

THESIS

OUT OF THE CLOSET AND INTO THE ROCKIES: HOW LESBIAN FEMINISTS
FOSTERED WOMEN'S COMMUNITY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY COLORADO.

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

OUT OF THE CLOSET AND INTO THE ROCKIES: HOW LESBIAN FEMINISTS FOSTERED WOMEN'S COMMUNITY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY COLORADO.

An examination of Colorado-based publications *Big Mama Rag* and *Double Standard* revealed an active lesbian feminist community centered around physical health and recreation. Colorado women reading these newspapers were exposed to ecofeminist ideology, and the papers' monthly calendars offered women ample opportunity for community-building events. Lesbian feminists fostered Colorado's women's community as staff on these publications, or as community mobilizers and feminist business owners.

This thesis aims to tell the story of Colorado lesbian feminists in the decade of 1974 to 1984. Colorado's feminist community was experiencing immense change during this decade. In the early 1970s many lesbian feminists rejected bar culture in Colorado, and instead worked to create communities in bookstores, women's centers, or other feminist businesses. Colorado lesbians had been influenced by nationwide cultural feminism and began to shift away from the gay community in favor of women's liberation. Throughout the 1980s, Colorado lesbian feminists were still dedicated to forming community, but began to move away from bookstores and basements in search of woman-identified women. Ecofeminism was a major factor of Colorado lesbians' growing focus on the outdoors and a nature-based community in the 1980s. The latter half of the decade brought an increased concern on physical health, self-defense, and outdoor leisure. Colorado lesbian feminists continually prioritized women's community in their political and social lives in the twentieth century.

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DEDICATION

“Someone will remember us,

I tell you,

even in another time”

Sappho, Fragment 147.

This thesis is dedicated to Kathy Riley, the collectives of *Big Mama Rag* and *Double Standard*, and to the many lesbian feminists who fostered women’s culture and community in Colorado.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------------|
| ABSTRACT..... | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | iii |
| DEDICATION..... | v |
| Chapter 1 – <i>What Does the Word LESBIAN Do to You?</i> | 1 |
| The Homophile Movement and the Rise of Lesbian Feminism..... | 4 |
| “We’re not gay, we’re angry”..... | 10 |
| Digital Methods, Spatial Mapping, and Lesbian Geographies..... | 16 |
| A Note on Language, Terminology, and Sources..... | 27 |
| | |
| Chapter 2 – <i>I like a place I can relax without men</i> | 30 |
| Introduction..... | 32 |
| “ <i>The Trouble with Women’s Bars in This Town</i> ”..... | 36 |
| “ <i>Like the bookstore, our school will be a Woman Space.</i> ”..... | 42 |
| “ <i>Women Unite, Take Back the Night, Self-Defense is Our Right!</i> ”..... | 44 |
| “ <i>Poetry for the People</i> ”..... | 48 |
| “ <i>So You Want To Be A Mother</i> ”..... | 53 |
| “ <i>TAKE CONTROL OF OUR BODIES, TAKE CONTROL OF OUR LIVES</i> ”..... | 56 |
| “ <i>Lack of Funds?</i> ”..... | 64 |
| “ <i>Women’s Community Conceived: We Gotta Live Together</i> ”..... | 68 |
| Conclusion..... | 73 |
| | |
| Chapter 3 – <i>the Earth, our Mother, is the basis of our real health</i> | 76 |
| Introduction..... | 77 |
| “ <i>we see the land being violated as women's bodies are violated.</i> ”..... | 80 |
| “ <i>Shock And Lock And Drug And Shut em’ Up So That Their Cries Are Not Heard</i> ”..... | 85 |
| “ <i>Women’s clinic isn’t just another doctor’s office</i> ”..... | 89 |
| “ <i>Baby Factories, Glass Wombs, and Mother's Rebellion</i> ”..... | 93 |
| “ <i>it's the health of my daughter and her daughters...</i> ”..... | 96 |
| “ <i>Goddess worship alive.</i> ”..... | 104 |
| “ <i>Number one, I'm afraid of getting raped, mugged, stabbed, or murdered.</i> ”..... | 109 |
| Conclusion..... | 115 |
| | |
| Chapter 4 – <i>Amazon nation out here in the mountains</i> | 117 |
| Introduction..... | 118 |
| “ <i>Nearby getaways just the ticket for travel bug.</i> ”..... | 125 |
| “ <i>Amazon Adventures Hiking Club in Colorado</i> ”..... | 128 |
| “ <i>One of us traveled to Estes Park to visit the Dykes of Estes.</i> ”..... | 132 |
| “ <i>It’s not exactly Lesbos but it's close.</i> ”..... | 137 |

“Women still running together, even at different pace”.....141
“lesbians are active, community is growing”149
Conclusion157
Chapter 5 – Conclusion: “*We were earnest, we were idealistic, we were committed.*”163
Bibliography167

Chapter 1- *What Does the Word LESBIAN Do to You?*

In her 1973 article, “What Does the Word Lesbian Do to You?” in Denver, Colorado-based newspaper *Big Mama Rag (BMR)*, Maureen Mrizek discussed the significance of the word lesbian, and public perceptions attached to the word, like “women in men's suits, perversion, butch, insecurity and a threatening feeling.”¹ Mrizek continued on, explaining the ways in which labels infuriated her, but answered that the label of lesbian had become a political necessity for women to liberate themselves. Mrizek explained her idea of the word lesbian and why woman-identified women were important to women’s liberation, writing, “I enjoy loving and being loved by women spiritually and physically. I'm beginning to think that Lesbians are the only non-masochistic women in our society. How can you conquer an oppressor when you sleep with him every night? Yes, I did say conquer, the only way women are going to obtain liberty is to take it.”² To Mrizek, and many other women of the 1970s, lesbian was a politically significant word. The act of loving another woman while living in a patriarchal society was both a feminist tool and an earnest display of love that fostered a woman-identified women’s community.

Has lesbian become an academic *bad word*? Does the word lesbian frighten people with the perverted images of butch women Mrizek discussed in 1973? Some of the aversion to the word stems from historians who use other terms to describe women who love women to avoid anachronistic language. Historians like Judith Bennett and Leila Rupp both theorized different ways to write histories without stamping the identity of lesbian across women who may not have ascribed to definitions of the term. Bennett, an English medieval historian, introduced “lesbian-

¹ Maureen Mrizek. "What Does the Word LESBIAN Do to You?" *Big Mama Rag* vol.1, January 1973, 10.

