring/Summer 1995), 27.
critique of the unequal gender relations within marriage is offered in the memoirs of Margaret Bayne and Emily Carr.

Margaret Bayne’s sole discussion of marriage in her memoir is to criticize it. She does state that “marriage is the greatest trade open to women,” though not that it is the only one. However, she notes with sympathy that the girls in the Industrial School where she was Superintendent often thought marriage did not necessarily mean a wonderful life – in their eyes, marriage for a woman was “a life of cooking and cleaning, nursing babies, living with a diffident inattentive husband, who any day might leave her with the family to support.” She states: “It takes an exceptional man to give joy to such duties and make love the law in such a home.” Because she does not mention a single male romantic interest in her memoir, we can only speculate, if she identified as heterosexual, as to whether she found the men of her own acquaintance lacking.

Emily Carr’s thoughts on being single can be drawn out in her comments on married life and its hardships, especially for women. In her several autobiographical texts and letters, Carr is direct in her condemnation of the genteel tyranny of her father in her parents’ marriage, as well as that of other friends; most damning, perhaps, was she felt that marriage made her friends’ art decline, likely confirming her assertion that she could not hope to succeed in her ambition to be an artist if she married.

She also offers feminist critiques of the gender relations she encountered in her tenants and neighbours. To support her painting Carr had a large house of suites built in 1913, which she called the House of All Sorts. Being a landlady brought her into contact with ‘all sorts’ of people, including married couples, many described very critically by Carr. She remarks in her literary sketches of her time in the house, The House of All Sorts (1942), that she had never before had the opportunity to observe “the close-up of married life” as her parents had died when she was young, her married friends had moved away, and her three spinster sisters could give no example. She reports: “I discovered I could place ‘marrieds’ in three general

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63 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 181.
65 Carr did have one sister who married and remained for some time in Victoria, Clara (‘Tallie’) – she married when Carr was 10 and as Blanchard puts it, “she was somehow on the outside; she was the sister who married.” Blanchard, *Life of Emily Carr*, 24.
groupings – the happy, the indifferent, and the scrappy.” 66 In one flat a young husband “was trying to accommodate himself to a difficult and neurotic wife” and in the flat next door, a “middle-aged groom was trying to slow a bright young girl down to his dullness.” This second bride, Arabella Jones, was lonely, having taken marriage for a “home of her own” and freedom from “the drudgery of bread-and-butter-earning” but finding no comfort in it.67

This scenario of a woman seeking security in marriage is often critiqued in Carr’s sketches. The disagreeable widow of “Furniture” lamented: “I married to be free! He spent my money, died, left me with that [child]!” 68 Carr pitied Arabella Jones, for “it was not Silas Jones but a ‘home’ that had lured Arabella into marriage.” That home was found in Carr’s house, then in a house of their own – but his opium habit soon left only a notice of sale by public auction to tell of “Arabella Jones’s Home.” 69

Carr also draws pictures of male violence she encountered. She describes with loathing the Reverend Pendergrast, who drove his wife “without mercy by night and by day.” 70 Another husband, the “crude, enormous” tenant of her Doll’s Flat, “was grinding out the life of his little third wife. She was slowly disintegrating under the grim, cruel bullying.” 71 A violent tenant threatened Carr when she tried to throw him and his wife out of the house for not paying the rent. He “raised his great fists. I was just another woman to be bullied, got the better of, frightened.” 72

Carr never explicitly compares her own state to that of the people she sketches in her works, yet her criticisms reveal an attitude that marriage is only best for women when done for love, by choice, with a worthy partner. While Carr was not against marriage when it was a partnership of love, she was concerned about the motivations of most people in marriage, and had strong expectations for husbands in particular. As in the epigraph above, she wondered how much of marriage was fear and want, “how much is love and how much the

67 Carr, House of All Sorts, 218.
68 Carr, House of All Sorts, 254.
69 Carr, House of All Sorts, 231.
70 Carr, House of All Sorts, 208.
71 Carr, House of All Sorts, 259.
72 Carr, House of All Sorts, 214. This bullying tenant actually struck her to the ground when a pipe in his suite froze (260).
ordinary needs of life.”\textsuperscript{73} Thinking of her friend Therese, who planned go to Calgary to marry her fiancée of many years but little acquaintance, she is worried: “It is a risk. I wish she could have a spell of his society before she is tied body and soul to him.” Although Therese felt that since he had been supporting his parents, that he will do his duty to her, Carr wonders: “But a man has only to give his outside self to parents […] But to a wife, if he marries right, it is his whole self, his soul, body and manhood.”\textsuperscript{74} These criteria are very akin to traditional expectations of a woman’s duty to offer her whole self in marriage, and do not take into account the financial or provider roles of the supposed ‘good husband,’ but instead reveal a framework based on emotion, profound sharing, and trust.

Carr’s sketches of single people may be read in similar ways as those of ‘marrieds.’ In “Characters” in The Book of Small, Carr describes several types of single people, men and women, in both a humorous and a sad, pitying tone. She describes the “doddering old gentlemen” that drove about Victoria, asleep in their buggies; and Brother Charlie and Sister Tilly who were inseparable and “evidently sworn to see each other into the grave.” On a sadder level, she also describes maiden aunts who came to Canada out of a sense of duty to ‘Brother’ and found themselves unneeded, becoming a “wilted homesick derelict” by the fire.\textsuperscript{75} These caricatures of singleness can be read much in the same way as those of marriage: Carr also recognizes a variety of fates that adhere to the choice of nonmarriage. Choice seems to be a strong theme, one that may reflect, if only indirectly, Carr’s decisions about marriage in her descriptions of her own life.

\begin{itemize}
\item being alone
\end{itemize}

\begin{quote}
I’d love an understanding companion. Otherwise I’d sooner be alone. It teaches one things.
\end{quote}

\hfill – Emily Carr, journal entry, 18 October 1933. Hundreds and Thousands, 703.

Ever-single women identified the pitfalls of marriage, but singleness could carry its own burdens, both economic and emotional. ‘Being alone’ is often seen as the prime negative

\textsuperscript{73} Carr, journal entry, ‘February 14\textsuperscript{th}, Valentine’s,’ 14 February 1935. Crean, Opposite Contraries, 97.
\textsuperscript{74} Carr, journal entry, 22 June 1936. Crean, Opposite Contraries, 133. Interestingly, both of these quotes were excised from Carr’s original published journals.
consequence of being single (and assumed the most fearsome). Some expressed their struggles with loneliness and isolation. It makes sense that some of these women were not happy with their state and longed for a husband – or a female lover and companion. But others express loneliness in terms of wider relationships, seeking friends and companionship in general rather than a particular partner.

For rural teachers especially, isolation could be coupled with a heavy workload, often accompanied by long distances to travel to and from the school, which could take up the time otherwise used for socializing. Lottie Bowron, the Rural Teachers Welfare Officer for British Columbia from 1929 to 1934, frequently found that rural communities offered little or no social life at all.\textsuperscript{76} As rural teacher ‘Penelope’ explained in 1912: “I have neither leisure nor opportunity, for society, and so cannot hope to make acquaintances.”\textsuperscript{77} Isolation was of course not solely a rural phenomenon. The majority of the obituaries found for the 1901 Athenas sample were careful to note that “many friends” attended the funeral. However, some of these women experienced a failure of support, like Helen Anderson, who appears to have died of pneumonia at home without anyone to know or fetch a doctor; or Ellen O’Sullivan, who committed suicide in a state of clinical depression, leaving behind the guilt-tinged testimonials of co-workers.\textsuperscript{78}

Sometimes when loneliness emerges in ever-single women’s discourse, it is about children, not adult male companionship. In a debate over the merits of marriage in \textit{Maclean’s} in 1931 ‘A Businesswoman’ writes:

> Well, I’ve gone too far down the road of spinsterhood to turn back now […]. But I am very, very lonely. Sometimes in the night I dream of little fumbling arms around my neck, and I am crying when I awake.\textsuperscript{79}

Yet being alone could offer benefits as well as burdens. Margaret Bayne was proud of the independence afforded by the ‘bachelor’ apartment she set up in 1896 over her schoolhouse in Gleichen, Alberta and invited visitors to come see how she lived, alone.\textsuperscript{80} For Emily Carr, being alone was in fact a necessary part of her artistic development. Art

\textsuperscript{76} See Wilson, “Lottie Bowron and Rural Women Teachers.”
\textsuperscript{77} ‘Penelope’ (British Columbia) in Prim Rose at Home, \textit{Family Herald and Weekly Star} October 30, 1912. Rpt. in Lewis, ed., \textit{Dear Editor and Friends}, 100.
\textsuperscript{78} Helen Anderson, obituary, \textit{Victoria Daily Times}, 11 February 1907, 2; “Search By Police Reveals a Tragedy: Miss O’Sullivan’s Remains Discovered on Beach Off Dallas Road,” \textit{Victoria Daily Times}, 18 May 1908, 4.
\textsuperscript{79} ‘A Businesswoman,’ “This Freedom” \textit{Maclean’s} 15 July 1931, 48.
\textsuperscript{80} Bayne, \textit{Roses in December}, 98.
authorized and demanded solitude. Carr especially relished her sketching trips with her camper van, which she called the ‘Elephant.’ She would go off for weeks at a time with her animal family in tow. She notes that “many people, forgetting I was an artist, thought it morbid, queer that I went off to the woods with the dogs and a monkey and no other companion.”81 Here the ‘artist’ was her prime identity, the persona that allowed and excused her eccentricities, even her solitary life.

Sometimes Carr’s general contentment and desire to be alone is punctuated with bouts of loneliness that come out in her journals and letters. She wrote to Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher in November 1933 just after she had sold the House of All Sorts to move to a cottage comprised of “six rooms of emptiness and a garden and a yard.” She reported that she liked it that way, and “the dogs like it here. So does Woo [her monkey]. So I must fall in line with the family. And, I do like the little house too, all except the water tap and the stove and quite so much lonesomeness.”82 She does seem to recognize this cycling contradiction between seeking solitude and resenting it. In her journals she writes: “It must be my fault somewhere, this repelling of mankind and at the same time rebelling at having no one to shake hands with but myself and the right hand weary of shaking the left.”83

Carr expresses conflicted emotions over companionship. When unable to motivate herself to paint, she exclaims “if there were only someone to kick me or someone to be an example (I’d probably hate them), but it is so dull kicking and prodding your own self.”84 When Carr does express a strong desire for companionship, it seems to mostly center on an intellectual and artistic bond, a longing for someone of compatible mind that could share her ideas about art and writing.

I don’t feel as if there was one solitary soul that I could open up to. Sometimes you forget and find yourself opening up. Then, like a stab, the other person suddenly

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81 Emily Carr, The Heart of a Peacock (1953) rpt. in Doris Shadbolt, ed. The Complete Writings of Emily Carr (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993), 602. However, before her 50s Carr was usually accompanied on her sketching trips by White female companions and/or Aboriginal guides who acted as company and chaperone. Dianne Newell, “Belonging – Out of Place: Women’s Travelling Stories from the Western Edge” in Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherford, eds. Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 255-56.
83 Emily Carr, journal entry, 6 April 1934. Hundreds and Thousands, 732-3.
84 Carr, journal entry, 22 October 1936. Hundreds and Thousands, 844.
shows that they don’t understand, don’t agree, have a different viewpoint, and you bump back on yourself with a thud that nearly stuns you.\textsuperscript{85} Never does she refer to a man as the person that would fulfill these longings, nor do her criteria include traits only a man was thought to be able to provide.

\textbf{Emotional geographies}

\begin{quotation}
We are jigsaw puzzles with the pieces mixed. We don’t make one picture. Was it accident we all came in one family?
\end{quotation}

Instead of a single all-important person, Carr had many friends who collectively seem to offer such companionship. Her journals and letters show moments of loneliness and isolation, broken by flurries of correspondence and contact from visitors. She frets over her manuscript of \textit{Pause}, thinking it is better than \textit{The House of All Sorts} “but I don’t know and who is there to tell me, or who to care if it is better or worse?”\textsuperscript{86} Yet her next entry notes she gave the sketch to Flora Burns, who read it to another friend, Margaret. Flora, who was also ever-single, was her “listening lady” and good friend. She also mentions Flora Burns in \textit{Growing Pains}: “I had two faithful women friends who were very patient in listening to my script – Ruth Humphrey and Flora Burns. It is a tremendous help to hear words with the ears as well as to see them with the eyes; so I read aloud to these friends and received helpful criticism from them.”\textsuperscript{87} Women such as these formed a core of support for Carr’s later life that complements the cast of friends she had made during her years abroad. This network sustained her through her later years, held by lines of contact in letters, shows, and visits.

Like Carr, other ever-single women surrounded themselves with people who could share companionship, intellectual stimulation, and emotional security. Simply put, most single women were not alone. A recent collection by geographers concerned with the “spatiality and temporality of emotions” is of use here in thinking about the patterns of relationships in ever-single women’s lives. The editors of \textit{Emotional Geographies} note: “An emotional geography,

\textsuperscript{85} Carr, journal entry, 28 December 1940. \textit{Hundreds and Thousands}, 891.
\textsuperscript{86} Carr, journal entry, 25 February 1938. \textit{Hundreds and Thousands}, 844.
\textsuperscript{87} Carr, \textit{Growing Pains}, 461.
then, attempts to understand emotion – experientially and conceptually – in terms of its socio-spatial mediation and articulation rather than as entirely interiorised subjective mental states. In the same volume, Owain Jones suggests: “One way to think of emotional geography is to think of the connections between memory and our geographical imaginations.” The way we lay out our memories is spatial in the sense of an imagined terrain of emotional features and memories – what Jones calls ‘ecologies of the self.’ But we also have more concrete geographies of emotion and affect, tied to place: “Clearly remembering being-in-place, and perhaps remembering through place, through emotions of (remembered) place are powerful elements of emotional geographies of the self.”

I would like to explore two ways of seeing ‘emotional geographies’ here: one, as a useful metaphor for a pattern of relationships laid out over time in the textual terrains of select ever-single women’s autobiographies; and second, focusing here solely on Carr, as a more literal mapping of emotional ties onto places, where key relationships are heavily bounded by the places in which they occurred, and demarcate the phases in her life measured by her formal autobiography.

Seeing ever-single women’s relationships not as a hierarchy measured against one ultimate, legitimate relationship, but as a pattern or even cycle of relationships that change over time and circumstance, allows us to see all relationships as vital – kin, mentors, networks of friends, colleagues, political allies, and intimate friends. Using ever-single women’s autobiographies, we can examine the chains of relationships brought forth, how those emotional ties are constructed, and what meanings they are given.

A close look the autobiographical accounts of Margaret Bayne, Alice Ravenhill, Ethel Johns, and Emily Carr reveal a pattern of relationships, a cycle of different people and places that is organized around emotional ties. Ravenhill and Bayne trace important figures whenever possible, in the traditional mode of the male memoirist reflecting on a public career; Ethel Johns traces her emotional landscape through the ‘big’ names of female pioneers, particularly in the nursing movement. Emily Carr also traces her life history.

through people, but these are (with the exception perhaps of the Group of Seven) rarely ‘important’ people but those who were important to Carr.

Alice Ravenhill’s text is the most oriented to recounting the professional development of a public career, with her chapters divided by stages in her professional arc, and filled with anecdotes of ‘greats’ met and achievements made. Yet even in this most traditional style of memoir, there is still an underlying structure of connection to family and friends. Although her draft autobiography is very fragmentary, Ethel Johns also constructed her memories around key people, notably mentors and colleagues in nursing school, which she cast as nothing short of heroic: “It can truly be said that in those days there were giants in the land” who were “names to conjure with.”92

The fact that all four women were self-supporting professionals naturally creates a narrative that begins with family but pulls away to a different world of mentors, friends, and colleagues. Family is the source of personal character and goals in all the accounts, but Carr structures her family relationships as barriers to her development, as does Ravenhill. Bayne and Johns enjoy good relationships with their families and name family members as important mentors and supporters (Bayne, the example of her Grandma White and the support of uncles who provided for her education; Johns, her father) but just as for Ravenhill and Carr, who frame education as a hard-earned escape into personal freedom and development, the pursuit of education and career goals also took them from the physical and emotional proximity of their families.

Alice Ravenhill experienced a great deal of pressure from her family to conform to upper-class British norms of female propriety and much resistance to her plans to seek training to support herself in a career, only relaxing their injunctions against professional education when the family finances took a drastic downturn.93 (However, she later counted her sister Edith as her most stalwart supporter of her career as a public health educator.)

Emily Carr is very critical of her family (which she describes as very traditional and stifling), especially her father and eldest sister’s totalitarian rule of the family, and often expressed

92 Ethel Johns, transcription from draft autobiography, “Teachers College Unit,” 3. Margaret Street fonds, UBC Archives, box 6 file 17, Ethel Johns Autobiography.
93 Ravenhill, Memoirs, 50, 63-64.
anger at her younger sisters’ indifference to her work. She sought escape from her family in going to San Francisco to art school, because “Nobody is allowed to grow up in our house.”94

But to the family both Carr and Ravenhill return. The others do not – Johns’ fragment autobiography does not reach the later stages of her life (although we know from her biographer that she lived independently all her life, usually far from kin), and Bayne constructs her family as a springboard from which she leapt and does not return. Ravenhill’s close attention to her career arc, which subsumes much mention of family, seems to emerge consciously from a sense of having escaped her family’s boundaries of expectations for their gentry-born daughter. Ravenhill comes back to narratives of family after an account of many years as a public health services professional, with the death of her mother (who, we are told, finally had expressed pride in Ravenhill’s accomplishments) and the banding together with her younger sister Edith, who would remain to share a house and companionship for the rest of Ravenhill’s life (and, in fact, give Ravenhill care as she was increasingly immobilized in old age). By the end of her formal autobiography, Carr’s family is allowed back in her life as a positive element. Notably, in her journals for 1932 (when she was 60) Carr reports that one of her sisters, Alice, expressed admiration for some of her work.95

These examples signal that relationships of intimacy and survival could shift with changes in ever-single women’s life-cycle, from youth through active maturity to old age, bringing new physical, social, and economic needs as well as new perspectives on old relationships. A closer look at the prolific autobiographical texts of Emily Carr offers an opportunity to apply this reading method to other types of relationships. Carr’s formal autobiography, Growing Pains, tracks the physical locations of her life as terrains of affect, of connections made (and cordoned off) within specific geographical locations, people whose connections stand in for each place and phase in her life, negative and positive.

Amongst shifting geographic locations and Carr’s own stages as an artist, relationships shape the borders of each section. Each era in Carr’s life was marked by a special person or two – family at first (father), then friends and mentors. The special people in her life seem to have marked themselves by having a special name for her – ‘Dummy’ for Adda and friends at her San Francisco art school; ‘Carlight’ for Wattie and ‘Motor’ for Mildred, her art school

94 Carr, Growing Pains, 308.
95 Carr, journal entry, October 1932. Hundreds and Thousands, 698.
friends in England; and, most telling, ‘Klee Wyck’ for Mrs. Radcliffe (signifying that she was best known by this important mentor in her life). Conversely, people she feels ambivalent to (often, even her sisters) are frequently themselves left nameless – like the friend in the Cariboo, where she visited after her illness in England, who is described thus: “Surfacely we were very good friends, down deep we were not friends all, not even acquaintances.”

Each section of her life – centred on education or explorations in art – is cordoned off, with special relationships that do not extend beyond its borders. The first part centres on her early family life and art school in San Francisco; part two chronicles her time in London, searching for ‘her’ art, forming her character as unabashedly Canadian, and ending with a crash in an English sanatorium; and the third part narrates her flowering as an artist, teaching and practicing ‘Art’ rather than only a student.

Significantly, Carr marks her transition into adulthood, not by graduation from Art school or some other attainment, and not by the lifecycle turn (marriage) expected of women – but by being responsible to another young woman, Ishbel Dane, a lonely housemate in Carr’s boarding house during her tenure at art school in San Francisco. Being enjoined to ‘be good’ to Ishbel, as she was her only friend, Carr is amazed:

I a woman’s friend! Suddenly I felt grown up. Mysteriously Ishbel – a woman – had been put into my care. Ishbel was my trust. I went down stairs slowly, each tread seemed to stretch me, as if my head had remained on the landing while my feet and legs elongated me. On reaching the pavement I was grown up, a woman with a trust.

When Carr was leaving to return home to Canada, Ishbel gave her a portrait of herself and Carr remarked: “Ishbel was the only one of them all who hadn’t wanted to change some part of me – the only one who had.” Ishbel’s death that Christmas came as a bitter blow, and significantly, ends the first section of Carr’s autobiography.

Part two, concerned chiefly with her sojourn in England for more art training, is Carr’s coming-of-age as a person and artist, and is characterized by new friendships and an especially important mother-mentor figure in the pseudonymous ‘Mrs. Radcliffe.’ At the end

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96 ‘Klee Wyck’ or ‘Laughing One’ was a cherished name given to Carr by Nootka acquaintances on her first sketching trip up the BC coast to Ucluelet, and its use by Mrs. Radcliffe was surely an indication of Carr’s satisfaction that this mentor figure came to accept her ‘real self.’
97 Carr, Growing Pains, 421.
98 Carr, Growing Pains, 339.
99 Carr, Growing Pains, 339.
of the second section, her experience in the sanatorium in England causes her to be too ashamed to see any of her friends, and she leaves the country, and any further mention of them, behind. Just as deep friendships and important mother figures characterize her transition into womanhood, the loss of such connections and a shift in attention to artistic peers and mentors is the core of her final section that documents her maturity as an artist.