² Maureen, “What Does the Word LESBIAN Do to You?,” 10.

like” to include a broader number of women in history who may have had intimate and meaningful relationships with women, but did not or could not use the term lesbian to describe themselves. Bennett’s words speak to the larger issue of lesbian erasure in history, and she aimed for the term to be used in order “to resist the heterosexist bias of history-writing.”³ Rupp argues that the term lesbian is “an identity that is only sometimes available or sometimes available and not chosen, we should not use it to describe the whole range of women who erotically loved other women.” Rupp instead coined the term “sapphistries” to describe erotic love or desire between women. The word lesbian itself doesn’t even have a singular agreed upon definition. Some scholars, like Rupp, stick to a sexuality-based definition of lesbian that limits the term to women who want to have sex with other women.⁴ Adrienne Rich’s “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” in 1980 explained why a sexuality-based definition is not always relevant or necessary to lesbian identity.⁵

Rich, an American feminist writer, argued that heterosexuality was something women had been conditioned into. Heterosexuality to Rich was an institution that restricted the roles of women and provided a “male right of physical, economical, and emotional access” to women. In this vein of thought, many women have been historically unable to choose lesbianism or loving women, and instead have been obligated to love, marry, and reproduce with men. Rich examined lesbianism as a feminist practice that can make women more independent from men and support a woman-identified women’s community.⁶ Sexuality-based definitions had less meaning to Rich

³ Judith M. Bennett, “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianism,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2000, pp. 1–24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704629>, 5.

⁴ Leila J. Rupp, “Lesbian Generations: Thinking About ‘Lesbian History,’” *Feminist Studies*, 2013, 357–61. doi:10.1353/fem.2013.0053.

⁵ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs*, 1980, 631–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834>.

⁶ Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” 643.

and other radical lesbians who believed that female sexuality had been largely defined and enforced by males.⁷ Similar to Rich, a document written by Radicalesbians in 1970 answered the question of what is a lesbian—“A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion.” To the Radicalesbians lesbian, along with all other sexualities, were sex roles designed by men with the intent to dehumanize women and gay men into hierarchical roles where heterosexual men were on top. The Radicalesbians explained that lesbianism should be prioritized and not viewed as an alternative to men.⁸ Definitions of sexuality and community no longer needed to include men. Women were fighting for power in a male-dominated society, and Colorado women were often aligned politically and socially to the lesbian community. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the popular Denver-based newspaper *BMR* was primarily staffed by lesbians and often centered articles, special issues, and news coverage on lesbian artists, literature, and issues in the community.⁹ In the 1980s *Double Standard*, an explicitly lesbian feminist paper for Colorado gained popularity and acted as a social mobilizer in the community.¹⁰ Many other lesbian and gay newspapers existed in the state during the 1970s and 1980s, but these two were dedicated solely to women in Colorado and the growing lesbian community.

Because the women in the bulk of my primary source research often refer to themselves as lesbians, center woman-identified culture, and participate in lesbian feminist events, I use the term lesbian loosely to describe these women. Many of these women were lesbians by all definitions of the word, both in erotic relationships with women and in political affiliation to the

⁷ Radicalesbians “The Woman-Identified Woman,” 1970, <https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/radicalesbianswoman.html>.

⁸ Radicalesbians “The Woman-Identified Woman,” 1970, <https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/radicalesbianswoman.html>.

⁹ *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1973, 1.

¹⁰ “Double Standard.” *Double Standard*, June 1981, 1.

lesbian feminist movement that erupted in the 1970s.¹¹ In the 1978 issue of Denver newsletter, *Gaynin'*, written by and for Colorado's gay community, Tea Schook wrote, "There are many lesbians, notably feminist, who feel uncomfortable and excluded by the term 'Gay.'"¹² Gay liberation. Gay community. Gay politics. Gay bars. The word gay and its connotation to male homosexuals pervaded the homophile movement and often excluded lesbians from the community. Within the liberation movements of the 1960s, many lesbians were left out of so-called gay issues. Gay men focused on sexual liberation, but many lesbians saw this a heteronormative ideology. Women's sexuality was defined and built by men; moving into the 1970s, women began to create their own definitions. To distinguish themselves from the male-centered gay community, lesbians often aligned with women's movements instead, highlighting lesbianism as an integral part of the female experience.¹³

The Homophile Movement and the Rise of Lesbian Feminism

Denver, Colorado, 1959— Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) founder Del Martin hijacked the Mattachine Society's Sixth Annual Convention. Hal Call, the Mattachine's president, had called Martin and her partner, Phyllis Lyon on stage to present them with an honorary membership to the male homophile organization. Rather than quietly accept this offer, Del Martin took the microphone and looked out at the horde of men in the audience, rejecting their invitation. Martin called out, "Lesbians are women, and this 20th century is the era of the emancipation of women. Lesbians are not satisfied to be auxiliary members or second-class homosexuals."¹⁴ Although it

¹¹ "Lavender Menaces Confront the Congress to Unite Women." *Gay Power*, vol. 1, 1970, p. 8. *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*. <https://link.gale.com>. ; Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, 233; Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, 2006, 231.

¹² Tea Schook, "Lesbian/Gay Freedom Week," *Gaynin'*, July 1978, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

¹³ Addison Price, "Out of the Closet and Into the Rockies"; Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, 2006, 112.

¹⁴ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (Simon and Schuster, 2015), 227.

would be many years until Denver underwent its own cultural shift from the gay movement to lesbian feminism, Denver would eventually become home to a flourishing lesbian feminist community. Del Martin’s words reverberated throughout the nation and lesbians took a stand against their political erasure in the gay movement.

Gay liberation groups were predominantly male, and often had an “emphasis on male-defined sexual liberation...”¹⁵ Lesbians were frequently ignored and left out by the male-centric definitions of what gayness entailed.¹⁶ John D’Emilio explained these how these ideas of gayness were defined in “terms that negated the experience of lesbians” in his book *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*.¹⁷ This referred to the heightened bar culture in the gay community and the sexuality-based definitions of gay that not all lesbians felt aligned with. D’Emilio’s work introduced the notion of gays and lesbians as a minority group, tracking the discriminatory laws and challenges the community faced from 1940 to the 1970s, as well as noting the distinctions between lesbians and gays. The idea of a lesbian/gay divide has been a recurring theme throughout LGBT scholarship. Marc Stein similarly examined the movement’s divides in his book, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*.¹⁸ The book chronologically follows the lesbian and gay movement from WWII to the 1990s, acknowledging the pushes from other groups, like trans and bisexual activists, to make the movement more inclusive. Historian Lillian Faderman added another layer of analysis to these divisions in her 10th book, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of Struggle*. Faderman used over 100 interviews, 20 archives, and various

¹⁵ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Taylor & Francis, 2022), 102.

¹⁶ Addie Price, “Out of the Closet and Into the Rockies.”

¹⁷ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 92.

¹⁸ Stein purposefully chooses the words “gay” and “lesbian” rather than queer or LGBT to stay “true to the historical evidence of the periods we’re studying.”; Brian Bromberger, “Queer Reading: SF State prof sees reasons for rethinking LGBTQ history,” *The Bay Area Reporter*, June 2023.

court cases to show the changes in public perception of lesbians and gays from “scapegoats,” to “citizens.”¹⁹ On top of Faderman’s meticulous study into lesbian and gay civil rights, she also examined lesbians’ shift from homophiles to feminists. Faderman used Del Martin as a connecting point, following her rejection of the Mattachine society to the rapidly growing lesbian groups like Gay Liberation Front (GLF) as more and more lesbians began to join in on the emancipation of women.

Popular gay movements prioritized gay males and often revolved around male issues; lesbians were excluded from gay bars, sex-centered culture, and differences of ideology.²⁰ Gay bars, which were a major place of connection for gays in large cities, did not always play the same key role in community for gays out West. Although many gay bars existed, most were frequented by gay males and lacked space for lesbians. Gay publications served as hotspots of connection for the gay community, both men and women. However, popular Colorado-based gay magazines, like *Out Front*, were catered to gay males with erotica, male-centric political op-eds, and even sexually explicit classified ads. Lesbians who subscribed to these magazines and newsletters could be greeted by gay bar advertisements, drag show schedules, or male personal ads calling to “TRY DENVER’S LARGEST!” for men “Seeking...HOT, sweaty sex.,” or wanting to “Bend over and take it like a man!” for \$30 an hour.²¹

If lesbians got lucky, sometimes these magazines or newsletters would set aside a single page for them in the full twenty-page spread. This page would often include mental health services, hair and salon services, and advertisements for “Lisa’s Recorded Love Stories,” where she would “whisper sweet nothings in your ear.”²² Even Colorado-based publications committed

¹⁹ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, ix.

²⁰ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, p. 75.; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 90.

²¹ *Out Front*, December 1982, Lesbian Herstory Archives, 12.

²² *Out Front*, October 1982, Lesbian Herstory Archives, 8

to gay healthy living, like *Quest*, would center male homosexuals, with lists of male recreational activities and ads like “Dial-a-Hunk” included within the issue.²³ The heavy focus on erotica and sex was an act of male chauvinism and exclusion of lesbians; lesbians as women could not gleefully partake in the “male-defined” sexual revolution.²⁴ Lesbians started to distance themselves from a lesbian-gay alliance, and instead sought to align themselves with the women’s movement, which was increasingly radicalizing through the 1960s and well into the 1970s.²⁵

Del Martin’s earlier words reflected the larger move from homophile organization to women’s liberation. Martin’s Denver speech acted as a harbinger for the burgeoning lesbian feminism movement. Martin was one of the most prominent lesbians in America. As the founder of Daughters of Bilitis and a renowned lesbian activist, Martin had a strong influence over lesbians across the nation.²⁶ Martin Meeker explains that “feminist groups provided a fertile soil in which lesbianism could grow,” in his book *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940-1970s*.²⁷ Over the course of the decade, DOB members broke apart from homophile groups, and Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon joined the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1968. However, not all feminists would welcome lesbians into the movement with open arms. NOW founder Betty Friedan worried over feminism's association with lesbians, or as she had nicknamed them the “Lavender Menace.”²⁸ Some

²³ *Quest*, June 1989, Lesbian Herstory Archives, 10.

²⁴ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980): 631–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834>.

²⁵ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay Revolution*; Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence.”

²⁶ Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, 2006, 225.

²⁷ Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, 229.

²⁸ “Lavender Menaces Confront the Congress to Unite Women.” *Gay Power*, vol. 1, 1970, p. 8. *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*. <https://link.gale.com>. ; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, 233; Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired*, 231.

feminists were concerned that they would become even more stereotyped as lesbian, man-haters in popular culture if they started fighting for lesbian women's issues.

In 1970 at the Congress to Unite Women, The Lavender Menace busted into the auditorium, adorned with shirts and posters reading, "SUPER DYKE LOVES YOU...", or "TAKE A LESBIAN OUT TO LUNCH."²⁹ Similarly to Del Martin in 1959, the Lavender Menace took over the podium from heterosexual feminists and began turning the microphone to the audience for questions. This turned the feminist meeting into a lesbian-themed consciousness-raising session. Prominent lesbian feminist Rita Mae Brown called out to the crowd and asked who wanted to join the Lavender Menace. From the auditorium seats the chorus of cheers and positive responses from the other feminists could be heard. The Lavender Menace had not appeared out of thin air; lesbians had been preparing for their moment. The group had mostly formed from GFL and had rebranded themselves as a more militant group called Radicalesbians. This group of about 40 lesbians created the pamphlet, "The Woman-Identified Woman" redefining the word lesbian and rejecting the definitions created by men.³⁰ Although this pamphlet did not solve all issues surrounding the involvement of lesbians in the feminist movement, it did create a more inclusive version of women's community; a community that was not centered around either heterosexual or homosexual men.

Colorado began building a woman-identified women's community in the early 1970s, after Del Martin's inspiring words at the Mattachine Society meeting in Denver.³¹ Lesbian feminists were growing more active in Denver throughout the 1970s. In 1973 a feminist newspaper called *Big Mama Rag (BMR)* out of a basement on Gaylord Street in Denver,

²⁹ *Gay Power*, vol.1, 1970, 7.

³⁰ "Lavender Menaces Confront the Congress to Unite Women." *Gay Power*, vol. 1, 1970, p. 8. *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*. <https://link.gale.com>. ; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, 233

³¹ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 227.