Interestingly enough, she declares in the start to the third section of her autobiography ("Cariboo") that upon her return to Victoria, the three “intimate school friends” she had had there had all moved away, justifying her cordons of affect: “I made no new friends; one does not after school-days, unless there are others who are going your way or who have interests in common. Nobody was going my way, and their way did not interest me.”100 Thus the relationships she highlights in this part – with the exception of her Aboriginal friend Sophie – are artistic and literary mentors rather than friends or ‘aunts’ like Mrs. Radcliffe. This third section, which details her full flowering as an artist, also has its cordon, with Carr again leaving but in a more metaphysical sense, anticipating her own death.

What we learn from this exploration of ever-single women’s texts is a new way of reading for the relationships of women’s lives. This particular kind of emotional geography that I have attempted to lay out here can also be traced, to a varying degree, in the autobiographical texts of other ever-single women, and may hold a clue as how to map the full affective terrains of women who do not have an intimate domestic companion to hold – or divert – our attention. We also need to read for cycles of relationships, for phases that are linked to key people, and be alert for changes, the passing of influence from one set of relationships to another.

In this next section, I lay out a set of key relationships that were central in the autobiographical accounts of the ever-single women studied here. Friends, of course, formed a vital part of ever-single women’s lives, and of particular note are the networks that ever-single women forged between themselves. The interconnections between ever-single women in nineteenth-century Victoria are traceable in evidence from sources such as letters,

100 Carr, Growing Pains, 422.
obituaries, lists of pallbearers, and wills.\textsuperscript{101} These indicate a connection amongst most of the elite ever-single women in Victoria, bound if not by friendship then the acquaintance brought by a small social circle. We do know that Kathleen O’Reilly was a friend of Josephine Crease, also an ever-single daughter of Victoria pioneering elites; Kathleen would have also known Josephine’s ever-single sister Susan.\textsuperscript{102} Some connections across class and even race are also apparent. As members of Bishop Cridge’s church, women from these circles would also have known his ever-single daughter Maude Cridge (and many members of the ‘founding families’ were at her funeral); Alice and Lizzie Carr witnessed Maude Cridge’s will, indicating a friendship between them; and according to her recital programs, pianist Selina Frances Smith performed for and taught the children of these same prominent families, including the Creases.\textsuperscript{103}

However, friendship was not necessarily a panacea for all ever-single women. In a rich passage that displays much of her own temperament along with the capricious nature of friendship, Emily Carr muses:

Friendship – what does it mean? None of us knows any of us. It sickens me sometimes. Those close hugs, those kisses and confidences, they don’t mean a thing except for a heartbeat or two. The connection was never fast grown. It broke so easily. This heart went bitter. That heart went; your shoulders shrugged and that was the end. No gum, no bridging, can mend it; the old wound would always show. Maybe lazy fat would collect and hide the injury, but [when] the weather changes, the old injury would grumble and remind you.\textsuperscript{104}

While many friendships (and connections made in social and professional networks, like those in chapter three) were undoubtedly important, I would like to concentrate on three categories of relationships that strike me as significant to the ever-single woman in particular: birth families, mentors, and intimate friends.

\textsuperscript{101} Lists of pallbearers – always men – make a tenuous connection between ever-single women (through their brothers and fathers) but do imply at least a social acquaintance.
\textsuperscript{102} See photo of an 1886 garden party on the Point Ellice House website, with caption: “Including Kathleen O’Reilly standing under the garden archway to the left, with her brother Frank and friend Josephine Crease.” (http://collections.ic.gc.ca/peh/photoexhibit/contact%20sheet/pages/8149(b&w).htm).
\textsuperscript{103} Selina Frances Smith fonds, BCA MS-1992; Maude Cridge, will, 1922. BCA GR-1417, B01990 (vol.2), 83-0426-31 – Index to Victoria probate files and BC wills, 1919-1926.
I can’t imagine life without them; it would be one awful blank.

For ever-single women, birth-family relationships were bound by structures of love, obligation, and support. Families could also serve a catalyzing function in ever-single women’s lives, either through active support for their educational and career goals, or through the vagaries of mortality and economic distress that ‘freed’ or compelled women to pursue their own support. Encouraged to read anything she liked as a girl, Ethel Johns declares, “I owe to my father that priceless gift – a love of books and of reading.” ¹⁰⁵ Both Ravenhill and Johns were set on their vocational paths by the deaths of their fathers.

While some parents, notably middle-class and affluent, supported the aims of their ever-single daughters, other families called upon them for support. With changing personal circumstances over the life cycle, single women often acted as caretakers to aging or widowed parents and other immediate family members, and served as surrogate mothers to the children of siblings. ¹⁰⁶ Commonly espoused obligations of daughterhood in rural and working-class families included the imperative to support and care for the immediate family throughout adulthood, until released (at least in part) by her own marriage or the death of her parents. ¹⁰⁷ Even then, responsibility for siblings could pass to her. Single women’s obligations within the family is a key theme in Betsy Beattie’s study, *Obligation and Opportunity: Single Maritime Women in Boston, 1870-1930*. ¹⁰⁸ Starting with what is known about the family economy in the nineteenth-century Maritimes, Beattie hypothesizes that female out-migration was as much driven by obligation (to help support the family back home) as opportunity for independence or adventure. Building on the available literature on single migrant women, she finds a relationship between single women, domestic service, and financial obligation to the family that is set in a broader context of daughters’ roles in the

¹⁰⁵ Ethel Johns, draft autobiography, “Reserve Unit,” 2. Ethel Johns Papers, UBC Archives, box 2 file 1.
¹⁰⁶ For a survey of ever-single women’s family relationships into the later twentieth century, see Katherine R. Allen and Robert S. Pickett, “Forgotten Streams in the Family Life Course: Utilization of Qualitative Retrospective Interviews in the Analysis of Lifelong Single Women’s Family Careers” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 49 (August 1987), 524.
¹⁰⁸ Beattie, *Obligation and Opportunity*, passim.
family economy. Important here are the differences revealed in motivations and experiences between the generation of migrants from the 1880s, marked strongly by obligation to contribute to the family economy, and those from the 1900s to 1920s, where opportunity for personal independence, adventure, and pleasure adds an additional element to the matrix of motivations for female migrants.

As the discussion of the 1901 Athenas sample in chapter two reveals, many single women lived in some kind of support relationship with family. The mores of respectability and obligations of caring rather than simple economic dependence often shaped the living arrangements of even the most affluent women in the sample. Just over half (55.6%) of ever-single women in the sample lived with kin, most often their parents and/or siblings. Agnes Deans Cameron was the primary breadwinner for her mother and older, ever-single sister Jessie. It appears that Cameron only moved away from Victoria to build her journalism career after her mother had died.109 Ethel Bruce gave care to her aging father and uncle Jim, although she did not live with either.

For many ever-single women like Jessie McQueen, this liminal state of obligation never ended, becoming a defining framework of her adult life. McQueen, a Nova Scotian who came to BC to teach several times in the 1880s and 1890s, remitted money back home to pay off family debts and pay accounts at various businesses where the family got supplies. A telling statement of Jessie’s “sense of daughterhood’s obligations” was her declaration to a sister upon passing her teacher’s exam in 1888, that she would “send home my ‘marks’ so that you family may all know if I did my duty as a man and a brother.”110 Jessie never forgot, nor was she allowed (principally by her mother) to forget, what she ‘owed’ the family; her brother George, although conscious that it was a normal son’s duty to send money home if not staying to work the farm, could and was allowed to make excuses that his own career aims and economic needs came first. George seems to have done very little for the family, and indeed it was partly the girls’ wages that sent him in style to university at Dalhousie and down to a publishing job in New York, with new clothes and money proffered by his doting

110 Jessie McQueen to Janie McQueen. August 16, 1888, Lower Nicola. Mrs. D.M. McQueen fonds: 1887-1893. Add.Mss. 95. Nicola Valley Museum and Archives. Cited in Barman, Sojourning Sisters, 96. The specific nature of the comment – man and brother – suggests a sense of exasperation at the preferred treatment that George received while Jessie’s work covered his ‘duties.’ Jessie’s sister Dove noted in 1893 that relations between George and Jessie had become cool possibly because he knew full well she had been playing the part of the dutiful son that he had not. Barman, Sojourning Sisters, 96.
mother. Yet his comparably high wages never came back in remittances like his sisters’ did. However, Jean Barman argues that it was precisely because Jessie McQueen had an obligation to help support her family that she could sojourn several times to BC, where the teaching salaries were higher, and her ability to live outside the immediate presence of her family allowed her a more self-determined life and subjectivity, at least in the spaces of the frontier. McQueen’s story highlights the fact that although we have tended to see sojourning to the West for economic gain as gendered male (while women sojourned for marriage and family), BC in particular attracted single women whose family duties required good pay to remit money home.

The ties of obligation seem to have slackened somewhat on the BC borderlands after the turn of the century, likely aided by the rise of the suffrage movement and the upheavals of the First World War. Ethel Bruce demonstrates signs of the evolving obligations of daughters into the twentieth century, as well as her own resistance to them. In speaking of Miss Marboeuf, who lived with and gave care to her mother, Bruce quipped – “That is a very good daughter, devoted as can be. I hope she is a good Catholic, and that she believes she will be rewarded hereafter. Because I don’t think she’s getting any of the reward here.” Although she herself does give care to her father and uncle (while living separately from them) she establishes a sense of personal and career priorities that she is not willing to sacrifice for the caregiving role. She tells her sister Maude in the spring of 1919 that she must have a long summer break from work and caregiving, because “I am worn threadbare of ideas”:

I must must must have a holiday if I am to stay on another year and have an eye on the Pater and Uncle Jim. [...] Honestly it is not much of a holiday to be at home – it is no holiday. I love being there, but I hate washing dishes and sweeping floors [...] And of course it isn’t a bit fair to Pater to be there and not to make it more comfortable rather than less comfortable while one’s on the spot. But I want a change for my work’s sake. And I’m going to have it.

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113 In fact this figure of the ever-single woman was the direct opposite to the ‘remittance man,’ the oft-maligned, usually young, British sons of minor (or not so minor) gentry sent to the West to make something of themselves, but were sustained by a small income ‘from home.’
114 Ethel Bruce to Maude Bruce, Nov 6 [ca. 1915]. Ethel Bruce fonds, City of Victoria Archives PR13 25c5, file 11.
115 Ethel Bruce to Maude Bruce, April 8 1919. Ethel Bruce fonds, City of Victoria Archives PR13 25c6, file 1.
Bruce saw her own personal and professional needs as priorities in tandem with daughterhood’s obligations, emblematic of a change from the earlier generation’s sense of obligation that gave some of its strongest adherents like Jessie McQueen no permanent ability to shape her life as she wished. Yet we need to be mindful of the difference of class—other women with middle-class privilege who were contemporaries of McQueen, like Margaret Bayne and Emily Carr, do not recall any pressure to support their families, even in declining economic circumstances, but their own self-support appears to have been rarely aided by family members.

Family ties could also stretch beyond simple categories of duty or affect. Sisters in particular could be deep friends—or fail to be so. Ethel Bruce’s close connection with her sister Maude is revealed in the over 100 letters of correspondence between them over a decade. Bruce lavished attention on her sister and saw herself in a position of caretaker and aide as well as friend, repeatedly offering to share living space and resources with Maude so she could leave teaching in the interior—which Maude, in her drive to be self-supporting, seems to have resisted, as year after year Ethel made the same offers and entreaties.116

For Emily Carr, it was necessary to write about her unhappy life with her siblings in the 1890s after her parents’ deaths, despite her sister Alice’s disapproval for speaking of such intimate matters, for that was “what drove me to the woods and the creatures for comfort, what caused the real starting point of my turn to Art.”117 Carr’s sisters often played key roles in the painful experiences of Carr’s life. In one retrospective account in her journals, when Carr was young her sister had come upon something she had written about the new year: “when she hurled my written thoughts at me I was angry and humbled and hurt” and burnt the diary “and buried the thoughts and felt the world was a mean, sneaking place.”118 However, it was their rejection of her work that seems to have stung Carr the most: “My sisters disliked my new work intensely. One was noisy in her condemnation, one sulkily silent, one indifferent to every kind of Art.”119

Although they often disagreed, and certainly her sisters never supported her choice to become an artist in any way that Carr acknowledges, the three youngest Carr sisters were

116 Ethel Bruce, correspondence with Maude Bruce, Ethel Bruce fonds, City of Victoria Archives, PR 13, 25C5 file 11, 25C6 files 1-4.
117 Carr, Growing Pains, 461.
118 Carr, journal entry, 23 November 1930. Hundreds and Thousands, 668.
119 Carr, Growing Pains, 438.
“tied close in affection to one another and miles apart in temperament, in habits and likes.” By middle age through the 1930s they “lived together separately,” keeping separate residences but visiting one another daily. The death of Lizzie in 1936 left Alice and Emily, “though they were further apart, tied closer together than ever.” Only the loss of Emily’s cottage in 1940 prompted her to move into a suite in Alice’s house. It would seem that Carr’s pain at her family’s indifference to her work did not block her connection to them, and by the 1930s at least one sister finally looked favourably on Carr’s work, surely prompting a closer relationship.

◆ aunts and other mentors

During the weeks I spent with an aunt at Weymouth [...] she opened my eyes to the elements of geology, which captivated my imagination.

– Alice Ravenhill, on what started her on the road to her career, Memoirs, 53

As Bennett and Froide note for early modern Europe, many single women “passed their entire lives in the company of relatives – moving from their parents’ household to that of siblings or aunts, and eventually taking other kin into their own households.” Certainly the 1901 Athenas sample supports the continuation of this pattern into the turn of the twentieth century in Canada.

Of particular interest here is the role that combined mentorship and kin – that of aunt. This potentially powerful relationship appears to be neglected by academics. A literature search on ‘aunts’ reveals little that is useful – besides a spate of fiction (much of it children’s), the majority of the literature on aunts seems to be cornered by biomedical and anthropological research. Yet the potential relationships and identities within the figure of the aunt are too rich to ignore. Aunt – and eldest sister – was the chief role of power and authority a single woman could hold in her family. As an aunt, an ever-single woman could occupy roles of mothering and mentorship, and nieces especially could play roles of surrogate daughter, protégée, and heir.

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120 Carr, journal entry, 19 December 1936. Hundreds and Thousands, 848.
121 Carr, journal entry, ‘October,’ (ca. 1 October) 1932. Hundreds and Thousands, 698.
Ever-single women could be on both sides of this relationship – drawing upon mentors in their lives and acting as mentors themselves. Alice Ravenhill’s sole family supporter in her quest to be educated beyond ladylike ‘accomplishments’ was an aunt who introduced her to the study of geology. It is perhaps significant that she was spending time at this aunt’s soon after her family broke off her engagement to her fiancé (and sole male romantic figure in her memoir).\textsuperscript{123} Margaret Bayne’s interlocutor in her memoir was her niece, Evelyn McKay, to whom it was dedicated. Agnes Deans Cameron filled a role as mentor and patron for her ever-single niece Jessie Cameron Brown (dubbed ‘the Kid’ by Cameron), bringing Brown with her as a companion/junior partner in her trip to the Arctic in 1908 (documented in her 1910 travel narrative, \textit{The New North}) as well as retaining her as a personal secretary in her lecture tour to England in 1909-10.\textsuperscript{124} Theirs appears to have been a reciprocal relationship of seeking adventure cloaked in respectability, each giving ‘chaperonage’ to the other as they sought fame in the north and on the lecture circuit. In her will, drawn up hastily in the aftermath of a (quickly fatal) appendectomy, Cameron left everything to her sister Jessie (witnessed by Brown) with the sole instruction to help out any of their nieces and nephews that needed a hand.

Aunts and surrogate aunts pop up in many places in Emily Carr’s autobiography: sisters of family friends are called ‘Aunt’, with varying amounts of respect and affection – ‘Aunt’ Amelia in whose house Carr boarded in London, was a disagreeable relationship\textsuperscript{125}; Mrs. Radcliffe was the aunt of a friend and became a valued mentor and mother-figure. “Mrs. Radcliffe was my English backbone. Her kind, practical strength of character was as a pole to a vine. In all my difficulties I went to her.”\textsuperscript{126} Although Carr’s relationship with Mrs. Radcliffe was also fraught with conflict between two strong-minded persons, Carr declares “I could not have gotten along without Mrs. Radcliffe’s bullying and strength.”\textsuperscript{127}

Nearly every woman in this study who left autobiographical materials named other mentors who played crucial roles in their lives. As often as not, these were other single women whose professional or status positions allowed them to offer a leg up to younger

\textsuperscript{123} Ravenhill, \textit{Memoirs}, 53.  
\textsuperscript{124} Agnes Deans Cameron, \textit{The New North: An Account of a Woman’s Journey Through Canada to the Arctic} [1909]. David Richeson, ed. (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1986).  
\textsuperscript{125} Carr, \textit{Growing Pains}, 350-1.  
\textsuperscript{126} Carr, \textit{Growing Pains}, 360.  
\textsuperscript{127} Carr, \textit{Growing Pains}, 396.
women. Ethel Johns recounts the inspiring visit of E. Cora Hind, the pioneer ever-single agricultural journalist, to her home on an Ojibwa reserve in Ontario. Johns was 16, helping her widowed mother run the local Indian school but looking forward only to a life of isolation. Hind’s visit opened up her world and their subsequent correspondence (complete with news clippings and magazine articles for Johns) began a 40-year friendship. Hind was also instrumental in securing the necessary recommendations for Johns to enter the Winnipeg General Hospital nursing school. And a bequest from Hind allowed Johns to buy a house in Vancouver, where she lived for the final two decades of her life.128

Political mentors also feature in some accounts. Margaret Bayne considered herself the beneficiary of pioneering women’s struggle to enter higher education and forge rights for women. Early in her memoir Bayne declares: “There were daughters of Zelophehad living in those proper and punctilious days of that mauve decade of the [18]80’s.” Here she references the Biblical story of the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-7), who argued that they deserved rights to their father’s inheritance with such success that these rights were granted by God. Bayne considers the women petitioning to enter the University of Toronto as heirs to that legacy of women’s rights to take their place in the world and activities of men: “Just as these Hebrew maidens had done many centuries earlier, so the daughters of Zelophehad living in and about Toronto appealed to the Moses of their day to share the educational inheritance of their father and be permitted the enter the university.”129 One of these ‘daughters’ she mentions is Dr. Augusta Stowe Gullen, leading Canadian suffragist as well as prominent in the campaign to admit women to the university. Gullen (and her mother, Dr. Emily Stowe) were

the outstanding champions of suffrage in Canada. The amazing thing was how deeply rooted was the desire for political freedom, how it possessed their very souls, and colored all their thoughts. They did indeed “follow the gleam.”130

Augusta Stowe Gullen was integral in bringing Bayne into suffrage activism and occupied a central place in Bayne’s narrative of her activist phase. And Bayne was not alone in suffrage activism; several women in the 1901 Athenas sample appear in suffrage documents,

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129 Bayne, Roses in December, 59-60.
130 Bayne, Roses in December, 70.
signalling their potential support and possible mentorship of other women in the suffrage movement.  

Emily Carr’s narrative also underlines the fact that ever-single women could have key mentorship relations with men. At the end of her section on her art education in England Carr notes: “I remember with affection and gratitude something special that every Master taught me.” She would praise them again in her autobiography for pointing out to her “that there was coming and going among trees, that there was sunlight in shadows.”132

More important were Carr’s editor Ira Dilworth ("Eye") who played the part of literary mentor, and her artistic mentor Lawren Harris. A prominent member of Canada’s ‘Group of Seven’ circle of artists, Harris is portrayed not just as a the prime mentor for her artistic growth but also as the catalyst that got her painting again after her hiatus from art.133 She notes: “Mr. Harris’ letters were a constant source of inspiration for me. He scolded, praised, expounded, clarified.”134 An interesting difference between Carr’s treatment of these two mentors is that she used ‘Mr. Harris,’ even in this retrospective account, changing to a sonorous ‘Lawren Harris’ later – a respectful distancing. (Although she does not do so in her journals, where she uses ‘Lawren’).135

But Ira Dilworth was ‘Eye’ almost immediately in her account of meeting him, a palpable difference in the ease of their relationship. This was perhaps explained by the fact that by the time she was writing Growing Pains, the intensity of Harris’ mentorship had waned (although she dedicated the book to him); but I also think what was important was her description of Dilworth as bolstering her self-identity as a person rather than as an artist: “He

131 Among the signatories of the 1885 Female Franchise Petition (covering Victoria, New Westminster, Wellington, Comox, Sumas and Chilliwack, and Maple Ridge) at least 15 women can be found in either the 1901 Victoria sample or my similar 1881 census database for Victoria – including several women discussed in chapter two: Jessie Cameron, Catherine and Harriet Fox, Seraphina Montero, and Jane Work and May Fraser Tolmie. And Susan Reynolds Crease appears to have held a leadership position in the Victoria movement, leading a suffrage delegation to the legislature in 1914. See “Female Franchise Petition,” BC Government Sessional Papers, 1885. Extracted by Hugh Johnston, rev. Jan 2004. [http://www.rootsweb.com/~canbc/femfran.htm]. For Crease, see Michael H. Cramer, “Public and Political: Documents of the Woman’s Suffrage Campaign in British Columbia, 1871-1917: The View from Victoria” in Barbara Latham and Cathy Kress, eds. In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women’s History in BC (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), 91.