Colorado.³² Throughout the feminist movement print media would be significant for networking and community building. As scholars like Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor have argued, lesbian feminists are often major mobilizers for the feminist movement.³³ In their article, “Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism” aim to redefine cultural feminism with a lens of lesbian feminism. They examine lesbian’s role in the women’s community and how lesbians have helped to build women’s culture. Taylor and Rupp introduce four points of lesbian feminist culture that “promote survival of the women's movement during periods of waning activity,” like the 1980s conservative political era. The four categories are “female values, separatism, the primacy of women's relationships, and feminist ritual.”³⁴ Lesbian feminists have been documented as business owners, activists, and political leaders in the second wave movement. Lesbian feminists were often foundational to the women's community and Colorado’s feminist culture. Colorado lesbian feminists were *BMR* collective members, National Park rangers, and founders of women’s centers and clubs.³⁵

³² *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1973, 1

³³ Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, “Women’s Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism,” *Signs* 19, no. 1 (October 1, 1993): 32–61, <https://doi.org/10.1086/494861>.

³⁴ Taylor and Rupp, “Women’s Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism,” 34.

³⁵ *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1973, 1; author’s interviews with lesbian feminists Kathy Riley, Chocolate Waters, Sharon Miles, and Susanna Smith.

“We’re not gay, we’re angry.”

Feminist publications were a major hotspot for community building and spreading awareness of politics within the women’s movement. Colorado-based publication *BMR* had a collective of members, primarily made up of lesbian feminists. Enfolded in one special, summer issue, “We’re not gay, we’re angry,” there was an interview with lesbian feminist Del Martin. In her interview, Martin poses the concept of lesbian feminists as crucial to the movement and to lesbians' own self-liberation. For women to truly begin to question patriarchy, they must understand the lesbian lifestyle which decenters men and finds love, compassion, and even sex with another woman. Amid the political pieces and detailed, first-person accounts of protests, a woman saw a 1974 poem by *BMR* member Chocolate Waters, reading,

“She died to live she
lived to die she
died inside him where she lived
so long dying
TO GET OUT!”³⁶

This poem by Waters may be read like a call to action for some women, especially those feeling lost in their heterosexual partnerships. Instead of feeling stuck, these women could look at Waters and her life as an out, lesbian woman and feminist, and know that they too can leave the man behind to focus on the woman within. Even with *BMR*'s focus on lesbian feminists, the collective aimed to create a feminist publication that could be read by all women.

Much of the *BMR* content urged women to get out (of unhealthy relationships with men) and come out (of the closet). But not every woman reading or buying or even writing to the

³⁶ Chocolate Waters, “Epitaph,” *Big Mama Rag*, July 1974, 11.

paper was a lesbian. In the 1973 “Ask a Lez” column, one woman wrote asking for advice about her sexuality, the “Lez,” Aggie, answered back in good humor, writing, “What you could have is heterosexuality and it afflicts many members of our society.”³⁷ Colorado women with such afflictions did not have to worry, *BMR* strove for inclusivity within women’s culture. A woman picking up her copy of *BMR* could thumb through the pages and find ads for consciousness-raising sessions or self-defense classes for women. Although *BMR* ran ads for bars, primarily lesbian bars or those deemed lesbian-friendly, this thesis will show that advertisements for women’s clinics, support groups, and sports clubs were more common inside the monthly issues.

Colorado’s gay community often failed to account for lesbian needs, forcing lesbians to make space for themselves within the women’s movement. Not only did lesbian feminists readily join Colorado’s feminist community, but lesbians also bolstered the movement as staff on feminist publications, owners of feminist bookstores, and organizers of women’s events.³⁸ Lesbian feminists in Colorado helped create the women's community and provided women-only spaces across the state. Colorado lesbians moved from drinking in seedy bars to opening bookstores and celebrating Mother Earth in the Rockies. Colorado women could enjoy a women-identified women’s community that was fueled by lesbian feminist publications and collectives.

This thesis builds on the foundation of the many historians who have dedicated research to the lesbian and gay communities, and the feminist scholars who explore the contrasting feminisms within the women’s movement. Many scholars have examined the lesbian and gay community, particularly the examination of how lesbian and gay communities overlap.³⁹ I use the terms lesbian and lesbian feminist frequently as I find it important to highlight the visibility

³⁷ “Ask a Lez,” *Big Mama Rag*, November 1973, 9.

³⁸ Kristen Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Duke University Press, 2016), 58.

³⁹ Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, 7.

of lesbian women in Colorado's history of outdoor recreation. My thesis aims to be women-centric, primarily focusing on lesbian feminists to tell their often-ignored stories of resistance, resilience, and most importantly, recreation. I use a lens of environmental and recreation history to examine lesbian feminists' leisure and shift from bar culture to outdoor recreation. Colorado lesbian feminists provided women-only spaces for political conversation, to meet romantic partners, and to have fun with groups of like-minded women. I argue that Colorado lesbian feminists were inherently ecofeminist, even without claiming the identity themselves. These women had an intense focus on reproductive and environmental health which worked in tandem to provide an ecological lens to Colorado's feminist movement.⁴⁰

Since its coining in 1974, ecofeminist has often been used to connect women and nature through ideas of male domination. In the 1980s and 90s, scholars like Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Mary Daly, and Susan Griffin worked to introduce links between women, Mother Earth, and the environment. In her 1995 book *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*, Merchant wrote that "Nature has been revered as animate mother, feared and degraded as unpredictable witch, and plowed as virgin land," but women's socialization and domestic duties have "often propelled them [women] to act to preserve both nonhuman nature and themselves."⁴¹ Women in Colorado were no strangers to motherhood, economic burdens, capitalism, and the masculinization of medical science. Colorado's lesbian feminists reflected ecofeminist ideology through publications like *BMR* and *Double Standard*, religious worship, and even leisure activities. *BMR* and *Double Standard* staffed women with varied political and social interests. Collective members like Kathy Riley, Jane Hoback, and Dee Farrell were often focused on health and wellness, while others like Rose and Jessica Lipknack centered on female spirituality

⁴⁰ Rose, "Emerging Energies, Honest Self-Expression," *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 13.

⁴¹ Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (Routledge, 2014).

and women's connection to the Earth. Many forms of Colorado leisure helped to connect women to the outdoors and the environment, taking their ecofeminist philosophy into recreational practice.⁴² From potluck dinners to group hikes in the Rockies, lesbian feminists in Colorado could enjoy a variety of opportunities for community building.