132 Carr, Growing Pains, 458.

133 Carr, Growing Pains, 442-4.

134 Carr, Growing Pains, 443.

135 Carr, Growing Pains, 457. For an example of her familiar address for Harris, see her journal entry, ‘October,’ (ca. 1 October) 1932. Hundreds and Thousands, 699.
was a million times younger, a million times cleverer than I but he never made me feel an old fool, or finished, or stupid, or ignorant.”136 Again, outside of her formal autobiography, Carr’s relationship with ‘Eye’ is revealed as intensely personal, even intimate; although she gained a lot of support from Harris and held him in deep esteem, it was Eye who was allowed to converse with Carr in her final persona, that of ‘Small.’137 In a 1942 letter, near the end of her life, Carr attempted to explain to Dilworth what his friendship meant to her:

The love I gave you certainly was not the type I gave to my sweetheart, a love that expects a whole heap back. It was a better love than any of these; its foundation was in lovely things. [...] When Sophie called me “friend” it was friend in the true sense of the word. When someone says my friend Mrs. Smith it means nothing; friend can be a deep word or have no meaning at all. Perhaps the kind of meaning my love has for you and I’d like yours to have for me is comrade; comradeship seems so expansive somehow, a turning into things together.138

This interesting and nuanced use of ‘comrade’ may be a fruitful term for further studies of ever-single women’s lives, offering an insightful addition to the varied relationships in their emotional geographies.

◆ intimate friends

Apparently a woman may love another woman genuinely. Let a man come into their life. Phiz! Out goes the other woman; just incidental [to] your friend you were, and their man is the all supreme with them. It hurts.


The third important category of ever-single women’s relationships I want to discuss here was that of ‘intimate friend’ – a special, close connection with another woman that could include many facets, from sharing a close emotional bond to sharing a home. Martha Vicinus uses the term ‘intimate friends’ to open up a spectrum of close, intense, and erotically-charged female relationships, utilizing a term that intentionally “embodies the indeterminacy inherent in any study of sexual behaviors and beliefs.”139 Although Vicinus concentrates on

136 Carr, Growing Pains, 463.
137 A good example of this is in the letters recently published by Susan Crean which reveal the intimacy of their relationship. See Crean, Opposite Contraries, 223-42.
138 Emily Carr to Ira Dilworth, September 1942, excerpt qtd. in Crean, Opposite Contraries, 218-19.
139 Vicinus, Intimate Friends, xxiv.
women whose primary emotional bond was with a woman, her point is not to excavate enough ‘evidence’ to be able to firmly name some women as ‘lesbians’ or determine those who were not; instead, “more interesting and difficult questions can be asked about friendship, intimacy, sexuality, and spirituality than who had what kind of identity when.”

Seeing women’s relationships with other women through the lens of ‘intimate friends’ opens up an illuminating and useful framework for looking at the deepest connections in ever-single women’s lives. The intimate friends framework lets us forgo the insistence on physical evidence to affirm the nature of women’s intimate relationships (‘did they do it’) and instead tackle the substantive emotional, economic, and intellectual elements between women partners. As Smith-Rosenberg notes of one set of intimate friends: “Certainly Molly and Helena were lovers – emotionally if not physically. The emotional intensity and pathos of their love becomes apparent in several letters.” This emotional intensity could very well exist without sexual sharing; as Ruth Hamson notes in her study of two ever-single women who shared a home and a partnership in the mid-20th century: “their perception is that sexuality is tied up with men and children, and as such is outside their experience.”

Amongst the papers of the ever-single women in my study, I have found little evidence of the ever-single companions found in the networks of colleges and settlement houses of the eastern US and Canada, or the thriving lesbian subculture of wealthy and socially-connected artistic and literary women in London and Paris that included prominent women such as Radclyffe Hall and Gertrude Stein. And only a couple pairs of women resemble the life-pairs found in the artistic and political circles of Eastern Canada studied by Rooke and Schnell, Rooney, and Sisler.

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140 Vicinus, Intimate Friends, xxiii.
141 Smith-Rosenburg, “The Female World,” 58.
143 For a discussion of Canadian networks of ever-single/lesbian women that sprung up among alumni of McGill University, see Rooke, “Public Figure, Private Woman”; for lesbian leaders in the American suffrage movement, female colleges, and the settlement house movement, see Lillian Faderman’s work, including Odd Girls and Twilight Lover and To Believe in Women.
144 Both Laura Doan and Martha Vicinus offer insights into the lesbian subculture centred on London, Paris, and (to some extent) Italy between 1880 and the second World War: Doan, Fashioning Sapphism; Martha Vicinus, Intimate Friends.
Yet we can still trace some intimate friendships amongst the BC women in this study, although there is mostly silence about the most private and physical aspects of their relationships. As we saw from the discussion of the 1901 Athenas sample, the census leaves open the question of the exact relationship between pairs of unrelated women; Agnes Gibson and Abbie Gardiner are one such pair, whom I speculated might be better understood as ‘roommates’ or indeed companions. And cousins Fanny Archbutt and Mabel Messenger shared both home and workplace, operating an elite girls’ school in Victoria for nearly three decades. Their blood relationship was not necessarily a barrier to romantic attachment, as seen by their contemporaries, Katherine Bradley and her niece, Edith Cooper, avowed lovers who wrote together under the name Michael Field.\textsuperscript{146}

Emily Carr appears to have experienced elements of traditional romantic friendship with her closest school friends, as she describes their relationships in \textit{Growing Pains}: Mildred kissing her and causing Spring to bubble up\textsuperscript{147}; Wattie rocking her like a mother when she was upset\textsuperscript{148}; Adda taking her under her wing and showering her with ‘Momma’s’ advice.\textsuperscript{149} And as the epigraph above hints, at some point in her life she may have experienced a close relationship with a woman that meant to her to love ‘genuinely,’ one which did not withstand its interruption by heterosexual competition.\textsuperscript{150}

Margaret Bayne may have had a similar experience. Although Bayne mentions several periods in her life when she shared accommodations with other women (including sharing a house with other teachers or living on a farm with a co-worker and her family), there is only one place in her memoir that seems to break her silence on intimate relationships, in her section on the Girls’ Industrial School in Vancouver: “A very short time after going to the school [in 1918] it was my good fortune to have Miss Martha Lindley share my roomy, comfortable quarters.” Lindley and Bayne instituted a system of psychological assessment at

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{146} For a biography of Bradley and Cooper, see Emma Donoghue, \textit{We Are Michael Field} (Bath, UK: Absolute Press, 1998).
\item \textsuperscript{147} Carr, \textit{Growing Pains}, 396.
\item \textsuperscript{148} Carr, \textit{Growing Pains}, 366, 371.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Carr, \textit{Growing Pains}, 310. Although these relationships were all in the context of school friendships, Carr was at least eighteen when she met Adda and Wattie, and in her twenties when she knew Mildred.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Carr, journal entry, ‘February 14th, Valentine’s,’ 14 February 1935. Crean, \textit{Opposite Contraries}, 96.
\end{itemize}}
the school that was noted in 1919 as the only industrial school to do so in Canada.\textsuperscript{151} A Martha Lindley, listed as a psychologist for the Vancouver Public Schools in 1919, can be traced in city directories only until 1920, when she may have moved away or married.\textsuperscript{152} Oddly enough, she is listed as having a residence of her own during the time Bayne notes they were sharing rooms, at the Glencoe Lodge in 1918 and at 1175 Haro in 1919.\textsuperscript{153} If this was the same Lindley, she may have cohabited with Bayne only for a short time in 1918.

What can we make of this relationship? Bayne clearly felt that Lindley’s professional activities were of great value to the school and her own work; why they shared rooms when (it appears) Lindley had the means to have her own accommodations is a question. At any rate, the very lack of emotional descriptions throughout Bayne’s narrative makes this one line leap out from the page. Without other evidence, we cannot say definitively what the nature of this companionship was, in the traditional terms of sex and emotional intimacy; but we can see it as an intimate relationship, as they shared both their living space and their project of implementing exciting new methods in their professional practice, in what might have been a brief but surely intense meld of personal and work relations.

Like Margaret Bayne and Martha Lindley, Fanny Archbutt and Mabel Messenger, Norah Creina Denny (1885-1981) and Dorothy Rachel Geoghegan (b.1896) shared personal and professional spaces, albeit for most of their lives. They shared a lifelong passion for the Girl Guides, the founding and direction of a girls’ school – Queen Margaret’s School in Duncan – and a home. In 1919 Norah Denny came to Duncan from Britain for a “working holiday” and decided to stay on, in 1920 opening her first day school. In 1912 Dorothy Geoghegan immigrated with her family to Duncan; she then attended the University of British Columbia and was a member of the first graduating class of 1917. The two met over their avid interest in Guiding in 1920 and founded Queen Margaret’s in Duncan in 1921, where they were headmistresses until their retirement in 1963. Again, what we seem to have here is an intertwining of professional aims, personal intimacy, and passion for service.

Given the discursive regime around the lesbian, their respectability as school mistresses and community leaders over 60 years may have shielded them from disapproval, their

\textsuperscript{151} Bayne, \textit{Roses in December}, 171.
\textsuperscript{152} There is one marriage certificate for a Martha Lindley in 1920: Martha Lindley m. William Lashley Hall, Nelson, 7 Sept 1920. BC Vital Statistics Reg. Number: 1920-09-225316 B12905.
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Greater Vancouver Directory}, 1918-1920 (Vancouver: Henderson Directory, 1918-1920).
relationship cast as two spinsters rather than two lesbians. In the absence of personal papers, letters, or diaries, it is nearly impossible to speculate further on the ‘nature’ of this relationship, but the simple fact of its long duration intertwined with vocation, residence, and community activities surely points to an intimate friendship, whatever elements of the erotic and romantic may be lost from our view.

**Multiple intimacies**

What we feel most strongly we cannot put into words.

– Agnes Deans Cameron, *The New North*, xiii

Martha Vicinus makes the important point that “Women then, as now, however, could live long and emotionally complicated lives that changed over time. One woman, one kind of love, did not automatically exclude other lovers or kinds of love.”\(^{154}\) Tracing the emotional geographies of ever-single women prompts us to struggle with our difficulties in conceptualizing women outside heterosexual bounds and contest a heteropatriarchal model for women’s relationships.

What we need to do is explore the relationships of ever-single women as true, significant, and normal in their own right. Taking marital status as a central category of analysis for women’s lives enables us to take seriously their own reasons for their singleness, and explore their narratives for critiques of marriage that would inform their negotiations through the conditions and choices of their lives. We also need to keep in mind the dictates of *cherchez l’homme*, and seek to uncover the conditions under which ever-single women wrote and where they might have obscured or erased the intimate friendships with other women (or indeed with men) in their lives. Still, we have to keep firmly in mind that no intimate companion may have existed in some women’s lives, and this was a legitimate mode of living. We should then avoid privileging the heterosexual dyad (or even its homosexual counterpart), and instead look for diffuse terrains of affect.

To recall Roona Simpson’s statement: “expanding our capacity to picture varied social relationships extends the possibility of ‘plural paths’ to intimacy.”\(^{155}\) Being open to ‘multiple

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paths to intimacy’ frees us to explore patterns of relationships that women experienced over their lives, and how they might express those patterns in their lifewriting. It would seem that Emily Carr traces an interwoven series of relationships that should not be seen as ‘compensation’ for lack of a partner but instead a norm of its own. Family and friends brought the companionship and intellectual stimulation she needed, even if it was not constant. At no time does she express any regret at refusing her suitor Paddon, or taking the single path in life. If anything, her writings reveal a celebration of the potential of singleness to allow and fuel an artistic career, a fully developed intellectual potential, and a positive self-identity. At the same time, the pitfalls of marriage are also laid out, and it seems obvious that Carr even in her dire financial straits as a landlady would not have traded fates with the ‘marrieds’ she encountered. Her singleness was both a liberation and a burden, a forking path across the terrain of her life as success and disappointments shaped her course.

How the experiences of singleness shaped the subjectivities of ever-single women is the focus of the next chapter, which explores the identities that ever-single women presented in their lifewriting and what marital status as a category of analysis offers the study of autobiography.
Five: Eccentric subjects

Emily, don’t you know by now that you’re an oddment and a natural-born “solitaire”? There is no cluster or sunburst about you. You’re just a paste solitaire in a steel-claw setting. You don’t have to be kept in a safety box or even removed when the hands are washed.

– Emily Carr, journal entry, 6 November 1933. *Hundreds and Thousands*, 709.

As this wry take on the wedding ring indicates, ever-single women could see themselves as possessing a particular character, perhaps even a ‘natural-born’ condition of being ‘solitaire.’ The voices of ever-single women often cut across the grain of gender regimes and the required performances of femininity. At the level of ideology, their very existence as ever-single violated gendered norms. The pursuit of some ever-single women of leadership and ambition in the public sphere was an additional departure from normative femininity. And the ranks of ever-single professionals who built careers securing femininity also negotiated a fine line between authority and marginality. Single women in particular were strongly bordered by sexual and behavioural prescriptions about the proper performances of non-married femininity that were bound to the heterosexual matrix: the liminal single woman, chaste but attractive and available for male choice; and the ever-single spinster, capable of performing supervision of the liminal single precisely because she did not participate as a ‘player’ in that same system.

This points to the vital role of sexuality in shaping both conditions of survival and subjectivity for ever-single women. Feminist research demonstrates that heterosexuality is not a ‘natural’ state but a socially constructed and imposed system. The ever-single woman in particular troubled that system by her essential outsider identity. As I noted in the introductory chapter, ever-single women were often seen as potential ‘problems’ precisely because they were not in domestic, conjugal relationships with men, the heart of heterosexual relations. Certainly, in terms of the highly gendered expectations of dress, comportment, and roles within the workplace and the family, ever-single women could be inside heterosexual expectations, but their place outside conjugality and the proscription of (hetero)sexual activity outside marriage marks them as effectively outside heterosexuality.
Several historians make the point that we actually rarely have proof of heterosexuality in anyone, especially not in terms of recorded sexual acts, which seem to be demanded as proof of lesbian desire. Martha Vicinus notes: “I find it ironic that ‘lesbianism’ continues to depend upon the evidence of sexual consummation, whereas heterosexuality is confirmed through a variety of diverse social formations.”\(^1\) As many scholars of lesbian lives have sought to shed the narrow (and too often impossible) standard of proof based on genital contact, they’ve raised the question of what did, or should, constitute a lesbian identity in historical context, looking to various counterhegemonic practices by women, sexual or otherwise, to identify lesbian existence in the past. In doing so, many historians of lesbian lives seem to have cast a wide net to claim women who led lives independent from patriarchal control as ‘lesbian,’ regardless of their desires or relationships.

In her landmark essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Adrienne Rich avows of the importance of women “who – as witches, femmes seules, marriage resisters, spinsters, autonomous widows, and/or lesbians – have managed on varying levels not to collaborate” with heterosexual systems.\(^2\) In a similar vein, early modern European historian Judith Bennett employs the term ‘lesbian-like’ to incorporate “sexual rebels, gender rebels, marriage-resisters, cross-dressers, singlewomen”\(^3\) into a lesbian landscape. She goes so far as to state that an independent early-modern single woman, “regardless of her emotional life, lived in ways relevant to lesbian history” – even if she shared no personal or political connections with other women, her circumstances were ‘lesbian-like.’\(^4\)

And Monique Wittig proposes a profound rethinking of the category of Woman, placing the lesbian outside of the gender binary precisely because of her fundamentally different socio-economic position:

\(^1\) Vicinus points out several unconsummated marriages among middle-class British intellectuals, including the Ruskins, Carlyles, and George Bernard Shaw and Charlotte Payne Townshend; “these spouses may be failed heterosexuals, but they are not stripped of their sexual identity.” Martha Vicinus, “Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?” Radical History Review 60 (1994), 59.
\(^4\) Bennett, “Lesbian-Like,” 15. Because of this scope, Martha Vicinus has found the term especially useful for her work on nineteenth and twentieth-century lesbian history. This approach has also been useful for historians of the medieval and early modern periods especially (where narrow boundaries of ‘evidence’ threaten to erase all nonnormative sexualities entirely). See Vicinus, “Lesbian History.”
Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ("forced residence," domestic corvée, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual.5

In reading all three of these theorists, I was struck how these statements apply just as well to the 'ever-single woman' as the 'lesbian.' Rich and Bennett (and indirectly, Wittig as well) conflate the lesbian and the ever-single woman, suggesting that the ever-single woman – necessarily outside heterosexuality – is thus inside homosexuality.

These theorists are doing important work in displacing heterosexuality as the ideal of social organization (as opposed to a historical condition structured by prescription, economics, and compulsory conjugality).6 But this extension of some form of 'lesbian' to accommodate women who have no sexual or emotional connection to other women exerts a restricting binary over the lives of ever-single women in history, one that does not account for their diverse experiences, desires, or emplacement in changing modes of heteronormativity.

In tackling the “oppressive dichotomy” of heterosexual/homosexual, Karen Duder argues for a space for “other modes of sexual being that are neither ‘lesbian-like’ nor ‘hetero-like’ but that are, rather, bisexual.”7 Duder critiques Rich and Lillian Faderman, whom she sees as creating an unproblematic valorization of intimate friends and disguising the “radical difference between same-sex friendships and sexuality,” stressing we need to make a distinction between “the historical experiences of women who had sexual relationships with one another and of women whose primary affectional and political commitments may have been to other women but whose sexual commitments were not.”8 And she seeks to pull the

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6 In Wittig’s terms: “The discourses which particularly oppress all of us, lesbians, women, and homosexual men, are those which take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality.” Wittig, “The Straight Mind” in Monique Wittig, The Straight Mind and Other Essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 24.


definition of ‘lesbian’ back from a concern with anti-hegemonic identities, arguing it is crucial to identify histories of women who indeed had sexual relationships with other women, acknowledging the threat this lesbian existence posed (and poses) to ‘heterosexist patriarchy,’ and at the same time carving a space for those women who might have experienced same-sex desire or sex, but cannot be placed in a mould of solely loving women.

Although Duder thus calls for a more complex conception of sexuality, her attempt to pull back the definition of ‘lesbian’ and replace some of its reach with ‘bisexual’ still leaves many women without a space: the *ase*ual, the *non*sexual, the uncateogorizable. These are vital categories because women who were truly asexual in their desires and practices, or simply cannot ever be classified, should not be forced into one camp or the other. And they are also important because as we have seen, all respectable, non-liminal single women had to *appear* to not be practicing any sexuality, in terms of appearance, publicly-perceived acts, and publicly-acknowledged relationships – in effect, ‘non-sexual’ in public perceptions of their place in the heterosexual matrix.

Once we apply marital status as a category of analysis alongside or instead of (putative) sexualities, what is revealed is the gap *between* that needs to be encompassed in theory. So what terms and models can we use that accommodate all these diverse and, in the end, unquantifiable sexual identities? Judy Tzu-Chun Wu proposes the use of ‘queer’ to “critique a perceived essentialized dichotomization between homosexual and heterosexual identities” and a way out of the binds of essentialism:

I would like to suggest that the idea of “queer” partly reflects the meaning of Rich’s concept of the lesbian continuum. That is, queer refers to a variety of counterheteronormative actions, beliefs, and values. However, without the explicit reference to “lesbian,” queer does not raise the specter of an essentialist sexual identity. At the same time, queer also does not connot being “woman-identified.”

‘Queer’ could be a useful term here in several ways. From an ideological standpoint, every single women in this study were ‘queer’ in the language of their era: odd, outside the norm. And they were ‘queer’ in Wu’s sense of ‘counterheteronormative,’ as well as a slippery, hard to quantify sexuality. Yet I hesitate to use this term, precisely because many of the individual women in this study (while being outside the norm because of their singleness) would not

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have had a public reputation as ‘queer’ (in the sense of strange, peculiar) – although others like Emily Carr were certainly thought to be so, both in resisting norms in youth and in dress and habits in middle age.¹⁰

Teresa de Lauretis offers an opening that moves past this dilemma. In response to Wittig’s statement above (“Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex”), de Lauretis notes:

The struggle against the ideological apparatuses and socioeconomic institutions of women’s oppression consists in refusing the terms of the heterosexual contract, not only in one’s practice of living but also in one’s practice of knowing. It consists, as well, in concurrently conceiving of the social subject in terms that exceed, are other than, autonomous from, the categories of gender.¹¹

She contends that “the concept ‘lesbian’ is one such term.”¹² But it is not the only one. De Lauretis gathers Rich, Anzaldúa, and Wittig (among others) together to forge a metacategory of the outsider to the heterosexual matrix, the subject that exceeds the boundaries of normative systems, one which resonates for me in my struggle to give a space to the ever-single woman: the eccentric subject.

We, lesbian, mestiza, and inappropriate/d other are all terms for that excessive critical position […] attained through practices of political and personal displacement across boundaries between sociosexual identities and communities, between bodies and discourses, by what I like to call the eccentric subject.¹³

The figure of the lesbian here is a way in, but lesbian is not solely what emerges. The eccentric subject can encompass all the spectrum of possible sexual identities held by ever-single women, including the non-sexual, and opens an array of sites for inquiry that are otherwise foreclosed with an insistence on a particular sexual identity. It can also speak to the potential effects of that ‘displacement across boundaries’ that all ever-single women share as being outside normative female roles – the ‘excessive critical position’ that many ever-single women offer.

In the end, what is chiefly celebrated by scholars like Vicinus and Faderman is the transformative nature of the eccentric subjects they study. Martha Vicinus asserts:

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¹² de Lauretis, “Eccentric Subjects,” 143.
Lesbians and lesbian-like women have had a profound influence upon women and men, challenging them to rethink and alter their behavior. Economic independence, alternative life-styles, and sometimes nontraditional political and cultural activities characterize these women. As we have seen, ever-single women offer critical insights into the heteronormative practices of their societies, as well as lay out a map of human life that offers alternatives to heteropatriarchal structures of living, work, and affect. In this chapter, I will explore some of the voices of these ever-single eccentric subjects, and what a matrix of their subjectivities might look like.

Their lives can be read as a blend, a confluence of experiences and factors, traditional and revolutionary: the necessity of economic self-support; obligations to family; pressures of prescriptive femininity; successes (and failures) in pursuit of education, employment, travel, and professional attainment; the stigma of singleness; and the possible personal impact of a largely self-authorized life. It is not so surprising that ever-single women could in many cases express their experiences in a hybrid style combining elements of traditional and innovative autobiography. From pioneers expanding women’s roles, to caretakers of traditional femininity, ever-single women who worked and travelled in the borderlands of the ‘West beyond the West’ occupied a spectrum of political and philosophical standpoints. Yet it is clear that collectively they exhibit a sense of difference from hegemonic representations of femininity that was a profound effect of marital status.

This chapter will concentrate on the self-images that ever-single women built into their lifewriting, how they might be placed within conventions of self-expression of their time, and revealing a many-stranded wave of identities that challenges our conception of women’s writing about themselves.

Mapping the eccentric subject

Is it better to say nothing politely or to say something poorly? I suppose only if one says something ultra-honest, ultra-true, some deep realizing of life, can it make the grade, ride over the top, having surmounted mechanics.

– Emily Carr, journal entry, 21 February 1941. Hundreds and Thousands, 892.

A vital element to understanding the varied subjectivities of ever-single women lies in autobiography and feminist theories of reading and writing about the self. Yet not only is the study of ever-single women mostly absent from autobiography studies, the writing of individual ever-single women is often dismissed as inauthentic, or (particularly for prewar writing) an unsophisticated adherence to presumed ‘masculine’ modes of writing. Thinking through marital status as a category of analysis as it pertains to autobiography can offer other models to examine women’s lifewriting.

Françoise Lionnet and Helen Buss offer two models of autobiography that are particularly useful for thinking about women on the borderlands. Lionnet proposes that because of the lack of a ‘female’ literary tradition or voice, the female writer

must quilt together from the pieces of her legacy a viable whole – viable in that it embraces a multiplicity of elements that can allow the writer to assume the past (the literary tradition) as past and therefore to reintegrate it into a radically different present [...].

“This problematic,” she writes,

would point to a notion of the female text as métissage, that is, the weaving of different strands of raw material and threads of various colors into one piece of fabric; female textuality as métissage. It would emancipate the writer from any internal or external coercion to use any one literary style or form, freeing her to enlarge, redefine, or explode the canons of our discursive practices.

In the narratives of ever-single women studied here, we can see a multiplicity of strands, of narrative conventions, forms, and identity stances that they have braided into their texts as they negotiate their lives outside of prescriptive wife-and motherhood.

The other model of autobiography that is useful for this discussion picks up the geographical thread underlying parts of this study: mapping. In her 1993 study of Canadian women’s autobiographies, Helen Buss argues that a model of mapping is useful for the study of women’s writing. Map making implies active use of skills, “joining the activities of self-

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15 Although scholars of colonial literature like Mary Louise Pratt and Gillian Whitlock do examine the mobilizing of so-called ‘masculine’ tropes in women’s colonial travel writing, they rarely look specifically at single women’s accounts. Alison Blunt’s work on Mary Kingsley is an exception; see Blunt, “Mapping Authorship and Authority: Reading Mary Kingsley’s Landscape Descriptions” in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, eds. Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies (New York: Guilford Press, 1994): 51-72.

knowledge and knowledge of the world” rather than passive assignments of identity. From childhood, we learn to construct increasingly sophisticated maps that are “profoundly culturally influenced” – effected by gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, and nationality, as well as situation in the family. We all use language to map our daily existence, but the autobiographer “makes special surveys of personal experience” that form the “palimpsest of layers in human subjects” that is culture’s “geologic record.”

A useful part of the mapping metaphor is that maps are documents that hold prescriptive authority in our daily lives. When we want to get to a certain place, we consult a map, believing it to be a true (if ultimately, necessarily, an abstract) depiction of a correct, proper route that exists upon the real terrain. So we can read not only for the maps women create, but also the ones they might be reading to negotiate their own lives. If women were expected to form lives around wife- and motherhood, how did women who did not follow those pre-determined ‘maps’ create their own cartography? Did they adapt their lives as much as they could to prescribed patterns? Or did they seek to augment or correct them, even draft new ones?

Much like autobiography cannot literally contain every moment of a person’s life, we do not expect the map to be the terrain, nor the figures on the map to hold every particular feature of the land. Yet in many ways we do expect a map to be a reliable correlation to a tangible reality. This can make the map a problematic model for autobiography, as lifewriting does not produce some unmediated ‘true’ self on a page, but rather a tracing of a person’s ideas of their inner terrain, one they wish us to see and use.

And the map has historically been wielded as a tool of power relations, notably the Imperial project of rendering colonized spaces and peoples into subordination. As Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose note, “imperialist maps not only describe colonies: they also discipline them through the discursive grids of Western power/knowledge.” Timothy Mitchell explores how colonial survey maps erased the social constructedness of social relations, rendering invisible both the local authorities who formerly mediated land use and the violences of land seizure under colonial rule. Mapping is thus deeply implicated as part of

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“practices that redistribute forms of knowledge and ignorance, and rearrange the normal and the abnormal.”19 Catherine Nash firmly connects the practices of mapping and representations of women: “Both the colonial mapping of subject lands and the representation of women within patriarchy are forms of representation that seek to reinforce the stability of the controlling viewpoint and to negate or suppress alternative views.”20

When these representations are in the hands of ever-single women, what might be the result? All of the women whose writings are explored here were embedded in structures of Imperial hegemony and culture, as nominally privileged White women on the borderlands of empire, while at the same time positioned as eccentric subjects to heteronormativity. As Blunt and Rose note, “colonizing women could share in colonial discourses of power and authority.” Yet their position in the colonial project was never unitary or stable, as it was marked by the ambivalence of White subjects in gendered regimes: “The subject positions of such women, informed by patriarchal and colonial discourses of difference, were unstable and centred over space and time.”21 Thus even as they (re)produce colonial discourses, they confront the contradictions between racial power and gendered disempowerment.

Blunt and Rose look to feminist critiques of mapping physical terrains to “rethink the hegemonic maps of representation” that seek to order (colonial) power as transparent.22 Coming back to the sense of autobiography as a map, what I propose to do here is think through hegemonic maps of representation offered by autobiography theory, and explore what the self-representations of ever-single women might reveal about their maps of identity. Given the powerful tool that a map can become, we need to see the mapping metaphor here is not only about a drafting of a constructed self in the text, derived only from the aims of a ‘transparent’ individual. We need to also think of the authority wielded by the process of mapping; what alternative measures of self are made invisible or lost in this assertion of text to reality; and what power is being grasped and exerted in this self-representation, especially in the face of other powerful prescriptions of heteropatriarchal norms.

‘Truth,’ voice, and self-image

Episode after episode comes back, not photographically, not the surface.

This problematic nature of autobiography-as-mapping, however, brings up the question of authority in autobiographical writing. If autobiography is mediated through the author’s perceptions, aims, and response to hegemonic terrains of identity in the construction of the ‘self’ in the text, then all autobiographical writing is effectively allied with fiction, however ‘honest’ its attempt to portray lived experiences. Thus what use can the historian glean from it? Can we ‘trust’ what is in autobiography?

It depends on the questions we are asking. If we are looking for unassailable, objective facts, we might be disappointed – for how do we verify that a person really felt or said or did all the things they claim in their text? The chief criticism of autobiography as a historical source is that the author can craft their image to what they want the public to see, and thus what they say about themselves may be suspect in terms of the ‘truth’ of ‘how things really were.’

The autobiographical writings of Emily Carr are a good example. Using Carr’s actual words as a source for her life and times poses problems for many of her editors, biographers, and critics. Paula Blanchard notes that Carr is “truthful in the broad picture, though inconsistent in details” and warns that the reader should share her reservations about taking Carr at her word “when other sources are lacking.” Maria Tippet, in what is at times an astonishingly vitriolic text, accuses Carr of “embroidering” and “enlivening” incidents with fiction. Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher contends that Carr’s writings are filled with “personally construed, intensified facts” and (apparently damning for an autobiographer) “one also finds delusory errors in which she projects an outsize image of herself that goes beyond truth or reason.” And the problems are not simply with Carr’s words, but also editors’ interventions: Nancy Pagh is concerned that because most of her works were

23 Blanchard, Life of Emily Carr, 10.
24 Tippett, Emily Carr, 280.
25 Hembroff-Schleicher, Emily Carr, 173.
compiled and edited by others after Carr’s death, we cannot discern exactly what her “real voice” may have been.26

Here we see three elements that these biographers and critics see as errors or as failures to follow true autobiography form: a perceived lack of adherence to the ‘facts’ of small details; the concern that editing destroys a ‘real voice’ (thought possible to achieve otherwise); and a dismay that an ‘outsized image’ has been crafted by Carr, more a ‘self-portrait’ than autobiography. These concerns reflect in many ways an adherence to traditional autobiographical forms, built upon the canonical texts of male literary greats (Augustine, Rousseau) and reflecting masculine subjectivities in Western history, characterized chiefly by a linear timeline of individual struggle and success, and a claim to objective transparency about the inner development of a unified ‘self.’ This framework was re-codified in an 1980 collection edited by James Olney, principally in the essay by Charles Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography.”27

This re-assertion of a canonical and hegemonic poetics of autobiography led to a resounding critical response and flowering of autobiography theory as a field of study, particularly driven by the autobiographies of Western women and, more recently, other non-hegemonic groups. Feminist theorists who work with women’s autobiographies contended that women’s writing very often does not conform to these traditional forms based on men’s experiences in a heavily gendered society, and that ‘truths’ of a different sort are more important than chronologies or publicly verifiable facts: personal values, patterns of relationships, and the construction of the self within a system of relating to others rather than individual public successes.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson offer a useful overview of the evolving field of women’s autobiography and the emergence of a post-modernist approach to the genre in their introduction to Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader (1998). They divide their timeline into three general stages, while noting that some studies overlap these boundaries. The first stage identified a female autobiographical content and style distinct from the coherent linear narrative, heroic plot, and unity of subject that has been traditionally labelled ‘masculine,’

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instead noting women’s emphasis on the personal and the domestic, with a style that is often fragmented, disconnected, and diffuse. Second stage theorists critiqued these models as essentialist and of ignoring the implications of race, class, and sexuality, calling instead for a widening of generic boundaries and stressed attention to multiple narratives of difference that were not simply inversions of traditional hegemonic forms. A current, third stage (in which Smith and Watson include their 1998 text) takes on the postcolonial and postmodern turns, with diasporic and Third World writers ‘recasting’ theories based on Anglo-American autobiography. A very powerful aspect of this stage is the unfolding development and integration of ideas of subjectivity as negotiated and performed.28

Utilizing some key perspectives from this ‘third stage’ of criticism, we can return to the three elements problematized above in looking at Emily Carr’s work: ‘truth,’ voice, and self-image. Timothy Dow Adams believes that because of her inattention to factual accuracy (names, dates) in her writing, most of Carr’s autobiographical works must be seen more as “literary self-portraits” than repositories of undeniable truths; however, this is not a negative criticism, but instead a model for reading all lives.29 Sidonie Smith asks what ‘truths’ are really expected in autobiographical sources: “To facticity? To experience? To self? To history? [...] And truth for what and for whom? For the autobiographer? The reader? Society?”30 Although Nancy Pagh is concerned with the possibility of finding a ‘real voice’ for Carr, she also questions the linear, truth-based model of autobiographical writing, and feels that attempts by critics to condemn Carr’s stories as ‘lies’ constitute “a failure to ask why Carr describes her life the way she does.”31 When looking for evidence of an ever-single identity, we should not see autobiographical writing (the map) as offering proofs of actual subjectivity (the terrain), but instead what selves these women wanted portrayed, and what hegemonic – or counterhegemonic – inscriptions they are presenting to us.

28 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women’s Autobiographical Practices” in Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson, eds. Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 8-16. Smith and Watson note that these stages are not fixed; I found many theorists to be arrayed along this continuum. It may be that we are now in a fourth ‘stage’: looking at multiple authors, voices, and subjects in autobiography.
29 Timothy Adams, “‘Painting Above Paint’: Telling Li(v)es in Emily Carr’s Literary Self-Portraits” Journal of Canadian Studies 27 (Summer 1992), 38.
31 Pagh, “Passing Through the Jungle,” 74.
On the question of voice, Susanna Egan notes that Carr was her own (main) editor, and that Carr saw her early writing (which was heavily autobiographical) as “stories” which she reworked several times, “revisions that obviously include distortions of information for particular effects.” If any editing is necessarily mediation, then Carr’s voice was already mediated before her other editors arrived on the scene. A deeper concern is how we would measure the authenticity of Carr’s voice, in even the ‘purest’ manuscript straight from her hand.

As Smith and Watson point out, critics of autobiography have begun to grapple with the reduction of writing style and content to a masculine or feminine essence or ‘voice,’ with varied success. Estelle Jelinek, writing from the cusp of the breakthrough in women’s autobiography criticism in 1980, raises the issue of voice, offering an interesting exercise in assessing women’s autobiographies that should be kept in mind by scholars. She proposes that changing the author’s gender in a selection of autobiographies (all women with public careers as suffragists, artists, or professionals, including Gertrude Stein, an ever-single woman with a longterm female partner) renders a different outlook on their content and thus the significance of the author’s lives:

As men, these women’s experiences would be described in heroic or exceptional terms: alienation, initiation, manhood, apotheosis, transformation, guilt, identity crises, and symbolic journeys. As women, their experiences are viewed in more conventional terms: heartbreak, anger, loneliness, motherhood, humility, confusion, and self-abnegation.

Although here Jelinek is offering an analysis that points more to the gendered perspectives of the critic than any reality embedded in a given text, the treatment of various features found in women’s autobiographies as effects of an essential, ‘feminine’ nature – as opposed to the (supposed) nature of males thought to be revealed in autobiographies written by men – is a common feature of the early wave of theorizing women’s autobiography.

Since then, many scholars have developed a more nuanced analysis that reflects the lived elements of many women’s lives, such as mothering and caregiving, that would account for the relational, non-linear textuality of their narratives without needing to resort to some

quasi-biological ‘nature’ to account for them. However, an element of essentialism still remains: the paradigm Woman of most works of criticism is, explicitly named or not, the married, mothering woman.

Time and again, the basic construction of Woman that underlines the texts of theorists of women’s autobiography is a singular, homogenous figure: the wife and mother (or one in potentia). The prime exception was those texts that focused on lesbian lifewriting; however, most studies of lesbian autobiography before the Second World War focus on content rather than process. In particular, the body of criticism that focuses on White women in colonial and post-colonial contexts – that which most closely applies to the temporal and spatial context of my study – on the whole embraces the paradigm woman as married and mothering.34 One element of this phenomenon might be the subject position of the scholars themselves. In her “Autobiocritical Preface” to Repossessing the World, Helen Buss implies that her imagined reader of her own memoir (and by extension the imagined subjects of her theory) is a woman like herself – “overworked, with a career, kids, and marriage.”35 The values that Buss carries about marriage, female roles and worth, and women’s voice(s) clearly would be forefront in her desire to speak to her ideal reader.

Even as autobiography criticism has evolved, this continued perception of all women as married and mothers creates gaps that render this body of literature difficult to use in an analysis of ever-single women’s texts. Why? Because the insistence on the relational, the interior, the domestic, and the emotional – while deservedly crucial elements found in many women’s texts – are privileged to the exclusion of linear, self-promotional elements, a story arc of professional success and attainment, and other heroic elements that are coded and dismissed as ‘masculine’ and thus rendered suspect or banished entirely from a poetics of ‘women’s’ writing.

It’s this denial of the heroic that brings us to the third element found in the criticism of Carr’s writing: that her texts projected an ‘out-sized’ or heroic image of herself. Theorists of autobiography have had difficulty grappling with the presence of the heroic in women’s writing: a sense of self as achieving, within a narrative of struggle and triumph. Because the

34 An exception would be the aforementioned work done by Alison Blunt on Mary Kingsley, English ever-single travel writer. See also Alison Blunt, Travel, Gender, and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa (New York: Guilford Press, 1994).
heroic is an emblematic characteristic most commonly attached to ‘masculine’ writing, women’s use of heroic themes is questioned frequently as evidence of false identification, or of a unconscious slip into traditional narratives – in short, inauthentic to some ‘real’ female experience and voice. Looking at the work of Teresa de Lauretis (Technologies of Gender, 1987) Sidonie Smith (A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography, 1987) and Carolyn Heilbrun (Writing a Woman’s Life, 1988), Rebecca Bloom contends that

women need to be suspicious when they participate in creating their stories in a narrative form that is derived from masculinist models and norms. The danger in doing so is that women may recreate “master scripts” unconsciously (de Lauretis 1987) or become positioned inequitably if they choose female representations of selfhood (Smith 1987).

She also concurs with Heilbrun’s suggestion that “in writing or telling their lives, women often describe their feelings, experiences, hopes, and identities to live up to conventional patriarchal notions of being female.”

Bloom sees an adoption of ‘master scripts’ as a key element of contention in the oral histories she conducts in her study. She is clear that she defines a construction of a progress-based, public achievement narrative by women as a masking of women’s true subjectivity. In the case of ‘Olivia,’ who recounts a story of a successful business venture, Bloom declares her narrative is necessarily compromised: “As long as Olivia casts herself as a hero(ine), she inscribes herself with male selfhood.”

The suggestion that women cannot be heroes, that performing ‘hero’ is always and inescapably inauthentic for women, should be especially problematic in the case of ever-single women, because many of their autobiographical texts employ heroic themes.

In Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women (2002), Helen Buss recommends abandoning the term ‘autobiography’ because it is tied up with a certain kind of subjectivity:


37 Bloom, Under the Sign of Hope, 74.
the ego-centred, romantic, bourgeois rebel, professionally career-centred, bound on rising above the relational dictates of a mundane society to the place of the exceptional man, the autonomous man.\textsuperscript{38}

Instead, we need to pay attention to \textit{memoir}:

Memoir has required a human subject whose autonomy is compellingly intertwined with relationships, and community, a human subject that does not seek to disentangle herself from those compelling ties, but builds autonomy based on them.\textsuperscript{39}

In seeking to warn of the dangers of slipping into master narratives, this strand of theory denies the authenticity of the voices of many ever-single women, who might have the experiences of public action and struggle which shape the heroic narratives that these theorists claim is inauthentic to the ‘real’ lives of ‘women.’ The texts of ever-single women are often ‘memoirs’ in the senses Buss outlines; yet they also often trace a ‘bourgeois rebel, professionally career-centred’ identity in several ways. In some ways they offer a typical ‘traditional’ or ‘masculine’ autobiographical narrative, full of important people they had contact with, a linear narrative of their own accomplishments, and a focus on the connections between their life and great events of their day. Their narratives are also deeply interwoven with relationships, family, and community.

This notional contradiction or conflict of styles in ever-single women’s texts demonstrates that these may have less to do with some sort of essence of gender and more with the socio-economic conditions that constrained most women’s lives. Judy Long offers a useful way out of the trap of essentialism in autobiography by thinking of the effects of culture:

\begin{quote}
The valuing of connection, the exercise of empathy and care, the investment in relationship work are not characteristic of all women, nor is there any connection between these values and femaleness. The link, if any, is with female culture and female socialization.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

The ever-single woman was compelled by her marital status to frame her identity not in traditional terms of husband and children, but in experiences outside the conjugal home: education, employment, and service, as well as family, friends, and intimate relationships. When she comes to write this life, the result often is a hybrid narrative, one that embraces

both traditionally-prescribed arenas for women’s interests (family, personal relationships) and those often preserved for men: politics, intellectual and artistic attainment, and ambition.

Valerie Sanders illustrates the direct self-confident assertion of much (masculine) autobiographical writing with H.G.Wells’ declaration: “I shall die, as I have lived, the responsible centre of my world.” However, she notes, “many women were not the ‘responsible centre’ of their worlds; and even if they were, it was not something they chose to advertise.” I would contend that self-supporting, ever-single women may not have had to employ a defensive “deflected image of themselves” and downplay their roles to placate a real or imagined personal readership. ‘Responsible centre’ is actually an apt description of the self-identity that emerges in these texts. This stylistic conflict then may come from the lack of attention paid by these theorists of autobiography to marital status and the potential of a more individualistic female identity.