Throughout the 1980s women's publications like *BMR* were sending out thousands of copies a month, and subscribers were engaging heavily with the materials. In the early 1980s various clubs like the Women's Outdoor Club, Dykes of Estes, and more reported growing populations of community members.⁴³ Although Colorado's lesbian feminist community was actively expanding in size, lesbian feminism was not an overnight solution to the lesbian problem in the women's movement. Before lesbians made the turn from the gay movement to women's liberation, they were often activists in homophile movements, like the national lesbian organization Daughters of Bilitis.⁴⁴ Throughout the 1960s, lesbians were experiencing enormous cultural shifts that gave them the much-needed push from being ignored in one exclusive movement, to becoming mobilizers in the burgeoning women's movement.

As Colorado lesbians joined in the feminist movement, they began searching for a spot in women's spaces. Gay and lesbian bar culture was still at large across the nation, particularly huge in urban cities like Buffalo and San Francisco.⁴⁵ Scholars Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy examine the lesbian bar culture in Buffalo, New York and the butch-femme dynamic it often reinforced.⁴⁶ Many lesbians distanced themselves from the bars to reject this

⁴² *Big Mama Rag, Inc. v. United States*, 631 F.2d 1030 (D.C. Cir. 1980), casetext.com.

⁴³ Jane Hoback, "Women's Outdoor Club faces uncertain future," *Double Standard*, October 1981.

⁴⁴ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (Simon and Schuster, 2015), 227.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (Psychology Press, 1993); Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 220

⁴⁶ Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*; Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*.

heteronormative idea of lesbian relationships, while others strayed away from the bar scene due to the many dangers that it came with. In *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, Lillian Faderman states that many lesbians left the “violent, self-destructive world of gay bars,” trading it in for a woman-identified culture.⁴⁷ Gay bars meant bar raids, violence, and undercover cops. *Big Mama Rag* collective member Chocolate Waters exposed some of the truths to gay bars, writing, “you're constantly bumping into the pigs, faggots, straight couples, drag queens or a token policewoman who's probably a dyke herself but wants to haul you in just to prove she's not.”⁴⁸ Rather than continue to force themselves into seedy bars with sticky booths, lesbian feminists began opening bookstores in their cities.

Feminist bookstores were often owned and run by lesbian feminists, many of whom were looking for a place without men.⁴⁹ Kristen Hogan, a certified BookWoman, examined the significance of feminist bookstores in her book, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*. BookWoman is both a term Hogan uses to describe the feminists who owned and worked at bookstores, and the name of a bookstore itself. Hogan examines the transnational bookstore network through the 1970s-80s, arguing that bookstores became safe spaces for women of all ages, races, and sexualities. This is in opposition to bars, which were often exclusionist places for women of color. Feminist bookstores were not the only places for women-identified women to hang out; women-owned coffeehouses, restaurants, and cafes became popular 3rd spaces for women craving community. Feminist scholar Alex Ketchum examined more than 200 of these feminist-owned businesses in her book

⁴⁷ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (Columbia University Press, 2012). ; Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980): 631–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834>.

⁴⁸ Chocolate Waters, “The Trouble With Women’s Bars in This Town,” *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1979, 13.

⁴⁹ Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*, 58.

Ingredients for Revolution: A History of American Feminist Restaurants, Cafes, and Coffeehouses. These two books work in tandem to show the ways in which feminist-owned businesses cared less about profits and more about providing a place for women. These works also contribute to the wider field of lesbian geography, which was changing through the 1970s from bar-heavy to bookstore-oriented.⁵⁰

Bar culture was burning out in Colorado by the early 1980s. Instead of women finding community in the bars of downtown Denver, women found themselves at the forefront of various support groups. *Double Standard*, a newspaper for Colorado lesbians, replicated the same anti-bar politics of *BMR*. Each monthly issue of the *Double Standard* carried a calendar containing support groups like CHOICES, The Group, and even Brown Bag Reader's Theatre, a lesbian theater troupe centered around lesbian alcoholism.⁵¹ Throughout the 1980s, the number of support groups geared toward mothers, lesbian mothers specifically, was increasingly growing. Lesbian Mother's Support Group, Motherlode, and the Boulder Lesbian Mother Group were all meeting frequently, sometimes even multiple times a month. Colorado was distinct in its focus on later in life lesbians, or "Vintage" lesbians, who most likely already had kids before they came out. Support groups reached out to both sides of the spectrum, holding joint meetings with the young lesbians, or even planning dances, picnics, and events so both older and young lesbians could enjoy everything Colorado had to offer. Instead of being forced into bars or into hiring babysitters to enjoy community events, Colorado lesbians moved outward into an environment accepting of their community.

Rejecting bar culture, Colorado lesbians moved out of the closet and into the mountains, creating community with women away from the rest of patriarchal civilization. Women's

⁵⁰ Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, 2006, 58.

⁵¹ *Double Standard*, March 1984, 7.

outdoor clubs and activities grew in popularity in the 1980s. However, the first steps toward outdoor recreation took place through women's clubs in the 1970s. The *Boulder Lesbian Network* (BLN) newsletter published monthly events and group meetings in its issues, writing that groups are a "valid structure for giving lesbians support— emotional and social support..."⁵² Not only did this mean support groups but also the plethora of sports clubs and outdoor recreational clubs. *BMR* was often in the same field, showcasing outdoor events like summer solstice celebrations, motorcycle trips, and the varied hikes offered year-round.⁵³ *BMR* had solidified the nature of their audience; women who were wanting to work, play, and love with other women. These women sought each other out both through media and newspaper communications, but primarily through event programming. Plenty of these kinds of events, large-scale and outdoor, took place in Colorado, along with smaller and more consistent events. Lesbian feminists' rejection of bar culture contributed to their unique community that spread from Denver to Boulder, and eventually could be mapped across various locations in Colorado.

Digital Methods, Spatial Mapping, and Lesbian Geographies

Along with my qualitative study of Denver-based lesbian feminist newspapers, this thesis also uses digital tools to map a Colorado lesbian geography. Spatial analysis is a digital method that historians can use to look deeper at ignored or marginalized communities. "What is Spatial History?" by Richard White explicitly tied spatial and digital history together through digital tools and geo-referencing. White explained the use of GIS and mapping as a way of doing research that "generated questions that might otherwise go unasked."⁵⁴ Spatial mapping can both serve to help create dynamic and interactive visualizations, but also to focus specific details in

⁵² Feminist Alliance and Lesbian Caucus, "Visibility and Women's Organizations," *BLN Newsletter*, January 1979, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

⁵³ *Big Mama Rag*, June 1977, 17.