How far did ever-single women experience, or were able to experience, an identity as self-directing ‘individual’? The ever-single woman at least may have found traditional ‘relational’ models of female development/value/subjectivity not so easily applicable to her life as an eccentric subject in heteropatriarchal society; the cultural norm of the ‘liberal individual’ struggling through an upward-progress narrative might just have seemed closer to her own situation. However it is important to note that this likely created a fairly fragile ‘freedom’ to pursue this individual identity, with a corresponding pressure to do so – and succeed – while operating under the material and ideological constraints all women faced, and which worked to (severely) limit the numbers of women who could even attempt such a life and thus build such an identity.

The classic narrative of struggle and progress that is coded masculine is then better reframed as the domain of subjects who are able to be ‘self-contained,’ self-supporting, and self-authorized. (This would also be useful to address the variations in voice and content in autobiographies of people of colour and other marginalized groups.) This suggests that the identity of the ever-single woman may offer a hybrid alternative to the binary poles of masculine/feminine subjectivity found in prescription and in much of contemporary theorizing. This framework also begins to answer Joan Scott’s call for a “refusal of the fixed

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and permanent quality of the binary opposition, a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference."\(^{43}\) Instead of sectioning off a class of women who deviate from passive, nurturing, relational patterns in their lifewriting, let’s ask how socio-economic status, the necessity of being self-supporting, and the potential day to day differences in domestic relations (importantly, lack of subordination), could all lead to a certain frame of identity, of seeing the world and of acting in it, and of writing the self.

The women who wrote varying texts about their lives reveal to us some of the mapping of their own identities as they confront the effects of culture and socialization in their lives. Piecing together these fragments – or threads – with the more general strands of tradition and prescription gives us a sense of how their internal subjectivity may have intersected with their culture, a \textit{métissage} of identity.

**Heroic narratives**

Considering the restrictions placed on women – we girls probably did pretty well – much better than the average young woman of our day.

– Margaret Bayne, \textit{Roses in December}, 51

Rather than declaring that women did not and could not sustain an ‘authentic’ heroic construction of self in their narratives, a better approach is to assess where and under what conditions the heroics enter women’s autobiographical narratives in this period, from the late nineteenth century through to the Second World War. What then were the shared legacies and ‘culture’ of ever-single women in the borderlands of British Columbia in this period?

In her groundbreaking 1987 study, \textit{A Poetics Of Women’s Autobiography}, Sidonie Smith presents a very practical reason for the subsuming of “women’s voice” in traditional, masculinist forms:

When a woman chooses to leave behind cultural silence and to pursue autobiography, she chooses to enter the public arena. But she can speak with authority only insofar as she tells a story that her audience will read. Responding to the generic expectations of significance in life stories, she looks towards a narrative that will resonate with privileged cultural fictions of male selfhood.\(^{44}\)

\(^{43}\) Scott, “Gender,” 165.
\(^{44}\) Smith, \textit{A Poetics Of Women’s Autobiography}, 52.
Thus when women like Margaret Bayne set out to write their stories, the models they had available were most likely traditional ones, which helped shape the ‘heroic’ format of their narratives. Yet there were other models that offered similar elements. Popular European autobiographies describing women’s quests for public attainment such as those of Beatrice Webb and Harriet Martineau might have been available to some women through family collections and libraries. The network of letters in the rural women’s pages also presented alternate ways of being as well as practical advice. And spiritual testimonies were also gaining popularity through the nineteenth century, a genre that effectively authorized female lifewriting through the practice of witnessing for God. As Marilyn Färdig Whiteley notes about Annie Leake Tuttle, “The rhetoric of the testimonial forms a thread woven through her story […] testifying to God’s action in her life gave her permission for the audacious act of autobiography.”

We also know some of the literary influences on individual women in this study. Emily Carr was a devoted fan of Walt Whitman, an American poet who embraced non-normative sexuality, conduct, and philosophy; she also read Gertrude Stein’s *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, an emblematic text of heroic self-description. And in her formative years – ‘those early [18]80s’ – Margaret Bayne’s mother acquired a book called *Eminent Women of the Age* (1876) from a neighbour:

> We girls revelled in its biographies. So many women we had never heard of that were doing marvellous things, writing stories, doing newspaper work, lecturing on woman’s suffrage. […] That book made suffragists of everyone of us and of cousin Bess as well.

There was also the widespread legacy of a particular form of female memoir-writing much in use through the turn of the century: the deflected heroic self. Two examples of a buried, indirect, or ‘deflected’ heroic self are found in the memoirs and diaries studied by Julia Bush and Valerie Raoul. And another important example is an inversion of these – the adoption of a heroic persona of mythic proportions.

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45 Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, *The Life and Letters of Annie Leake Tuttle: Working for the Best* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 5. Although Tuttle was briefly married late in life, it was several years after she left BC and her long status as a life-cycle ‘spinster’ appear to have heavily shaped her insights on her life; I have confined myself to her correspondence and accounts of her childhood and years in BC.

46 Carr, journal entry, 6 April 1934. *Hundreds and Thousands*, 732.

In her study of memoirs by elite British women published in the interwar years, Julia Bush finds that their texts are shaped as proud chronicles of the ruling class and homage to male political leaders in their intimate social circles – presenting themselves not as central actors, but as privileged observers. Bush notes that this group “consistently claimed that their writings were an act of homage to past heroes and past times, and thus the performance of a duty towards posterity.”48 This stance had the effect of authorizing the self-expression of this set of women in terms that were clearly identifiable as within the bounds of feminine propriety: duty and service. As Mary Jean Corbett explains in a similar analysis (of the memoir of an English author in this period), the key to this model is not the presentation of the author’s personal, interior ‘drama’

but an external, historical, public one in which she plays her own part. From her privileged position, she conveys an intimate view of important personages, while always remaining ‘in role’ – as granddaughter, niece, and wife, and as lady novelist as well.49

However, even as these authors celebrated the accomplishments of others, their own identities embraced a kind of deflected heroism, in “a profound self-association” with these reported successes and their place at the hub of social and political life. As Bush points out: “rejection of more obvious forms of self-promotion does not amount to lack of self-confidence or lack of a sense of their own historical worth.”50

In her study of French women’s diaries from 1880 to 1920, Valerie Raoul identifies “one of the few heroic models for women available in nineteenth-century France: that of the saint or martyr.” Concentrating on two diaries in particular, she discusses how the diarists’ “narcissistic identification”51 with a male Other, to whom they direct their energies and self-sacrifice in the hopes of saving his soul, actually re-inscribes their own identities as superior:

Taking on themselves the responsibility for his salvation, they become Christ-like redeemers, who buy back, through their suffering, the soul of the man who needs them

in order to be saved. Rather than remaining passive and pathetic victims, they emerge as triumphant heroines.52

This model was especially promoted by the Catholic Church as a “triumphant role model for other women” which Raoul sees as an instrument “to teach resignation to other potentially rebellious women.” However, she also notes that this diary form’s authorization of a feminine voice could serve as “a site of resistance, an expression of women’s refusal to be completely silenced.”53

In contrast to these models, Gertrude Stein, often the grand (or maligned) exception in studies of women’s autobiography, has inspired a lot of scholarly attention to her avant-garde form and unabashedly heroic construction of her own image in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (1933). However, this work also owes something to the model of deflected heroism, even if in parody – Stein writes as if the narrator is Alice B. Toklas, her own life-partner; this narrator then describes Stein in the third person, in a eulogizing mode similar to the narratives studied by Bush. ‘Toklas’ describes Stein often in wildly flattering terms: Stein is pronounced a ‘first class genius,’ her writing is compared favourably to Bach’s compositions, and she is shown to be a witty confidant to Picasso.54 Because the author actually is Stein, the ‘homage’ model is turned on itself.

Some critics find this text very problematic, however. Timothy Dow Adams includes Stein in his work on ‘lies’ in autobiography in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (1990). In Sidonie Smith’s critique of his study, she notes that Adams characterizes Gertrude Stein’s text as the construction of ‘a legendary figure’ and believes she ‘presents herself as the great American folk hero’ because mythmaking is her primary objective. Smith counters with the suggestion that this ‘mythmaking’

becomes for Stein one means of resisting culturally provided identities, specifically the identities of the unwomanly, egoistic artist and the physically grotesque and sexually perverse lesbian. More-over, it effects an un-manning of a masculine tradition since Stein puts herself in the place of the (male) folk hero.55

53 Raoul, “Women’s Diaries As Life-Savings,” 149.
It is quite possible that both Stein and Carr set out to mythologize themselves for various reasons: vanity and pride, literary playfulness, or to challenge conventions of what a ‘good woman’s’ life story ought to be.

This range of models of the female heroic in autobiography offered different ways of plotting subjectivity for ever-single women. While women like Carr sought a narrative framework that reflected their struggles with iconoclasm and difference, others like Annie Leake Tuttle who felt the justifying presence of God in their life had access to a heroic that fit their own worldview. Reading the lifewriting of ever-single women in this study, I have identified four major streams of narrative that evoke the heroic: self-reliance, vocation, mobility, and nation.

◆ self-reliance

Its a nuisance, but that is one of the penalties of being useful to society.

– Jessie McQueen (on how her cousin is nearby but cannot visit due to a church obligation), letter to Catherine McQueen, March 16, 1891, Lower Nicola

Helen Buss suggests that to better understand women’s identities presented in their writing, we need to pay attention to the various models of femininity that circulated at this time, especially on the development frontier. In her efforts to discern the effects of Western gender regimes in the Canadian context, Buss has identified Canadian pioneer men as maintaining the ‘clinging vine’ image of the ‘True Woman’ as the ideal, even in the face of their own requirements for a competent, strong companion on the frontier.56 In a close reading of Isabel West’s travel journal, Buss detects this pioneer wife’s struggle between the two figures of the True Woman and the capable, pioneer woman; the account is “full of the modest language of a woman who must portray herself as nonheroic, while showing herself able to suffer hardship in silence for her husband’s sake and her own respectability as a middle-class woman.”57

Buss notes that the varied gender stereotypes that appeared in West’s text such as ‘clinging vine,’ ‘good sport,’ ‘pioneer,’ and ‘heroine’ indicate the multiple, over-lapping

“gender agendas that early twentieth-century, middle-class ideology offered women.” Buss finds a reflection of this seeming ambiguity in Frances Cogan’s discussion of the emerging doctrine of ‘real womanhood’ which advocated separate spheres but insisted that women were mentally and emotionally men’s equals; women were important to society because of their functions as wives, daughters, and mothers, yet should not ask for the political powers that would reflect a more real equality and universal worth. Buss sees this model as promoting a positive self-image for women based on their traditional competencies and worth as married/mothering women, while still “fulfilling the function of ‘good’ woman in patriarchy.” Thus Isabel West could be gratified that she was seen as a ‘good sport’ even as she maintains a non-threatening, self-deprecating sense of self in her text. Buss sees this as emblematic of a new version of the True/Real Woman emerging in the twentieth century Canadian context, “a gendering of females as more active, boyish women, who are ‘good sports’ and companions for their men, while not competing with them.” The image of the competent but not competing woman extended well into the twentieth century, re-inscribed as the ability to ‘make do’ in the Depression years.

So for ever-single women in the Canadian context, this legacy of the competent female was available to them. This construction of women as strong, capable, competent, but not in competition with men might be an important background element in ever-single lifewriting. However, in the hands of the pioneer wife it remained a deflected heroic, which demonstrated survival in conditions not of one’s choosing – as opposed to the experiences related by many of the women in this study, who pursued travel, exploration, and exploitation for their own ends.

Again, the crucial differences in opportunities and experiences driven by marital status remains an enticing extra element shaping how ever-single women might craft their identities, given the shared cultural models they had access to. The ever-single women in this study adopt the language of the competent ‘real’ woman in even stronger terms, focusing on

58 Buss, “A Feminist Revision of New Historicism,” 226. The use of the term ‘good sport’ for someone willing to ‘play along’ with the needs and dictates of (male-directed) conditions and the use of ‘sport’ for a woman of the underworld makes an interesting comparison.
60 Buss, “A Feminist Revision of New Historicism”, 227
61 Veronica Strong-Boag, “Pulling in a Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load: Women, Work, and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie” Journal of Canadian Studies 21/3 (Fall 1986), 42.
an identity of self-reliance that is usually coded masculine. Annie Leake Tuttle demonstrates in her autobiography her ambition and ability to do hard work and get things done. She recounts stories where she matches or bests her brothers at work and ‘boy’s’ jobs, even defending her younger sister Mary from a “heartless school companion”: “with all my strength, I pounded the boy.”62 And she pronounces: “Such, the material that went from home to earn their [sic] own way at 10 and 1/2 years.”63

A crucial tracing of the heroic cartography of Bayne’s autobiography lies in her discussion of the ‘pioneer woman’:

The pioneer woman was one of the most resourceful women in the world. She was a good cook, a good needlewoman, a good housekeeper and a handy nurse. She knew how to raise flowers, vegetables, poultry and livestock. She knew how to milk, to churn, to knit, to spin, weave and dye cloth; she could make soap, starch, maple sugar and tallow candles; she was a shrewd buyer, a careful executive, a good all around business woman. She was more than that. She was the wife of the most important man in Canada [...] the Canadian pioneer, and the mother of men who have made America.64

Hers is a positive, heroic description, making typical ‘womanly’ duties exemplars of competence, and pulling her model out of a simple binary of private/public by mixing ‘private’ terms of domesticity with ‘public’ terms of business.

Yet even as she does that, she stresses the pioneer woman’s greater identity was that of wife and mother of men (note, not of women). There are a few ways to take this excerpt. One is to see it as a necessary gesture towards normative gender regimes that theorists of autobiography find so pervasive in women’s texts. But I think even in this articulation of a prescribed ‘relational’ female identity, there is a resistance: the pioneer woman is important as a builder of men, not dismissed for it. In Repossessing the World Buss explores Judith Butler’s notion of performativity, extended by Sidonie Smith into the building and performing of gendered subjects in autobiography. For women who are not traditionally authorized to self-speak, the capacity to define ourselves, necessary to memoir, “depends on some degree of failure in reiterating societal norms.” She is very interested in how “the very acts of obediently performing accepted gender roles may not result in always performing

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63 Whiteley, The Life and Letters of Annie Leake Tuttle, 15.
64 Bayne, Roses in December, 45.
them successfully” and as such creates a space for women to resist such roles and spark “failures of femininity.”\(^{65}\)

Here Bayne may be opening up a fissure more in keeping with her heroic sketch of the rest of the excerpt: the logical conclusion to her statement is the pioneer woman builds Canada, a most exalted political role. (And given that this excerpt is prefaced by praise of her formidable and wonderful Grandma Whyte, we should consider that Bayne might have sought to not abandon her foremothers in her own evocations of personal worth). This map then is a complex one, revealing more with careful scrutiny than first appears. We can see many of the pioneer women’s traits displayed as Margaret Bayne’s own throughout the memoir, displaying for us how she successfully conformed to her ‘map’ of what a woman should be.\(^{66}\) Yet in reading this fissure, together with the crossover private/public competencies of her heroic figure, I am inclined to think that a certain comment is being made about the possibility of multiple roles of female worth.

◆ vocation

A wave of exhilaration swept over me. This was romance – I was going to be a trained nurse.

— Ethel Johns, excerpt from fragment autobiography, “Reserve Unit,” 8.

All of the women whose lifewriting I have read for this study traced a narrative of education and work that is presented as vocation – a path, a goal, or a sense of mission or meaning in life imbued in their occupations. At the beginning of that path lay education.

Education represented a number of things to the women in this study: a gratification of the desire for knowledge, the means by which chosen vocations could be pursued, and the path by which a stifling family orbit could be escaped. Emily Carr went abroad to study art in schools at San Francisco, London, and Paris, and had the opportunity to travel to many parts of England and France to train with painting masters. As she pursued her ambition to develop herself as an artist, she also got out from under the authority of her autocratic eldest sister

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\(^{65}\) Buss, *Repossessing the World*, 64-5.

\(^{66}\) Many of her vignettes demonstrate her success at a whole range of ‘pioneer woman’ attributes: educator, bookseller (120), darter of ‘sox’ and crack ironer (121), homesteader (144), land speculator (145), and, as Superintendent of the Girls’ Industrial School, teacher of all the ‘pioneer’ skills through the school’s domestic and commercial courses.
(who had become head of the family after her parents’ deaths), and escaped, for a time, the disapproval of her family. Annie Leake Tuttle deeply desired an education, but her service in her uncle’s homes at a young age mostly precluded schooling. She agreed to be a home help in her preacher uncle’s home partly for the promise of a better education than the local school; in this she was “bitterly disappointed” and had about three years total schooling when she began teaching (by private contract) to earn money for Normal School, which she fixed upon as a good means “whereby I could secure the coveted education and self-support.”

Alice Ravenhill also struggled with ideals of educational attainment. Born in England, Ravenhill was a migrant to BC in middle age. Her life’s work was promoting improved domestic hygiene and developing home economics education in the UK, US, and Canada, helping to found the Home Economics department at the University of British Columbia and lecturing widely on the subject. While she remained in the family home in England, Ravenhill had to hide her scientific textbooks and experiments, and her career choices were severely curtailed by her parents’ sense of family propriety and gentry class position. It was the failure of their fortunes that allowed her to ‘escape’ into public health nursing, which required moving away from home to gain her training. Interestingly enough, a lack of a substantive secondary education plagued Alice Ravenhill throughout her life, regardless of her achievements in her profession. As a pioneer in public health nursing, hygiene, and home economics education, Ravenhill helped develop the courses in professional training in her field; however, she was plagued by an acute self-consciousness of what she saw as her under-education (regardless of the fact that no training existed in the several areas she pioneered): “always I was and am acutely alive to the serious handicap of the insufficient groundwork from which I suffered.” In 1890 Margaret Bayne entered the University of Toronto, where “another new world opened before me, a world in which I knew less and less as the circle of my knowledge widened and revealed the immensity of my ignorance.” Bayne saw access to university as a profound step in the emancipation of women and was proud of her own participation as a secretary of the Women’s Literary Society.

71 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 58.
Just as education held multiple meanings for the women in this study, so did paid employment. The simple term ‘work’ hides the many ways ever-single women saw their means of making a living. Like religion and ethnicity, work appears as a major demarcation of subjectivity. Professionals and women who thought of their work as vocations often used elevated language to describe their work. Work, beyond the simple gaining of an income, is described in three broad themes: vocation, passion, and heroic enterprise.

Filled with a sense of service to the wider world – and quite possibly in response to pressures to prove themselves valuable even if not wives and mothers – many ever-single women saw their pursuit of education and paid employment as way to be ‘useful.’ Marilyn Färđig Whiteley notes that “usefulness was a primary virtue in Annie [Leake Tuttle]’s era, and especially so for evangelical Methodists like Annie.”72 Women who came from differing cultural contexts also echoed the usefulness paradigm. Looking back on a life of active community participation, BC-born Nancy Morley worried that because of impending old age, “soon I will be no longer useful to people.”73 At the end of her 1921 diary, Charlotte Black writes:

Oh that I may be able to do something by my example if nothing else for my younger sister and brothers. During this year I found that my desire is really to help others – thus I wish to be a missionary.74

Alice Ravenhill saw her trajectory through public health nursing and the development of the home economics profession as part of an early vocation to ease suffering:

I certainly remember feeling great concern in my childhood for what seemed to me such an amount of unnecessary sadness and suffering in the world. Presumably the seed was early sown (though by what means I do not know) for my great desire to play a small part in the removal of these conditions when at long last the opportunity for doing so occurred.75

Some framed their lives in terms of religious vocation. Annie Leake Tuttle, who was proud of out-doing her brothers and going out to work at the age of 10, gave all credit to God for her adult ambitions and success, believing God guided her to each new position and stage in

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74 Charlotte Black, diary, 1921. Charlotte S. Black fonds, 1913-1976. University of British Columbia Archives. UBC-43. Box 2-1. She eventually became an professor in Home Economics at UBC.
life. Of her five-year position as the first matron of the Chinese Rescue Home in Victoria – a position filled in consultation with chapters of the Women’s Missionary Society right across the country – she declares: “I had not chosen the position it came as I then believed from God and I now believe it more assuredly. And He alone was able to carry me through the difficulties of those years.” Jessie McQueen’s similar belief in Providence shaped her responses to her family’s demands for support, as well as helping justify her choice to sojourn a continent away from them to fulfill such duties:

I sometimes think I was headstrong & self-willed about coming here [to BC], but after all “my times are in His hands,” and […] “Thou camest not to this place by accident […] This is the very place God meant for thee.”

Margaret Bayne, whose narrative of personal success is certainly the most evocative of the ‘heroic’ self-authorizing individual, offers Biblical anecdotes and maxims in her text, although less as an argument for Providential intervention in her life and choices, than a proof to be proffered when resistance to such choices appears.

Others had a true passion for their vocations. Ethel Johns recounts how she was excited to pursue what she enthusiastically called the “romance” of nursing – a term encompassing struggle and ascendancy in the pioneering days of the nursing profession. Emily Carr chose ‘Art’ as the expression of a passion that transcended mere self-support: “Outdoor sketching was as much longing as labour.” When illness and age truncated her painting abilities, she turned to writing as a similar outlet that meant more than the income it generated.

Although clearly Margaret Bayne was self-supporting, work was framed as a means to a particular end, rather than a simple method of survival. And work was also seen by Bayne as a challenge, a chance for personal achievement. The Superintendent position meant for Bayne another heroic moment:

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77 Jessie McQueen to Catherine McQueen, May 22nd, 1889. The McQueen Lowden Fonds, Vol. 3347, Folder No. 6, Letter No. 12, 4. Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, Halifax, Nova Scotia.
78 For example, see her discussion of the ‘daughters of Zelophehad’: *Roses in December*, 59-60.
80 Carr, *Growing Pains*, 315. See also her assertion that she refused marriage because “it’s the work itself” that drove her, not the need for support: *Growing Pains*, 385.
The undertaking looked harder than anything I had ever tried. It seemed full of worth while [sic] possibilities and would probably be the difficult task that I had long hoped would come my way.81

Like Margaret Bayne, Annie Leake Tuttle looked for a new challenge after a teaching career, and found enormous satisfaction in a difficult and pioneering position as head of the Chinese Rescue Home in Victoria. Although the Home and its management were beset with problems, the five years there were the most fulfilling of her life: “I considered those five years among the most remarkable & successful of my life’s work.”82 Both of their representations of work here are evocative of the pioneer, relating the trope of striving and ‘progress’ one is expected to experience on the frontier.

However, we must remember that many professionals did not particularly love their work. Ethel Bruce’s letters show her repeated distress over her sister Maude’s keeping on in teaching when she disliked it so much. Survival simply outweighed loftier concerns like vocation for many women. Bruce lamented her own need to work (writing news stories) to pay the bills, rather than pursue the writing projects she really wanted:

I like Victoria, but I don’t think it’s good for me to stay here forever if I’m ever going to do anything but “sling ink,” in the rude phrase we employ to characterise mediocre journalism. You see what I’m doing fills my time so utterly that I haven’t the chance even to try whether I can do anything better.83

For Bruce, the chance at vocation, rather than mere employment, was a goal that might evade her but remained an integral part of her own self-fashioning – giving herself the right to develop beyond subsistence.

◆ mobility

Can anything compare with the dear delights of travelling when you do not know and nobody knows just what lies around the next corner?

– Agnes Deans Cameron, The New North, 142

Reading ever-single women’s narratives of work, education, and family reveals the importance of travel and personal mobility in these women’s lives. Both the obligations and

81 Bayne, Roses in December, 169.
82 Whiteley, The Life and Letters of Annie Leake Tuttle, 62, 71.
83 Ethel Bruce to Maude Bruce, n.d. [‘Friday’]. Ethel Bruce fonds, City of Victoria Archives PR13 25c5, file 11.
the opportunities they faced were enabled by travel. In her study of independent women in the Progressive and post-World War II eras in the United States, Trisha Franzen discerns a pattern of travel by ever-single women that is of some interest here. Franzen finds that all of the middle-class women of her study were absent from the family sphere for brief or prolonged periods (and some permanently), motivated by the necessity to gain an education or employment opportunities, or the needs of kin. This mobility was sanctioned by the family and community because of its acceptability in a framework of obligation – for instance, many pursued education to be able to support their families, or to pursue self-support, when family finances failed. However, mobility also offered opportunity, for escape from family supervision as well as prospects for self-development and achievement. The conditions of sanction or obligation that enabled the first move out of the family sphere did not erase the emancipatory nature of mobility for these women, in being able to move away from home, taking up independent living arrangements, or living in community with other women in an institutional setting in a college or residential community. And examining the autobiographies of women on the borderlands reveals a third element: adventure. This can be added to an expanded framework of the various forms of travel and mobility pursued by ever-single women, which can be divided into three broad categories: sojourning, sanctioned by family and community as necessary for education or employment; escape, from family obligations and barriers to opportunities for education, work, and independence; and advancement and adventure, mobility pursued for its own pleasures as well as an opportunity for new experiences and personal development.

Sojourning – going away from home to work for a limited time – was a widely accepted practice that especially took Maritimers south and west to find employment unavailable, or unavailable at decent wages, in times of economic depression in the Atlantic provinces. It was possible for Jessie McQueen and her sister Annie to move across the continent to take the higher-paying teacher jobs available in BC because that was seen as a part of respectable and dutiful daughterhood. The bonds and guise of obligation justified this potential adventure, as long as it was seen as an arc of returning home to the family. Part of what Jessie McQueen ‘owed’ the family, and particularly her mother, was to return from a

84 Franzen, Spinsters and Lesbians, 56-7.
85 Franzen, Spinsters and Lesbians, 58, 68.
profitable sojourn of a promised three years only, to help back on the farm. Yet because the opportunity for good wages was also crucial for the family’s well-being, Jessie was able to sojourn four separate times to BC. These cycles back into the borderlands were times of ever-growing independence and self-confidence. However, duty and obligation brought her back to care give for her mother and an older sister suffering from mental illness, duties that the other sisters who married escaped. In contrast, by marrying during her sojourn in BC, Jessie’s sister Annie took the chance to break the cycle of obligation and the promise to return – but she traded it for a severe limitation on mobility and choice, bound to her husband’s decisions on place of residence and way of life. Jessie, who never escaped the cycle of sojourning and return, had (in her times of sojourn in BC at least) chances for a much more self-directed life.86

And sometimes the sojourner became resident. Alice Ravenhill and her sister Edith traveled to British Columbia in 1911 with the intent of only sojourning for a four-year period, keeping house for their brother and nephew while the men established their ranch on Vancouver Island. However, by the time they had decided to return, in 1914, the outbreak of the Great War intervened to defer their departure for the duration of the war, by which time their economic circumstances forced them to remain in BC.87

Mobility for ever-single women could also mean escape from family. Emily Carr’s family was traditional mid-Victorian, stifling and authoritarian: “Carrs had always conformed; they believed in what always has been continuing always to be.”88 As a girl of 15 she wanted to go to San Francisco to Art School – framed as an escape because “nobody is allowed to grow up in our house.”89 Art study was an eligible mix of her love of drawing, and the great distance of art schools from her home. Changing family circumstances often allowed openings for such escapes. Only after her father’s death could Ethel Johns pursue her ‘romance of nursing.’ And her family’s sinking economic position allowed Alice Ravenhill to escape the restricted sphere of women of the British lower gentry to go to Chelsea to do a diploma course in public health nursing; however, this ‘escape’ was ultimately sanctioned by

86 Barman, Sojourning Sisters, 77. Annie found out the difference when she lost her newlywed home in Kamloops in just two weeks when her husband decided to move the family back to Ontario. Only in her widowhood would she again direct her own mobility.
87 Ravenhill, Memoirs, 184.
88 Carr, Growing Pains, 422.
89 Carr, Growing Pains, 308.
the family in light of her new need to be self-supporting, highlighting how multiple personal and family agendas could work simultaneously in these women’s lives.

Advancement and adventure was also a clarion call that ever-single women were in a position to respond to. Margaret Bayne represents herself as a scholar of life, an intellectual traveling on a quest to see what she can of the world. Travel and exploration are cast as central facets of her nature. Work was often a means to go someplace she had not been: in 1914 she was ‘ready for another land adventure’ and decided to take a job teaching on the prairie in her desire to do ‘a careful and leisurely study of the country.’ Teaching was an especially ideal means to travel to a variety of places. In a recent paper, Alastair Glegg notes that Bayne’s itineracy should alert us to another perspective on the frequent turnover of schoolteachers in this period:

The ease with which she moved from school to school shows the demand for teachers in these isolated little settlements, but also gives another perspective to the contemporary complaints about teacher transience, which tended to blame poor conditions rather than a spirit of adventure.

Bayne’s memoir is suffused with such a spirit. She wonders why, in the heady times of the opening of the West, anyone would stay at home where they were born. Bayne apparently drew great enjoyment from touring the cities of the Eastern States, Chicago, and Seattle, and saw new worlds open up with every trip: “such vistas of adventure, of industry, of accomplishment, of wealth, of seething activity, of possibilities and the visions of the shapes of things to come.”

In this Bayne appears to have been quite the opposite of Emily Carr, who often declared her loathing of urban centres and vast preference for the backwoods:

What was the sameness with a difference between a crowd and a forest? Density, immensity, intensity, that was it – overwhelming vastness. One was roaring, the other still, but each made you feel that you were nothing, just plain nothing at all.

Yet Bayne also loved nonurban spaces. As a girl she would wonder if she would ever get to see the Nile or the Mississippi, “the prairies, a storm at sea, a lumber or mining camp, a fish

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90 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 157, 159.
92 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 5.
93 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 58.
cannery, or the salmon swarming up stream.”

A cousin gone to California inspired ‘that California fever’ that burned for years.

Over the course of her life, Bayne moved through Ontario, Washington, Alberta, and British Columbia working as a teacher, a book agent, land speculator, and fundraiser for the suffragist cause. She states on the whole “My wander lust has been partly satisfied, though I regret I did not go farther and see more of other places and other people's lives.”

The mind reels and the imagination staggers in thinking of the future of this rich land.

– Agnes Deans Cameron, *The New North*, 299

The narrative thread of travel and adventure in Margaret Bayne’s text is coupled throughout with a vigorous Imperial vision, creating her own configuration of the hegemonic mapping of the borderlands. Even as she situates herself as a heroic challenger to traditional roles for women, Bayne’s pointed acceptance of a traditional colonizer’s perspective on indigenous and colonized peoples is quite dissonant. The transgression we see in terms of gender regimes is not brought into other aspects of her experiences, exhibiting that ambivalence of the female colonizer described by Blunt and Rose and reminding us that the eccentric subject took many forms.

In her study of privileged Victorian women writers, Mary Jean Corbett stresses that ‘some women’s autobiographical texts are produced not by transgressing but by conforming to bourgeois norms.’ She finds the models adopted by the earlier wave of autobiographical criticism of the 1980s (represented by Sidonie Smith’s 1987 text *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography*) – that all women have a marginal relation to cultural and literary authority, and that women representing “the self” is always an act of transgression – to be inadequate for privileged women’s experience. She argues that “certain women, primarily middle-class ones, have been empowered under patriarchy – and in its interests – by being positioned at

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95 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 12.
96 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 38.
97 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 51.
the centre, as cultural producers and reproducers of bourgeois values. In Margaret Bayne’s case, some of the elements of empowerment she displays stem from imperialism, which centres her as a middle-class White professional of British heritage.

This empowerment can be detected through the narratives of all the women examined in this study. In a rough spectrum from adherence to transgression, Bayne might represent one pole while Emily Carr the other. Critics feel that Carr’s aim to ‘record’ the art of Aboriginal villages puts her in the same camp as the ethnographers, policymakers, and public that consigned Aboriginal peoples to a facile and faulty status of a ‘dying culture’; in addition, her early artistic successes came from her renderings of Aboriginal art forms. It really cannot be said that she fully escaped the embedded racism of Whites in colonial society, yet Carr’s attitudes to Aboriginal peoples and cultures in her art and her writing still place her in far opposition to the supremacist attitudes of her day. Carr offered an apologetic that was emblematic of this mixed perspective in her 1913 address “Lecture On Totems,” recounting her experiences painting Aboriginal artefacts:

Two things help and spur me on. The love I have for the simple gentle folk and the desire to leave in this, my own Province of British Columbia, a collection of the things that she need not be ashamed of when they have ceased to exist.

Carr’s defence of Aboriginal cultural practices and rights, criticism of missionaries and government policies, the positive depictions of Aboriginal people in her writings, the cordial relations she enjoyed during her trips to Aboriginal villages and sites, and warm personal relationship with the Squamish basket-maker Sophie Frank in particular make up a very different mind-set than Margaret Bayne’s.

The terms in which Bayne describes her interaction and opinions of Aboriginal and Black people are nothing less than virulently racist, displaying a firm allegiance to received notions of white supremacy that complement her vision of British hegemony in what she celebrates as “this last Great West under the white man’s sky.”

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99 Mary Jean Corbett, “Female Authorship and Spiritual Authority in Victorian Women Writers’ Autobiographies” *Women’s Studies* 18 (1990), 14-5.
100 Emily Carr, “Lecture on Totems” (1913) in Crean, *Opposite Contraries*, 203.
101 See especially *Klee Wyck*, Carr’s collection of stories about her experiences with Aboriginal cultures on the coast of British Columbia. Susan Crean’s collection of clips edited from Carr’s published works also fills in more pieces of the warm, sisterly relationship Carr had with Sophie Frank; Crean, *Opposite Contraries*, 164-6, 220-2.
pronouncements about Aboriginal people in her text are actually quite contradictory: she can
talk of an ‘empty land’ and ‘white man’s skies’ then in the next paragraph describe in
glowing terms an Aboriginal rancher; a subtle and continual string of small asides about
cleanliness or other “uncivilized” factors mix with a certain respect for Aboriginal honesty
and sensible philosophies. In the most extreme example, she coolly recounts how a general
of her acquaintance ‘got even’ with the Indians who stole his stallions: when in command of
troops in the Northwest Rebellion he “did not spare any Indians he could dispose of.”

But even in its embrace of imperial ideologies, Bayne’s memoir demonstrates a different
mode of identity, one which I feel demonstrates her positioning as an eccentric subject: she
claims a direct relationship to the land and the nation, one not mediated/barred by being the
wife of a citizen, or the mother of the nation’s sons. Helen Buss has demonstrated that many
Canadian pioneer women regardless of marital status have an affinity to the land and a
connection to the nation. If we review the common ideological/material position of the
married woman, her imperial sensibilities may be approved, claimed, and contained in
maternal terms; with few exceptions her entree into the colonial scene (in emigration and
movement West) was not her own, but instead (with varying degrees of power and authority)
as the aide to her husband’s enterprise.

Although maternal feminist epistemology encompasses the unmarried woman as a kind
of public mother figure, holding important roles in social work, health-care, and education,
Bayne does not take on a nurturance or help-meet stance in her writing about the land and
nation. It’s this starring role in the imperial project that is so interesting. Although several
scholars (including Gillian Whitlock, Buss) have made attempts recently to demonstrate how
“women” write a differing, troubled, and more nuanced colonizing role in their
autobiographies, it is instructive to see how women like Bayne can nearly completely
embrace the terms of imperial hegemony: whiteness, Empire, and racism. What is missing, in
fact, is the too-common element of gender inequality. The key factors that make the

103 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 102.
104 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 106.
Foremothers: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Writers* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990), 123-
36.
106 Gillian Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women’s Autobiography* (London: Cassell, 2000); Buss,
“Women and the Garrison Mentality.”
difference in this ever-single woman’s subjectivity, as presented in her memoir, centre around her relative autonomy in the essential aspects of nation and nation building: her mobility is her own; her explorations are self-directed; and her exploitation of the land is for her own ends. For Bayne, mobility is a value in itself; the land is hers to explore and exploit: “So much of this continent to explore, so much to do elsewhere, why would anyone stay home in the town or country of his [sic] birth?”

In her descriptions of Canada Bayne shows a simultaneously sensual and colonial sensibility:

What a land – its magic of mystery, its emptiness, its unknownness, its distances, its loneliness, its fearsome storms, its cruel winter cold, its dazzling, glorious summer sunlight, its sunsets of indescribable beauty, its thunderstorms of immense and terrifying blackness, its vivid lightning – no railroads, no highways, no groups of habitations, no churches, no schools, no taxes – everywhere waiting for my generation to go in and take possession.

She does more than merely echo the imperial sentiments of her class and generation. At her arrival on the Pacific Coast in 1898 the “most impressive feature” was the “trees towering to the heavens that had taken hundreds of years to attain their kingly growth. Surely the way to get rich was to acquire some of this accumulated wealth as cheaply as possible” – and proceeded to do just that, pursuing homestead claims and forming consortiums to speculate on land both in Washington and British Columbia, taking two especially long trips into the interior.

Finally she asserts her rights to heirship: Canada (especially the West) “was indeed the land of opportunity, the land of the second chance.” And:

What a home for the landless and land hungry, for those who love not the crowded ways of life, for those who, like Abraham of old hear the voice telling him to go into a far country and establish his family there.

It is clear she is positioning herself along with Abraham, the original immigrant, whom she called “that Daring and adventurous pioneer.” Bayne sees an unbroken line of Westward movement from Palestine to Europe to America –

107 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 5.
108 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 4-5.
109 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 144.
110 Bayne, *Roses in December*, 162.
And now to this last Great West under the white man’s sky. This land, so fertile, so well watered, well wooded, under smiling skies, in a salubrious climate, is an empire awaiting the men and women who love the open country, who have the lust for labour, the desire to achieve.\textsuperscript{112}

This unabashed narrative of ever-upward progress and achievement positions Margaret Bayne squarely as a participant in building the nation, an heir to the ‘great pioneers’ and an extension of their vision.

**Maps of the ever-single life on the borderlands**

My whole life is spread out like a map with all the rivers and hills showing.


In the autobiographical writings of ever-single women in British Columbia before the Second World War, we can see emerging a ‘heroic’ female subjectivity that is neither wholly relational (as the ‘feminine’ writing style is framed by scholars) nor wholly concerned with individual prowess and success (like the ‘masculine’ model). The emphasis on roles, experiences, and meanings that differ from, or even conflict with, traditional feminine norms in much of ever-single women’s writings suggests that marital status can create a different means of building self-identity for ever-single women, exhibiting their positions as eccentric subjects to the prescribed norms for women in their society.

When we turn to ever-single women’s ‘maps’ and discover many elements of the traditional success-story form, it is possible that the result is not a simple imitation but a negotiated space between aspects of ‘women’s’ narratives and the typical masculine success story – a hybrid form that cannot be easily reduced to the normative ‘female’ model built upon the writings of wives and mothers. These maps should not be considered ‘inauthentic’ or derivative, because this implies an essential ‘feminine’ that women must comply with or be considered failures and/or pseudo-males. Such an attitude also maintains the idea of the ever-single woman as an aberration, a deviant or tragic figure fractured from the ‘true’ or ‘real’ path of an essential, heteronormative female existence. Instead, it is vital to pay attention to the multiple and possibly transgressive ways ever-single women laid out their identities.

\textsuperscript{112} Bayne, *Roses in December*, 154.
As Teresa de Lauretis argues, the eccentric subject occupies a position of resistance and agency, conceptually and experientially apprehended outside or in excess of the sociocultural apparatuses of heterosexuality, through a process of “unusual knowing” or a “cognitive practice” that is not only personal and political but also textual, a practice of language in the larger sense.\(^{113}\)

We can see this position of resistance and agency in the ways that some ever-single women embraced identities of competence, struggle, and worth that contested the construction of all females as dependent and inferior (to men) – in fact, what is seen here is not a preoccupation with the terms of men at all, but pressing forward identities of competent female existence and belonging that do not swing on an axis of male-female binaries. Even if not entirely successful (or even seeking to be so) at challenging gender and especially racial ideologies, we can still trace their shifting paths as they confronted the meanings of gender and race in their own lives.

If there is one thing to take away from this survey of themes in ever-single women’s autobiographical writing, it is the fact that no single, ‘essential’ identity can be distilled from them. Instead, the eccentric subject figured by the ever-single woman speaks here in many voices, none the ‘authentic’ one but all taken together showing some sense of their collective experience, and some of the ways that living in the borderlands – physical and, especially, social – have shaped them. Over time, the borderlands of British Columbia changed, brought more fully under imperial and national hegemony politically and culturally. “The frontier receded and BC became more like Nova Scotia, and more like the imagined community that was Canada, not in a single swoop but as a matter of accretion.”\(^{114}\) But in the formative period of newcomer settlement of British Columbia before the Second World War, the borderlands offered an intersection of cultures, practices, and identities that helped shape the lives of everyone who encountered them.

For some ever-single women, this offered a set of alternatives to prescribed roles of womanhood – occupations, land, adventure, and escape (temporary or permanent) from the duties of care, daughterhood, and propriety. To Emily Carr, the borderlands of British Columbia, a place where “beginnings and endings joined”\(^{115}\) meant an end to boundaries, to

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113 de Lauretis, “Eccentric Subjects,” 139.
114 Barman, Sojourning Sisters, 7.
115 Carr, Growing Pains, 345.
conventions in seeing and living that so constrained her in her family and society. Her pursuit of Art abroad had its aim first in escape from those bounds, but soon developed into a means of learning how to portray the essences of the British Columbia landscape that she loved, hence, to participate more freely in it. Embracing the borderlands, resisting the conventions and boundaries of normative, metropolitan Victorian society allowed Carr to find her authentic artistic voice, one that endures for us as part of our Canadian identity.

Margaret Bayne’s vision of the West as majestic and immense echoes Carr’s, but her fundamental attitude to the borderlands was what it offered to herself in opportunity – for self-development, adventure, and wealth – and to her people in empire. Although they publicly called for a more equitable attitude towards indigenous peoples, in many ways women like Carr also ‘owned’ the land, through their gaze, regardless of their philosophical stances – in their intent, with varying degrees of sympathy to those who inhabit it, to record it through camera, pen, and paint.