⁵⁴ Richard White, "What is Spatial History?," Spatial History Lab, Stanford University, February 1, 2010, 6.

place-making. The collaborative efforts and GIS work created a field of history that utilized other areas of research like geography, sociology, and more. White himself notes that Stanford's Spatial History Project was a product of professors, graduate students, undergraduates, geographers, architects, and computer scientists.⁵⁵ Similarly to Stanford's project, in 2015 a book of essays by historians, geographers, graphic information scientists (GIScientists), and one computer scientist "investigate deep mapping and the spatial narratives that stem from it."⁵⁶

The book, *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, included pieces from GIScientist Trevor M. Harris and historian David J. Bodenhamer highlighted the significance of examining space and place in historical narratives and proposed "deep mapping" as one approach to place-making. To define deep mapping, Harris first explained the general definition of mapping, labeling these as "thin maps" to mean maps that have been largely produced by institutions for infrastructural purposes like city grids, environmental topography, and population density.⁵⁷ Unlike thin maps, deep maps are paired with a desire to track patterns and find connections in everyday experiences and seemingly "unmappable" or more abstract ideas like memory, emotion, human interaction, and past sights or sounds.⁵⁸ Bodenhamer explained why mapping is important to historical narrative and interpretations. He wrote, "Space is not simply the setting for historical action but is a significant product and determinant of change."⁵⁹ The environmental, space, and place-based culture an individual or community lives and works in could be analyzed through spatial mapping.⁶⁰ With this in mind, spatial history can be applied to social history narratives to

⁵⁵ White, "What is Spatial History?," 1.

⁵⁶ David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor M. Harris, *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zxxzr2>, 45.

⁵⁷ Bodenhamer, Corrigan, and Harris, *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, 48.

⁵⁸ Harris, *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, p. 46.

⁵⁹ Bodenhamer, *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, p. 21.

⁶⁰ David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor M. Harris, *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zxxzr2>.

provide a complex view of a community through space and place, and the creation of culture. Many social historians and geographers have examined communities, like the lesbian and gay community, women's community, etc.... through a lens of spatiality and mapping.

Geographers and sociologists like Professor Kath Browne, Eduarda Ferreria, and Japonica Brown-Saracino have examined women's communities with spatiality as a lens. In 2015 *Lesbian Geographies: Gender, Place and Power* by Professor Browne and Ferreria introduced the idea of lesbian geographies to study the women's community. The two argued that geography and place are extremely important in sexuality studies as lesbians often built communities in defiance of patriarchal institutions and created a lesbian space where they felt safe and powerful.⁶¹ Similar to Bodenhamer, Browne saw space as intrinsically tied to identity and culture. Browne wrote that "place is central to the form identities take, the ways our lives are lived and to what we can and cannot do. In other words, place is more than a backdrop to our activities, it plays an active role in constructing them."⁶² Akin to the geographical methodology introduced by Browne and Ferreria, sociologist Brown-Saracino examined place-specific identities and offered graphs created through digital history tools to represent her data.⁶³ Like historian Richard White, Browne, Ferreria, and Brown-Saracino all used spatial history and geographic methodologies to interpret data, but not always to produce visualizations of their work for an audience.

⁶¹ Professor Kath Browne and Eduarda Ferreira, *Lesbian Geographies: Gender, Place and Power* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2015).

⁶² Browne, *Lesbian Geographies: Gender, Place and Power*, 2.

⁶³ Japonica Brown-Saracino, "How Places Shape Identity: The Origins of Distinctive LBQ Identities in Four Small U.S. Cities," *American Journal of Sociology* 121, no. 1 (July 1, 2015): 1–63, <https://doi.org/10.1086/682066>.

Brown-Saracino coined the term “sexual identity cultures” to describe place-specific orientations that fueled lesbian, bisexual, and queer-identified (LBQ) individuals’ identities.⁶⁴ In her article “How Places Shape Identity: The Origins of Distinctive LBQ Identities in Four Small U.S. Cities,” Brown-Saracino examined how the LBQ communities differed from San Luis, California to Greenfield, Massachusetts based on neighborhood and town-specific cultures. Her work relied heavily on big data from “field observations; in-depth interviews; a survey of informants regarding age, income, networks, and housing; analysis of on-line, print, television, and radio material on each site; and analysis of 2000 and 2010 census, FBI Hate Crime, and ACS data.”⁶⁵ This data was then used to create graphs that showed population percentages of education, political party, and identity definitions from her interviewees. Brown-Saracino ended her article a “call on scholars to devote far greater attention to how and why places matter and for further consideration of culture as a product not only of the group, region, or nation, but of specific locales.”⁶⁶ Similar to deep mapping from Trevor M. Harris, Brown-Saracino offers a methodology for scholars to provide a more complex and nuanced understanding of place and space. Some scholars have used spatial mapping to examine complex, but broad connections between groups across the nation. Spatial mapping has been largely supplemented by gender and sexuality scholars, like Browne, Ferreria, and Brown-Saracino, to examine how the gay, lesbian, and queer community has changed, adapted, and established connections over time.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Brown-Saracino, “How Places Shape Identity: The Origins of Distinctive LBQ Identities in Four Small U.S. Cities.”

⁶⁵ Brown-Saracino, “How Places Shape Identity: The Origins of Distinctive LBQ Identities in Four Small U.S. Cities,” 11.

⁶⁶ Brown-Saracino, “How Places Shape Identity: The Origins of Distinctive LBQ Identities in Four Small U.S. Cities,” 57.

⁶⁷ Michael Brown and Larry Knopp, “Queering the Map: The Productive Tensions of Colliding Epistemologies,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98, no. 1 (February 5, 2008): 40–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045600701734042>.

Geographers Michael Brown and Larry Knopp explored spatial mapping and GIS in their article “Queering the Map: The Productive Tensions of Colliding Epistemologies.” The two scholars explored queer geography and explained the process of making a map, managing data, and combining this into a narrative to explain queer or feminist theory. They compiled events, locations, names, advertisements, and more from periodicals like the *Seattle Gay Community Center News* and *Seattle Gay News*. The two scholars also conducted oral interviews of community members still in Seattle, a common public history practice, and managed this data online. Brown and Knopp wrote that the “map not only relied on but produced—and continues to produce—new and different kinds of knowledge, by affirming identities, sparking imaginations, and inspiring activism.”⁶⁸ This again reflected White and the Stanford Spatial History Project’s ideas that spatial analysis is as much about the production of the map as it is about the product.⁶⁹ Spatial mapping is both a methodology and a way to represent data. “Queer mapping” can come from guerrilla geographers and historians who use free online tools like ArchGIS and Google Maps to create maps of queer communities. Some forms of queer mapping were heavily focused on providing interactive maps to teach the public about gay, lesbian, and queer history through dynamic visualizations.⁷⁰

Queer Maps and *Mapping the Gay Guides* are two collaborative online projects that consist of online maps made from big data. Queer Maps has a large online presence with an interactive map, database/index, and an Instagram account with over 6,000 followers dedicated to posting about LGBTQ+ spaces in Los Angeles and their intricate histories.⁷¹ Queer Maps has a digital map that viewers can zoom in and out from, click on data points to see more

⁶⁸ Brown and Knopp, “Queering the Map: The Productive Tensions of Colliding Epistemologies.”