These narratives also contained silences, some crafted by the limits of the various forms of lifewriting used, as well as the aims (and perhaps fears) of the authors. Key elements of what we would expect in living a permanent single life are often missing, or veiled, in these autobiographical pieces: a sense of struggle and danger, personal or economic; coping with loneliness or building intimate relationships; or a coming to terms with the ever-single state. Margaret Bayne’s manuscript autobiography is a good example of keeping silence on these issues. It is quite closed to discussion of Bayne’s intimate life: it does not display any real sense of struggle, personal, economic, or professional; and her sense of her status as ever-single is veiled, seen through her adoption of a heroic persona and one or two short critiques of marriage.116 Genre could certainly be part of these limitations: in pursuing a narrative of self-driven achievement, Bayne appears to have adopted a narrative style that cannot allow for failures or real struggle, but instead inscribes a path of ever-upward achievement of worthy goals, evocative of the Bildungsroman as well as the name-dropping and historical sketches of traditional memoir.

116 Although Bayne attached great importance to a university education and the women who secured female access to the universities, her memoir succeeds in glossing completely over the fact that she in fact failed out of her courses at the university and left without getting her degree – most likely because that fact would interrupt her narrative arc of self-development and success. Many thanks to Charles Levi for this information.
In contrast, Emily Carr, whose aims in writing her life may have been different from Bayne’s, offers us some slippages and discontinuities of a unified master subject. In “Salt Water,” a vignette of a sketching trip up the BC coast and one of the pieces in Carr’s first published autobiographical work (*Klee Wyck*, 1941), Carr recounts being shipwrecked and stranded, then caught up in an exhausting and terrifying series of boats and docks in the darkness, handed off like ‘goods.’ As Dianne Newell notes, this autobiographical story gives “a glimpse behind the mask and into a woman's terror and weakness in the face of unanticipated difference and loss of control when she slips through the boundaries into ‘beyond.’” Carr’s willingness to include struggles with poverty, family, and indifference to her artistic vision in her works is in some ways much like the *Künstlerroman* genre, the young artist’s struggles with bourgeois society. In fact, the concern with struggle, in terms of reaching for an expression of inner vision, is a key factor that preoccupied Carr in her journals as well, and is one that survived the cuts of editors where other, more intimate details, did not. This openness to failure and struggle in her autobiographical work renders Carr’s writings in some ways more accessible than Bayne’s, even as Carr’s own use of the heroic does what it is meant to do: demonstrate her ascendancy.

The varied voices of ever-single women on the borderlands form a *métissage* that combines freedom and necessity, obligation and opportunity. For Annie Leake Tuttle, Providence stood as the prime instigator of her actions, legitimizing her mobility, independence, and role in varied communities. Obligation allowed Jessie McQueen freedom to travel and live independently from her family, although the same obligation brought her home again and again. Yet the more individual narrative of Margaret Bayne did not place her outside the pale of conceivable definitions of Woman. Bayne, in performing a hegemonic self as she does, engaged with exactly the terms as they were on the table – how citizenship and hegemony were defined in her time. Instead of seeing this, or any ever-single woman, committing some sort of failure of femininity, of embracing a masculinist identity (or at least masculine elements) we need to instead ask what enabled her to form a subjectivity that was individual, that formed a definition of Woman that could be equated with human, paradigm, and normal.

118 Newell, “Belonging – Out of Place,” 266.
Conclusions: Pandora’s box

Keep me from poverty and neglect in old age and keep me away from busy people.
Give me a garden to tinker with in summer and books in winter. Amen.

– Margaret Bayne, *Roses in December*, 188

Survival, status, relationships, and identity – the four major themes of this project demonstrate that the study of single women gives us exceptional, often radical insights into the intersections between women, gender, and society, and thus a much more complete and complex picture of Canadian history. Marital status is a vital and necessary category of analysis for all historical scholarship, analogous to gender in its importance for women’s lives in particular.

Taking marital status into account uncovers hidden differences in women’s experiences, and causes us to question the homogenization of ‘women’ under a single category of socio-economic status (marriage/motherhood) just as feminist scholars have questioned the invisibility of people who differ from a White, male, middle-class, heterosexual norm. This study demonstrates the salience of single women to history, not merely as a minor sub-field but as an oft-missing, essential element to our understandings of work, politics, social life, and nation-formation (to name a few), especially in the vital years of Canadian state formation and consolidation from Confederation to the second World War.

The decades between 1880 and 1930 were transition years that contained an emergent, and contested, movement from women’s constrictive identification with nature, motherhood, and service to the family, to socio-economic independence and autonomous personhood. This can be seen particularly in the lives of women who did not take up marriage but instead remained outside traditional roles. In this study I have sought to examine some of the ways this played out, in one particular outpost-cum-province on the edge of Empire.

British Columbia’s abundance of bachelors and spinsters immediately made it an interesting site of study. Digging deeper, it was clear that BC offered exceptional circumstances for non-Aboriginal single women in particular. As a favoured destination of female colonial emigration, BC benefited from the importation of single women, adding to those born to the province or migrating from other Canadian regions, especially as part of the
rural-to-urban migration patterns developing across the country as a whole. Placed on the edge of both Canada and the British Empire, the borderlands of BC were temporally as well as geographically situated: the period of this study, 1880 to 1930, spans the period of the province’s transition from a contested, mixed-race frontier in the newly minted province to the interwar consolidation of newcomer settlement and nation-building.

As we have seen, some ever-single women embraced the potentials that the borderlands of BC offered, both in exploitative and transformative terms. Just as women like Margaret Bayne dealt in the wealth of the frontier that she believed was her birthright, women like Emily Carr developed a deep identification with its spaces. And other women – perhaps more pragmatically, yet no less importantly – saw BC as a good place for their strategies of survival and success.

Ever-single women on the borderlands

The three major datasets (demographic, associational, and autobiographical) that I constructed for this study generated significant findings and opened up many important areas of inquiry.

Sifting through the census in search of the strategies of survival adopted by single women reveals some interesting facts about household composition in particular. The strategies of survival adopted by single women, especially the material conditions of income and household composition are revealed in my use of household-level analysis. When coupled with information on incomes and occupations, household-level analysis tells us much more about strategies of survival for single women than the individual records of single women taken in isolation. What this method gives us is a clearer view of the multiple layers of strategies single women used, from waged work to aid from kin. Women’s ‘survival relationships’ become a vital factor in the analysis of their lives – with parents, siblings, more distant kin, even close companions. And what emerges is less a model of ‘independent woman’ in terms of living alone, but more a model of *interdependence* that we should keep in mind when studying single women in the past. The variety of household formations found here requires us to decentre the conjugal home and the heterosexual dyad as the essential unit of the Canadian past and the only legitimate site for measuring adult women’s economic and
social lives. At the same time, it challenges us to examine all the strategies of survival that ever-single women employed.

As well, we can see that race (to the limited extent that it can be interrogated in this particular time and place) was not an impenetrable barrier to survival and success for non-White ever-single women. Although most were clustered around working-class occupations in the 1901 Athenas sample, some women of colour and women of Aboriginal descent had class privilege from their families’ positions as leaders in Victoria’s development, and in the case of Black pianist Selina Frances Smith, access to education and employment through her class privilege that brought her a large income and high social standing.

The more than 200 women in the Athenas sample without income or occupation offer other important hints to the multiple economic conditions possible for single women – dependence on family economies across class lines, hidden waged work, and the role of status that blocked (or freed) women from labour outside the home. This cautions us that the story of ‘single women’ is not merely in those who were visibly employed.

Looking at economic and household data, we can begin to see the shape of the class experience of women beyond their formal connections to men. The potential meanings of lifelong waged work offer another important opening for research. The life-long single woman, who expected to seek decades of self-support, disrupted the facile picture of the liminal single woman engaging in waged work for pin money for a short period before marriage. The ideal of structured dependence of waged work for women not only served employers’ interests and compromised women’s ability to survive; it also undermined women’s access to citizenship.

As many scholars assert, the normative citizen in Canada is not and has not been a neutral, universal figure but a middle class male of Anglo-European descent, presumed to possess the traits of self-mastery and independence necessary for a proper role in the nation. The modern notion of citizenship, though often highly contested, is shaped upon the Enlightenment development of the liberal individual and rights of the autonomous subject, entering into a free contractual relationship with the nation. The Enlightenment legacy, illustrated in Rousseau’s *Emile*, is summed succinctly by Silvia Vegetti Finzi: every bourgeois subject must be, in Rousseau’s vision, “habituated to discipline,” but Finzi notes: “Whereas, in the case of the boy, the goal of self-mastery is internal liberty, in the case of the
girl it is a total adherence to the will of another.”

Building on this gendered self-mastery was the ideal of the necessary independence of the citizen; as Christine Stansell notes for the early American republic:

To exercise virtue and ensure the capacity to maintain the republic, a citizen had to be independent: that is, he had to be at liberty to act according to his own reasoned judgments about what served the public good. He could not be dependent upon another for his well-being, lest he be influenced or coerced.

Given the primary assigned identity for women in the West since at least the Enlightenment has been to be dependent upon others for their well-being, the essential impossibility of female citizenship appears clear.

Even the rise of wide-scale female employment was not to contest the essential gender barrier to citizenship. As Alice Kessler-Harris argues, the systemic structural dependence built into women’s wages and working conditions acted to categorically exclude women from an ideal of the independent economic actor who contributed to the polity in (his) own right.

Part of the function of the female wage was to ensure attachment to family. The male wage, in contrast, provided incentives to individual achievement. It promoted geographical mobility and sometimes hinted at the possibility of social mobility as well. The female wage allowed women to survive; the male wage suggested a contribution to national economic well-being.

In short, women “were not expected to be members of the polity in the same sense as men, nor was their wage work expected to offer access to independent judgment.”

Yet as we have seen, many ever-single women functioned like this liberal citizen, while the conditions of others challenge the simple equation of dependence with political and social disability. We need more comparative work on the challenge of the self-supporting woman to social constructions of female worth, roles, and place in class formations. How a community defines a single woman who maintains an occupation and has no marital ties becomes simultaneously problematic and potentially transformative. Is she then more of a ‘citizen’

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2 Stansell, City of Women, 21.

3 Kessler-Harris, A Woman’s Wage, 19.

4 Kessler-Harris, A Woman’s Wage, 37.
than a married (or widowed) woman, because she more closely conforms to the male-centred ideal? (Maternalist feminists would not of course have agreed). We need to explore how ever-single women contested constructions of the liberal subject, while acknowledging their fragmentation across degrees of economic autonomy; this offers us an opening into what Seyla Benhabib recognizes as the “end of unitary citizenship” — the partition of the liberal citizen along multiple axes of ethnicity, class, and gender.

These axes also structured ever-single women’s access to another kind of citizenship, in the ‘fields’ of social interaction. A close look at the conditions, even contradictions, in how single women might negotiate the status hierarchy in a growing urban centre emphasizes the centrality of single women to (all levels of) society and the leadership that single women bring to both crafting and policing the borders of social fields. Status for single women relied on the circulation of a crucial symbolic currency: respectability. But rather than passive recipients of the labels crafted by social norms, ever-single women reveal themselves as key players in the organizations and professions that contributed to the construction of single women’s status at all levels of Vancouver society, from the brothel to the Georgian Club – and evidence that singleness, presented as a stigma in popular culture, was not a barrier to social acceptance for many women.

The discussion of status here was a first foray into a large web of social conditions that calls for more investigation. The aspect of single women’s participation in high status circles represented by the society journalists deserves closer attention, as well as ever-single women’s roles as arbiters of other cultural spheres such as literature and the arts. We also need to place the figure of the prostitute, the disrespected woman, in any construction of single women’s lives. More work needs to be done on the ever-single policewoman, who was, like the journalist, poised between poles of power (interior gender hierarchies in their professions, and exterior gender regimes). Ever-single women’s roles in securing femininity (the protection and tutelage of the liminal single woman) across Canadian social and legal institutions is another vital site of further research, especially how such women worked out the essential contradictions between their professions and their own status as outside the heterosexual domestic matrix.

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How ever-single women might have experienced and perceived their lives outside such a heterosexual domestic matrix, and the patterns of relationships and emotional ties detected in ever-single women’s emotional geographies, are another major contribution of this study. By tracing all the varied life-sustaining relationships that women forged, especially with other women, we avoid privileging the heterosexual dyad, (or even its homosexual counterpart), and instead discover diffuse terrains of affect.

These multivalent webs of relationships challenge us to avoid the imperative of cherchez l’homme and look past the heterosexual dyad as the one supreme model of relationship. Instead, we should examine and give credence to all the relationships brought forth in ever-single women’s autobiographies, how those emotional ties are constructed, and what meanings they are given – a meaningful exercise for all biographies of women.

As ever-single women negotiated the conditions and choices of their lives in their lifewriting, they present to us their own reasons for their singleness as well as their critiques of marriage that are important signposts for their subjectivity. Ever-single women could be very clear about the difference between ‘any man will do’ and true companionship. This critique of marriage is vital evidence of ever-single women’s ‘outsider-within’ perspective and a valuable counter-narrative to the norms, even myths of domestic fulfillment for women that maintained silence on the effects of subordination and violences against the subject encoded in patriarchal domestic relations. But ever-single women also reveal that, beyond the pitfalls of marriage, singleness often carried its own burdens, both economic and emotional, an important point to remember when we are tempted to treat with only the image of the heroic, autonomous woman whose single life appeared to be an unqualified success.

Studying ever-single women also demands that we ask critical questions about sexuality and identity. How can we open a common space for women who experienced heterosexual desire but not heterosex or conjugality; women who pursued nonconforming lives with other women; and women who may have indeed ‘performed’ respectable (hetero)femininity in public, but whose private lives were shared with an intimate female partner, or whose ‘survival relationships’ were with women? And how do we place – and account for the possibility of – the genuinely asexual woman?

Biddy Martin notes in her essay “Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference(s)” that lesbianism “works to unsettle rather than to consolidate the boundaries around identity,
not to dissolve them altogether but to open them to the fluidities and heterogeneities that make their renegotiation possible." I would argue that the category ‘ever-single women’ does this work more successfully, since the consolidation of boundaries around ‘lesbian’ and ‘heterosexual’ – however inclusive or fluid – continues to enshrine a locked binary that excludes a significant proportion of women historically and today. Ever-single women were eccentric subjects that existed in the borderlands between – and among – affirmed heterosexual and lesbian identities. Their ambiguous sexual statuses question the construction of a sexual binary and help us to formulate a more open, flexible model of human sexuality and identity that is not locked into a linear mode.

The eccentric subject had a unique standpoint that could inform her consciousness and critique of her society. As Gloria Anzaldúa describes, “Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element” and this entails a new consciousness “in every border resident.” The eccentric subject is “constituted in a process of struggle and interpretation, a rewriting of self.” Emilie Carr is the most obvious ‘eccentric subject’ presented here, in her own subject position vis à vis her family, gender, and social norms, and her willingness to comment on her society from such a position. She is also remembered and celebrated as an ‘eccentric’ in popular culture and history – a ‘queer’ personality, to use the term as understood by her own contemporaries – which in many hands is a problematic foreclosure of what her historical existence, identity, and struggle could mean for gendered norms and women’s lives today.

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7 Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera, 19.
8 de Lauretis, “Eccentric Subjects,” 144.
9 The massive Royal British Columbia Museum show of Carr’s work and life, “Emily Carr: Eccentric Artist, Author, Genius” (Victoria, June 1st, 2001 – April 7th, 2002) is one example of this. Although the finest print on one show flyer called on viewers to ‘marvel at the scope of her extraordinary talents,’ the titling of the exhibit itself invited an association of Carr not with talent but with character quirks. The title highlighted the word ‘eccentric’ with artist, author, genius in smaller print beneath, asking viewers to see her identities as artist and author as a subset of that eccentricity.

EMILY CARR
Eccentric
Artist • Author • Genius

Similarly her status as ‘genius’ is presented as an idiosyncratic aspect of character, rather than designating her as a genius from which her art, writing, and identity flowed. Significantly, this posture avoided the common pitfall of naming female artists of stature as ‘woman genius’ or ‘top woman artist’ while resisting actually allowing her the status of genius – a heavily masculinized term – without caveats. For a discussion of the female
The voice of the eccentric subject in ever-single women’s narratives traces the nascence of an ‘individual’ female subjectivity based in self-reverence rather than self-effacement, and the roots of a female citizenship based on a direct rather than deflected relationship to the nation. Ever-single women show us that ‘autonomous’ need not mean without family, kin, or other intimate relationships; it doesn't have to be defined as ‘without responsibility’ but instead as ‘responsible to self.’

The emphasis in ever-single women’s life narratives on roles, experiences, and meanings that differ from, or even conflict with, traditional feminine norms suggests that marital status offers a (potentially) different means of building self-identity for ever-single women. What marital status as a category of analysis offers here is an opening into a new angle on the study of women’s autobiography and feminist theories of reading and writing about the self. Even as ever-single women negotiated spaces between aspects of normative feminine roles, opportunities, and behaviour in their lives, so too do their narratives often express negotiated space between aspects of so-called ‘feminine’ narratives and the typical masculine success story – a métissage of freedom and necessity, obligation and opportunity. Again, instead of seeing this hybridity as committing some sort of failure of femininity, or of embracing a masculinist identity, we need to instead ask what enabled the ever-single woman to form a subjectivity that was individual, that even formed a definition of Woman that could be equated with universal. In fact, reading ever-single women’s narratives helps shift the normal and universal from identification with the masculine (and the feminine from perpetual relegation to the Other and marginal), reframing narratives of struggle and progress as the domain of subjects enmeshed in certain terrains of power and agency. This is not to erase in one sweep the deeply entrenched nature of gender, race, class, and sexuality in the lives of these women (or men for that matter); rather, it suggests an opening for us to examine the potential for women to have sought (and to be read as) individuals rather than on a scale of Woman or not-Woman, however broadly conceived. Thus the ‘heroic’ here, too easily coded as masculine, can be recoded as emerging from an individual whose social position enables them to be (or attempt to be) ‘self-contained,’ self-supporting, and self-authorized - even if deeply imbedded amongst many axes of connection.

I realize that encased in this analysis is the legacy of the liberal individual transformed into the purely ‘independent’ woman. Many, or even most, ever-single women would not have experienced their lives or seen themselves as embodying some fully autonomous subject position, especially those whose lives were heavily mediated by racialization and poverty. Yet this model of self-authorized autonomy is precisely how some ever-single women chose to present their lives, and we must be cautious not to dismiss their self-fashioning but ask what they might have seen in the mythos of the heroic that found such salience in their lifewriting. However, although many of these women used the heroic voice, they were not in themselves uncomplicated heroic subjects we can easily celebrate. Margaret Bayne clearly aligned herself with the most strident elements of racist imperialism, even as she was a foot soldier of the suffrage movement. However, I would argue that for women like Margaret Bayne, the model of the liberal individual was precisely that which defined the normative citizen and that her narrative tried to insert herself within that norm, reworking and even rupturing it. Additional work on the narratives of ever-single women, in a variety of colonial and post-colonial settings, is certainly in order to be able to elaborate (and contest) this theory further.

Other questions arise from some aspects of this study that have been necessarily more about openings than final answers. For example, what meaning did the widely shared notion of the essential gendered divisions between the public and the private have – at least for women who lived independently – when the private is a space for oneself? And what was the ‘imagined community’ of ever-single women? What were the conditions under which they could share a sense of solidarity? Did the ever-single woman participate in labour organizations to a greater extent than the average ‘marrying’ woman? Single women do seem to have fractured along lines of class, as the example of the ever-single expert securing femininity demonstrates; yet class conflict in times of economic strife such as the Depression, we could find working-class single women organizing around their marital as well as their employment status, arguing their separate and deserving position over married women. How they were situated as eccentric subjects to the structured dependence of women’s labour is an interesting avenue for future research.

Further research also needs to include a cross-country perspective, particularly the effects of the very different demographics of eastern Canada and the relationship to the
nation presented by Ontario, Quebec, and Maritime women. More also needs to be done on rural women and the particular barriers and opportunities that shaped their lives. And vitally, the experiences and conditions for newcomer women of colour and particularly Aboriginal women need to be explored to their fullest extent possible.

**Opening Pandora’s box**

The wide range of terms used historically to describe ever-single women – spinster, old maid, odd woman, virago, ‘business woman,’ New Woman, ‘sport,’ sapphist, lesbian – not only demonstrates the wide spectrum of identities single women could inhabit, but also how the woman independent from conjugal domestic supervision by men could not be widely perceived as figuring Woman but as something other to or aside from the fundamental nature of females. Anna Tijsseling asserts that the formula that bears thinking about here is not “the opposite of woman is man” but instead: “the opposite of woman is individual.”\(^\text{10}\) If there’s something about the ever-single experience that can lead some women to frame themselves as individuals – in exactly the terms that were valued by their own societies – then what we have is an opening into an exciting line of inquiry.

One more metaphor encapsulates this struggle by women to name themselves as individuals: Pandora’s box. In the myth of Pandora, the first woman created by the gods was endowed with many gifts (thus her name, ‘all-gifted’). The gods, seeking to punish the Titan Prometheus for having stolen their sacred fire, gave her a box full of the ills of the world and implanted an insatiable curiosity that compelled her to open it, releasing old age, fear, and pain on Prometheus’ treasured humans (leaving inside the box only Hope). It’s a classic misogynist construction of Woman, centring on the dangers women pose to men as well as the convenient sexualized and inferior Other to blame for the negative aspects of humanity. However, implanted in that same myth is the talented, all-gifted woman, a seeker of knowledge, the keeper of Hope.