⁶⁹ White, “What is Spatial History?,” 6.

⁷⁰ “Queer Maps,” Queer Maps, n.d., <https://www.queermaps.org/about>.

⁷¹ “Queer Maps,” Queer Maps, n.d., <https://www.queermaps.org/about>.

information about a bar, restaurant, or events, and community members can even add their own listing to be approved by the curators. Queer Maps defines itself as an “explorable archive built to preserve and share histories” of LA’s queer community. Similar to this, *Mapping the Gay Guides* maps “ignored queer geographies using the Damron Address Books, an early but longstanding travel guide aimed at gay men since the early 1960s.” *Mapping the Gay Guides* is an online, interactive map with a public dataset that viewers can look through, and a methodology section on the website to teach the public how the dataset was created.⁷² Works like these contribute to the largely growing field of spatial history and gay, lesbian, and queer geography. Although these are independent digital creations, some forms of spatial mapping are produced as supplementary or included within a larger body of research.

Scholar Dr. Alex Ketchum provided an interactive map on her website as supplementary to her book, *Ingredients for Revolution*. The book, along with the map, traced feminist restaurants, cafes, and coffeehouses across the United States. Ketchum’s book largely focused on specific locations and used data to show profit and cost analysis of the businesses, however, the online component provides a broader look at businesses through the nation and includes a directory, published dataset, and information for how to get started on spatial mapping.⁷³ On her website Ketchum also advertised her podcast where she speaks with other historians and scholars, like Dr. Annelise Heinz and Dr. Cameron Blevins who wrote the 2024 article “Separated, but far from alone”: Forging Lesbian Networks in the 1970s–1980s,” which explored the lesbian community through spatial and digital history. In their work the scholars wrote that the article was a “combination of spatial mapping and qualitative analysis” that “sheds light on

⁷² Amanda Regan, “Methodology,” *Mapping the Gay Guides* (blog), October 7, 2022, <https://www.mappingthegayguides.org/methodology/>.

⁷³ “Ingredients for Revolution,” <https://www.thefeministrestaurantproject.com/p/podcast.html>.

this historical geography.”⁷⁴ Similar to the other forms of queer mapping, Heinz and Blevins transcribed locations, events, names, and more from *Lesbian Connection*, a Northern Pacific-based publication that had a widespread communication network across the United States.

Heinz and Blevins write that the article sits between LGBTQ history and spatial analysis, and grounded concepts of network and identity into a visual map, as it “bridges the localized approaches of community studies with analysis of long-distance media networks.”⁷⁵ Heinz and Blevins investigated the important role that print media and national community networks had for lesbian feminists in the 1970s to 1980s. This study transcends regional bounds and examines *Lesbian Connection* as it impacts everyday women across the United States.⁷⁶ Like the idea of deep mapping from Trevor M. Harris, Heinz and Blevins attempted to map the unmappable in the form of identity, connection, and the significance of women who love women. The historians found that spatial analysis allowed them to tell a story that would have been at risk of being erased or forgotten. The subscriber location mapped by Heinz and Blevins show how *Lesbian Connection* helped build lesbian identity across time. Spatial mapping makes ignored and marginalized communities, like the gay and lesbian community, more visible and helps to share their often forgotten about histories.⁷⁷

Scholars Kath Browne and Eduarda Ferreria define lesbian geographies as “where, and how, individuals who identify as, claim the term, or might be seen as, ‘lesbians’...live, work and play.”⁷⁸ As Martin Meeker asserts in *Contacts Desired*, many lesbians had a Do-It-Yourself

⁷⁴ Cameron Blevins and Annelise Heinz, ““Separated, but Far From Alone,”” *Pacific Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (January 1, 2024): 417–44, <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2024.93.3.417>.

⁷⁵ Blevins and Heinz, ““Separated, but Far From Alone.””

⁷⁶ Blevins and Heinz, ““Separated, but Far From Alone.””

⁷⁷ Blevins and Heinz, ““Separated, but Far From Alone.””; Bodenhamer, Corrigan, and Harris, *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, 48.

⁷⁸ Professor Kath Browne and Eduarda Ferreira, *Lesbian Geographies: Gender, Place and Power* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2015), 1.

(DIY) frame of mind, and were often actively creating lesbian geographies through published lists or guides that told lesbians where they could go to meet other lesbians.⁷⁹ This DIY culture is particularly helpful when it comes to tracking down places that lesbians frequented. Most major lesbian newspapers and magazines included advertisements for lesbian feminist businesses, like bookstores and restaurants. To explore lesbian geography, one must understand the complex nuances that impact lesbian mobility. Gendered differences between lesbians and gays, like wage gaps, explain why lesbians are more likely to be found in poorer, urban communities. Lesbians can exist on the edge of two communities, taking over gay establishments for a lesbian night, or attending events catered to heterosexual women.⁸⁰ The lesbian community is not a homogenized unit, meaning working class lesbians, black lesbians, lesbian mothers, and gender-nonconforming lesbians may have had different experiences than white, middle-class lesbian feminists who could enjoy greater mobility and security in public places.

The study of people, identity, and sexuality are inherently tied to space and place. The geographic region someone lives in is bound to affect their identity and the ways in which they use their natural environment.⁸¹ Feminist women across the nation craved for safe public spaces where they could go to talk, share, and develop relationships with other women. Women's spaces often have limitations based on safety, societal norms, and the almost ubiquitous fear of violence.⁸² Many scholars have examined the connections between gender, identity, and place,

⁷⁹Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, 248.

⁸⁰Browne and Ferreira, *Lesbian Geographies: Gender, Place and Power*, 4.