In many ways, the various claims of (White, middle-class) women to the rights and privileges of (White, middle-class) men over the last 150 years – education, the franchise,

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\(^{10}\) Anna Tijsseling, “Betsy Perk Disputes the Boundaries of Feminine Spheres. The Strategical Use of ‘Odd Women’ in Debates About Schooling for Girls, 1860-1870, the Netherlands” Ph.D. diss, Erasmus University, 2001, 106.
professional employment – have been treated by people with a vested interest in the status quo as a series of Pandora’s boxes, whose opening would irreparably damage the family, the nation, and civilization as a whole. As we can clearly see in retrospect, these ‘boxes’ were opened and did not herald the end of the world, or even, sometimes, the significant changes in the status of women that their advocates hoped. But all of them were held, as it were, by (ever-)single women.

Alternatives to marriage and motherhood for women have been highly contested, even silenced in Western civilization, but the ever-single woman in particular embodied a potent alternative – although with great differences in individual personal and economic success, comfort, and safety – signalling the fractures and falsities of gender regimes, and standing as a vital reminder of the borderlands of gender.

Yet we still fear Pandora because we still cling to many key myths built and reinscribed in the period between 1880 and 1930: same-sex sexuality is deviant and anti-family; people who choose not to marry and have children are selfish, or have something wrong with them; ‘Woman’ is in her nature a wife and mother, and her interests and skills revolve around these roles, rendering her less or not competent for others.

What Pandora offers is transformation – frightening to those who hold power, however fragmentary and fleeting, in a patriarchal capitalist social system that requires women’s subordination across a range of hierarchies of class and race, as well as the condemnation or erasure of women’s sexualities that do not serve heteronormativity. Pandora is a figure of secret fears within gender regimes, that the falsity of their constructions will be revealed and those who gain power and safety from them will be rendered powerless or without identity: she’ll open the box and let truths out, let the whole system out of its containment. Only when we truly give up the false divisions between genders and realize all codings of male and female are constructions, and thus infinitely mutable, will we finally stop fearing Pandora and what she offers.

Ever-single women threaten to open that box, to demonstrate that there is an alternative to gender regimes. They also offer, by great and small means, a vision of a competent humanity by their own measure and reach for (if not always achieving) full participation in society as a true and normative citizen. By seeing the terms and conditions in which ever-single women in the past negotiated their lives we can theorize and build solutions for the
future where every woman, regardless of race, class, or sexuality, and regardless of marital status and mothering status, is a full citizen.

Ever-single women teach us the possibilities and problems inherent in living without male partners – the many different households and webs of relationships they built show us that there have always been alternatives to the nuclear family and alternatives to the regimes of dominance inherent in patriarchal social formations. They show us that the quest of the LGBT/queer community for lives of dignity and respect, partnered or unpartnered, have long roots in the quest of single women to survive and prosper. They show us that there has always been an undercurrent running against the grain of constructions of women as weak, passive, incapable, in need of protection, and fit only for service and childrearing. There have always been women who knew (or learned) better than this. They lived their lives proving it, not only through voyaging out and seeking grand gestures and ‘firsts,’ or challenging norms as prostitute or suffragist, but also in the daily round of life, quietly living out lives of dignity and worth. We can see in their successes and failure, their confidence and doubts, the effects of society’s structures on women who attempt to be autonomous, self-authorized subjects.

What ever-single women extend to all women (and men) today is a vision of an autonomous subject capable of making true choices – to be single, to be partnered, to have children or be child-free, to engage in any array of intimate and familial relationships – without the fear of censure or marginalization that haunts us still today, marking all our relationships with artificial, compulsory boundaries, and renders our ‘choice’ to form intimate relationships and families as less than free. When we can see singleness as an acceptable, viable, satisfactory, and fulfilling life choice, we will really be able to choose partnership – not in coercion, or fear, or for sheer survival – and be able to demand nothing less than a true, equal partnership without enforced webs of dominance. When the unpartnered and the partnered (of whatever stripe) have equal social worth, all our households can be built on equality, respect, and autonomy.
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Recommended reading


### Table A: Women 15 years and over, Canada, 1891-1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Single as percentage of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>3,379,483</td>
<td>1,149,329</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>2,760,425</td>
<td>884,568</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>2,210,276</td>
<td>770,174</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901(^a)</td>
<td>1,708,607</td>
<td>653,011</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>1,506,247</td>
<td>585,361</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881(^b)</td>
<td>1,293,612</td>
<td>517,476</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Estimate based on subtracting population under 15 from total
\(^b\) Extracted from 1881 Canadian Census, Version 2003-01-28, 1881 Canadian Census Project, Département de Démography/CIED, Université de Montréal http://www.irdh.umontreal.ca/1881/


### Table B: Table of individual occupations, 1901 Victoria (Athenas) sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actress</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent Insurance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding House Keeper</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookkeeper</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caretaker</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk Bakery</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk Dry Goods</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk General Store</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk Store</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Servant</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaker</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Goods Store Employee</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Servant</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle[wo]man</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governess</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeper</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housemaid</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegible</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living On Own</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodging House Keeper</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine Operator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matron</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milliner</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musician</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Given</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nun</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Income</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private labour</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired Lady</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saleswoman</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamstress</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stenographer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailoress</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Music</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trained Nurse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C: Distribution of women by leading occupational groups, Canada 1901 & Single women, Victoria 1901 (full)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>All women</th>
<th>Single women, Victoria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal service</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>25.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic/household service</td>
<td>23.32%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding/lodging house keeper</td>
<td>2.59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing and mechanical</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>19.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial/manual labour</td>
<td>0.52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle trades (employee)</td>
<td>13.47%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle trades (self-employed)</td>
<td>5.18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>41.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>17.62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>11.40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private music &amp; art instructor</td>
<td>3.63%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nun/missionary</td>
<td>7.25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School matron</td>
<td>0.52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer (arts)</td>
<td>1.04%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical (steno) b</td>
<td>2.07%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial and financial</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>9.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk retail</td>
<td>8.29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical (insurance and bookkeeping) b</td>
<td>1.04%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (incl. Managerial)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial/administrative</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitorial</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Including all females over the age of 10
b The original 'clerical/office' category is split here to accommodate the Prentice category definitions

Table D: Relationship to head of household, 1901 Victoria (Athenas) sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent/Head</th>
<th>Place of employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of Household</td>
<td>47 Servant or Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter of Head</td>
<td>129 Governess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister of Head</td>
<td>60 Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister-in-law of Head</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niece of Head</td>
<td>9 Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt of Head</td>
<td>3 Inmate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousin of Head</td>
<td>2 Matron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopted Daughter</td>
<td>1 Sister of Head (nuns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step Daughter</td>
<td>1 <strong>Unknown</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lodgings</strong></td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarder or Lodger</td>
<td>50 Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E: Relationship to head, by earnings category, 1901 Victoria (Athenas) sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earnings under $300.</th>
<th>Earnings $300.- 599.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of Household</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister of Head</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousin of Head</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter of Head</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niece of Head</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarder or Lodger</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant or Domestic</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earnings $600.- 899.</th>
<th>Earnings $900. and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of Household</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarder or Lodger</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter of Head</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousin of Head</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister of Head</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister-in-law of Head</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earnings $900. and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table F: Place of birth, 1901 Victoria (Athenas) sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>186</th>
<th>Europe/Russia</th>
<th>14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Québec</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>149</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Scotland</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>At Sea</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Possessions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Indies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Helena</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table G: Canadian-born, province of birth, 1901 Victoria (Athenas) sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Québec</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>186</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table H: Race, 1901 Victoria (Athenas) sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austrian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chilian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North American Indian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Given/Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Breed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prussian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scot</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scots Breed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>405</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B – Methods

Finding single women

Because of the conservative nature of most archives and the silencing of women’s history generally before the 1970s, the history of women is often buried in odd places and you often need many tricks to find what you are looking for – if it is indeed even there. The single most effective resource is I have found is auto/biographical material of a wide variety of types: manuscript autobiographies, account books, family histories, autobiographical accounts in news articles and author’s bios in publication files, business and professional papers, diaries, scrapbooks, photographs (especially when annotated), even fiction pieces.

Although at this point few Canadian historical studies devote much if any time to single women, references (even in the footnotes) in monographs, article collections, and journal and newspaper articles are a good source to mine for names, biographical details, and further resources. Local and regional histories, often produced by a local historical society and concentrating on stories of various pioneering families in the district, are good sources to trace names for particular geographical areas.

Archives

In my experience, archives can yield an enormous amount of material on single women’s lives. Archival searches are now fairly easy and comprehensive with the online database search tools found online for most major repositories. Union lists (combining the records of all repositories in a certain area, like the BCAUL for BC) are an excellent resource as they allow searching in rural, organizational, and ecclesiastical archives that may not have the resources to produce their own online database.

However, finding individuals in a database can be difficult. Some of the same issues for women’s history generally are encountered: how to identify records that are by a woman, let alone single? In the BC archives I have consulted (as well as the LAC) none of the online search engines allows for searching by gender of the subject of a fonds – not surprising since archives do not generally index their holdings that way.
But this makes for a frustrating exercise – short of browsing all holdings from A-Z (which is actually feasible in the smaller repositories), some search strategies are necessary. The best way to begin online is to try to isolate the records by & about women. What is contained in the description of each fonds is crucial. ‘Women/an’ as a search term is a start, although what this will yield are records where the subject has been interested in women, some organization with ‘women/an’ in the name is included in the record description, or the biographical details of the subject of the fonds references ‘women/an’ (i.e. ‘she was the first woman to…’).

Finding single women is another level of discovery. Without the clear indication of marital status, or the inclusion of honourifics (Mrs., Miss) in other records, it can be difficult to identify single women with accuracy. Luckily, most sources before the 1930s, including newspapers and city directories, employ honourifics. Additional strategies include looking for parents’ and brothers’ surnames (to see if they match), and cross-referencing other sources for age and marital status.

For online searching, ‘Miss’ is obviously very important as an indicator of gender and marital status together; however, titles are rarely used in the body of online records, so often this will catch the only the subject-heading line or the donor line in certain databases. ‘Single’ may also yield some names, although of course this term will bring up other unrelated records. ‘Single women/an’ offers very little result, unfortunately. These terms usually can only supplement your search.

Family fonds are also quite useful, as they might be listed under the family surname (‘Smith Family fonds’) but may contain the records of several women. Finding aids, where file-level details are listed, are a good source of pinpointing whether family fonds hold anything of interest by & about the women in the family.

Many archives keep news clipping files that are indexed by name. And often archives have prepared other collections of data such as the BC Archives’ lists of artists or, wonderfully, the City of Vancouver Archives’ index of all fonds pertaining to women.

Archivists and archives volunteers are founts of information, especially in the smaller local archives where they may have personal knowledge of women in the community. Archivists can make connections and lead you to information that no card catalogue or database can ever capture fully. Originally I spread my research net to
several communities in BC, and I proffer many thanks to the ladies at Port Alberni and Matsqui-Sumas-Abbotsford Archives especially, though all the archives I consulted had excellent and helpful staff. The archivist at Powell River remembered Alice Cluff, an ever-single teacher in the community, whose name did not come up in the online search because her teaching records would be in the School District fonds. The wonderful staff of volunteers at Port Alberni collectively remembered, called around, and found an almost entirely different set of women than the standard archives search revealed.

Organizations for/by women are also a good source of potential names – especially charitable, immigration, literary, and suffrage groups, and professional associations like the Business & Professional Women and the Canadian Women’s Press Club. Single women appear often in the membership and executive lists of such organizations, and service groups like the YWCA also had single women as clients. There is also a very interesting resource in a subproject of the 1967 Centennial of Confederation: the Pioneers’ Medallions records. These were awarded to members of communities across Canada that were born in or immigrated to Canada before 1890; the records include the application forms that ask for name, age, occupation, family history, extra space for comments, and the crucial line for marital status. These records are limited in scope, as they are both self-selected and driven by the relative enthusiasm of local Centennial committees to organize their distribution and collection – and again, the social capital of individuals based on race, class, gender, and community standing would be a factor. However, they potentially capture a set of people that are mostly not in the records in other capacities, as I have discovered, especially for Asian women.

The net product of these various strategies is a large set of names and records that will almost exclusively reflect White, middle-class, educated professional women, performing a nominal heterosexual-but-celibate identity. Of course there will be exceptions, but the nature of archives is a repository of permissible community memory, deemed ‘important’ in eyes of archivists and policy makers, and so the single woman (already a liminal identity) will in most cases make her way into a collection only if she is privileged in other socio-economic aspects. A key issue for the study of single women (and women generally) is that archival depositors are mostly self-selected, or, selected by friends, family or (more rarely) organizations. What archives accept is a complicated
issue. What is deposited is also selected, edited, defined and catalogued according to the aims of the depositor as well as archival policies. All of this creates a certain framework to an archives that is indelibly constructed by factors of gender, race, class, and sexuality. What survives the process then, from personal possession to public archive, is going to on the whole reflect hegemonic identities.

Directories

To create a more expansive search for both privileged and non-privileged women, other resources are necessary: city directories and the census. Institutional data collections such as these reflect a broader range of individuals than the self-selected (and archivist-selected) nature of the archive, with some caveats (see directories discussion below). Cross-referencing individuals found in these records to the archives databases yields extra subjects, with the added bonus of knowing that at least at the moment of the data collection, they were single. The UBC archives has a large set of BC and Vancouver city directories, but SFU library’s Lam Graduate Centre (in the basement) is the best place to go, as it has a complete set of Vancouver directories as well as many of the early all-BC directories, and are available during all library hours. Recently, viHistory has put a searchable database of the 1902 Victoria directory online, a complement to its digitized images of each directory page (http://vihistory.ca/content/bd/).

City directories are quite useful, as ‘Miss’ was used fairly consistently especially in the 1880-1930 period. (Note however that by the 1930s and 1940s regular use of titles like Miss disappear from most directories, at least in BC.) Again, there are many women who will not appear – those living in parents’ homes, most lodgers, and women in institutions (including nuns and hospital patients). For Victoria the preponderance of entries are women with some sort of trade (dressmaking and private teaching most often) who are listed either out of their homes or at a business address – reflecting the gendered, classed and raced nature of the directories. Generally you will find only respectable working- or middle-class single women (mostly White though not exclusively) with the wherewithal to have a trade or business – or the social status and wealth to have headship of a household. Adult women living in others’ homes, the majority of Aboriginal, Black, and Chinese women, and women in the ‘low’ service trades from cleaning and laundry to
prostitution – these rarely merit entries in directories, a vehicle meant as much to promote the hegemonic civic consciousness of a center (as seen in the included laudatory introductions and political and economic essays) as serve as a useful guide to its inhabitants.

Census

Historians are fortunate that now many crucial elements of our craft are available online. For British Columbia, census records are available online through several initiatives. viHistory (http://vihistory.ca/), a project of historians at Malaspina University College and the University of Victoria, is an excellent tool for research covering Vancouver Island and Victoria in particular, for 1881-1901. The site includes: searchable databases of the census for all Vancouver Island for 1881 and 1891 and Victoria in 1901; searchable city directories for Victoria and Nanaimo to match the census dates; maps; and links to other historical sites covering Vancouver Island. These census databases offer advanced search forms for most of the census fields, making a search based on single women very feasible.

Genealogy societies have put a wonderful amount of information online, driven by volunteer effort. The excellent BC GenWeb site (http://www.rootsweb.com/~canbc/index.htm), hosted by Hugh Armstrong, includes a text version of the 1901 census indexed by name and page, with many records containing annotations based on obituaries, cemetery records, and personal information supplied by volunteers. The Living Landscapes project (http://www.livinglandscapes.bc.ca/ ) covers part of the BC interior.

Other research projects offer searchable census data – the Canada Century initiative offers a beta of their 1881 all-Canada census data (in MS Access) to qualified researchers; the Canadian Families Project (http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/cfp/index.html) also developed a 5% sample of the whole 1901 census that is available on CD (with guide). The viHistory site also includes a searchable database of this 5% sample for BC. StatsCanada also provides the 1901 census online in its entirety (schedules 1 and 2) as digitized versions of each page (http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/02012203_e.html).
Indexing is only by census district and subdistrict, but a guide is available to identify where each community falls in these boundaries.

Like all data collection and search vehicles, online databases can contain errors, most often in interpretation of spellings done by data entry personnel. I found the best way to approach the Vancouver Island/Victoria data is (when possible) to cross-reference particular entries with other databases of the census. Since the 1901 census has triplicate coverage through the viHistory site, the BC GenWeb site, and the StatsCan site, a good method of cross-referencing and checking data is possible.

Beginning with the viHistory database, searching by attribute for ‘single’ ‘female’ and ‘>=30’ (I also used ‘>=18’) I produced a list of individual entries that are also linked to their households. After mining the data required, the BC GenWeb 1901 census index was consulted to confirm spellings and other details and I noted where annotations might have been included, such as date of death or eventual marriage (obviously very helpful in determining whether a woman was ever-single). For contested spellings or data, the 1901 manuscript census was called up, using the district, subdistrict, folio, and page number provided by the BC GenWeb site. This made for a very easy way to check any entry with the actual manuscript from the comfort of one’s own computer.

**Vital Statistics**

Finally, I cross-referenced my lists of potential single women with the BC Archives Vital Statistics databases containing birth, marriage, and death records (http://www.barchives.gov.bc.ca/sn-32E7476/textual/governmt/vstats/v_events.htm) and the City of Victoria Archives databases of marriage and death notices and the Ross Bay Cemetery records (http://web.city.victoria.bc.ca/archives/). This was crucial to determine, where possible, if a women died ever-single. The main problem was in the duplication of names and the ambiguity of tracing women through marriage records to eliminate possibilities. (Once I had a list of possible single women, I traced their actual death certificates on site in the BC Archives to confirm). Although the vital stats repositories have a mandate to collect all registrations, it can still be difficult to find several groups of people, such as people from the early pioneer period, when registration could be sporadic. Non-Europeans, such as Aboriginal and Asian people, might have different spellings in
the registry (due to the Euro-Canadian certifiers having little understanding or patience in many cases to get it right) and thus be hard to track. Also, Chinese and Aboriginal peoples were periodically excluded from vital statistics collection between 1872 and 1917.\(^1\)

Cemetery records were also invaluable for confirming singleness in absence of other clear records, although the Ross Bay Cemetery were generally only useful for more established families in Victoria or people who died before the 1940s. More and more cemetery records are being put online by genealogical societies so these are well worth pursuing.

**Subsistence threshold (300.00) calculation**

The crucial measurement of economic survival is the purchasing power of these incomes against the cost of living. In the oft-cited 1889 report for the Ontario Bureau of Industries, a sample cost-of-living table for female workers working a 54-hour week in industrial employment had a total cost of living of 214.28, with clothing making 67.31 and board and lodging 126.26 of that total.\(^2\) Based on a wage of 216.71 for the year, this average worker could expect a 2.43 surplus.

Some modification is in order to fit this Ontario scale for the women in the 1901 Athenas sample. The *Labour Gazette’s* schedules of retail prices and rents for 1901 are helpful in determining some of the cost of living for a single woman in Victoria. Staples by the pound (meat, sugar, beans, cheese, butter, tea), bread, milk by the quart, potatoes and flour by the bag, and eggs by the dozen, along with coal-oil and wood fuel are key staples tracked by the schedule. Even using the very conservative assessment of weekly consumption of perishables (meat, etc) and monthly consumption of large-volume staples and fuel (flour, potatoes, tea, coal-oil, wood) the total cost of food and fuel comes to

\(^1\) For more info see the BC Archives guide (http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/sn-4D2301C/services/inquiry/faqs/faq.htm#abname).

13.25 monthly.³ Note that it is hard to judge what an average use of fuel might be, i.e. a gallon of coal-oil would last a month or more.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly staples and fuel costs, Victoria, 1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perishables (by lb.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staples and fuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total per month</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Costs of rents and lodging are also given in the same volume. In Victoria, rents averaged 7.00/mo for a four-room house, and 13.00/mo for 6 rooms, the most common size of houses leased by single women in the sample. Board & lodging in Victoria ranged from 20.00-24.00/mo depending on area.⁴

Of course, there would be seasonal variables in prices, the possibility of barter or in-kind purchases, as well as strategies to produce what one could grow or make oneself. This is simply a rough estimate given published tables of average rates for major consumables. This gives us an average cost of living of 20.25-26.25/mo for women renting houses, and 20.-24.00/mo for women taking room and board. Taking the cheapest arrangement of these (four-room house or 20.00 lodgings) gives us a yearly outlay of about 240.00 for food and lodging alone, without ancillary expenses such as clothing, medical, leisure, furnishings and household goods, or repairs. Given our industrial worker of 1889 had a 67.31 budget for clothing and 20.61 for unnamed expenses in her total of 214.88, a 60.00-80.00 addition to our 1901 budget is not unreasonable. This gives us a grand total of 300.-320.00 per year.