⁸¹ Browne, *Lesbian Geographies: Gender, Place and Power*, Wright, M. W. (2009). Gender and geography II: Bridging the gap — feminist, queer, and the Geographical Imaginary. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34(1), 56–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132509105008>, Cameron Blevins, Annelise Heinz; “Separated, but far from alone”: Forging Lesbian Networks in the 1970s–1980s. *Pacific Historical Review* 1 August 2024; 93 (3): 417–444. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2024.93.3.417>.

⁸² Jennifer K. Wesely, and Emily Gaarder. “The Gendered ‘Nature’ of the Urban Outdoors: Women Negotiating Fear of Violence.” *Gender and Society* 18, no. 5 (2004): 645–63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4149423>, Browne, K., & Ferreira, E. (2015). *Lesbian Geographies: Gender, Place and Power* (1st ed.). Routledge, Wearing, Betsy.

and LGBT geography is a growing field. These geographies often focus on differences between rural and urban gay communities, the LGBT community as a whole entity, or the comparison of LGBT communities in various cities. Scholar Japonica Brown-Saracino invites researchers to think of identity as stemming from places rather than place; she examined the LBQ communities of four cities, Ithaca, San Luis Obispo, Portland, and Greenfield. Rather than examine large categories of space and place, Brown-Saracino examines how specific cities, neighborhoods, and the built cultures affect identity.⁸³ Like Brown-Saracino, many scholars examine the identity and geography of multiple identities, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer, rather than focusing on one singular identity.

Lesbian-centric geographies do exist and have existed for years. Historians Annelise Heinz and Cameron Blevins examined the communication network of *Lesbian Connection*, a popular lesbian feminist publication. Heinz and Blevins research divulged from major scholarship themes that put lesbian community in large, urban cities. Instead, their work revealed a “geography that tilted toward rural areas and mid-sized cities...,” and they mapped out the expansive network of lesbians/lesbian-businesses subscribing, interacting, and being advertised with/in *Lesbian Connection* around the nation.⁸⁴ Spatial mapping is a method that brings visibility to previously ignored or overlooked communities, like the lesbian community. Like Heinz and Blevins, Alex Ketchum created a supplementary spatial map for her book *Ingredients for Revolution*, showing the locations of each feminist business examined in her work.⁸⁵ These

"Hegemonic Struggles in Leisure Spaces: Cultural Studies." In *Leisure and Feminist Theory*, 60-82. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446278970>.

⁸³ Brown-Saracino, Japonica. “How Places Shape Identity: The Origins of Distinctive LBQ Identities in Four Small U.S. Cities.” *American Journal of Sociology* 121, no. 1 (2015): 1–63. <https://doi.org/10.1086/682066>.

⁸⁴ Blevins and Heinz, “Separated, but Far From Alone.””

⁸⁵ “The Book: Ingredients for Revolution,” n.d., <https://www.thefeministrestaurantproject.com/p/the-book.html>.

maps give readers more context, and help to fully visualize the dynamic lesbian communities that are not as physically present today.

My thesis will add Colorado's community to these lesbian geographies. In chapters two and four I will be mapping geographic visualizations of Colorado's lesbian feminist community. Chapter Two will focus on the struggle of finding lesbian feminist space; lesbian feminists moved from bars to bookstores throughout the 1970s to create a community that welcomed women of all different backgrounds from lesbian mothers to recovering alcoholics. Chapter Three will introduce ecofeminism and the ways in which Colorado lesbian feminists contributed to the growing movement in the 1980s. This chapter will explore how women broke into male-dominated institutions like labor, science, and religion while slowly being pushed out of bookstore basements and into the outdoors. Chapter Four will move across Colorado, into the Rockies and down the Colorado River, focusing on the shift from bookstores as the primary form of community to outdoor recreation. The Women's Outdoor Club brought a focus of leisure and outdoor recreation through the 1980s to Colorado's lesbian feminist community. Chapters Two and Four will include spatial mapping to show the lesbian geography of Colorado and will examine the differences in the many lesbian communities within Colorado as lesbian feminists slowly grew more connected through leisure activities.

To create these maps, I first transcribed, or copied direct references made of events at specific locations, for example "Every Tuesday LUNA, a feminist support group for lesbian alcoholics and their friends/supporters meets at 1178 Vine Street, Denver at 8:00 p.m."⁸⁶ This quote is pulled from *BMR's* monthly feminist calendar that was included in every issue post 1975. Other Colorado-based publications like *Double Standard*, *Gaynin'*, *Boulder Lesbian*

⁸⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, January 1980, 20.

Newsletter, and *Colorado's Gay and Lesbian Newsletter* advertised events in their own versions of a monthly calendar. Most of my references are pulled from *BMR* and *Double Standard*. From 1974 to 1979, *BMR* made up all but four of the references to location. In 1981, *Double Standard's* first issue was released and included a specific section for outdoor events in each calendar.⁸⁷ Out of the 309 events I transcribed from the years 1980-84, 278 of those are from *BMR* and *Double Standard*.

These maps reflect the importance of space and place for Colorado lesbian feminists. Women were searching for a safe space to communicate, perform, and enjoy time with other women. Spatial mapping reveals the spread of feminist events around Colorado, moving from bars in the early 1970s to bookstores in the late 1970s, up to the shift to outdoor recreation in the 1980s. Not every single event advertised in a calendar is transcribed, I eliminated weekly or biweekly meetings that were hosted at the same location. I also left out events that were not inherently feminist or lesbian feminist in nature. This means events that were not dedicated to education, arts, workshops, outdoor recreation, or were not hosted by/at a bookstore or coffeehouse were not included in the datasets. Although I did not transcribe every event, I did gather the bulk of the events advertised in *BMR*, and each event of outdoor recreation advertised in *Double Standard*. Even without every single event transcribed, spatial mapping reveals a shift from Denver-based events to outdoor recreation.

⁸⁷ *Double Standards*, June 1981, 8.

A Note on Language, Terminology, and Sources

To remain historically accurate, I will be referring to Colorado's lesbian feminist community as they referred to themselves. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, lesbian feminists used distinct language; terms like dyke and lesbo were reclaimed and utilized as a form of lesbian feminist rhetoric. I will be using these terms when quoting or referring to specific articles and organizations, like the Dykes of Estes.⁸⁸ Lesbian feminists often used terms like wimmin, womban, and womyn to separate themselves from male-centric words; this tactic was used for other terminology as well. Within the 1970s, many feminists, particularly lesbian feminists, began focusing on Women's Studies programs and education. Lesbian feminists swapped the word history with *herstory*, a term made to focus on women's history and the often-ignored stories of women, feminists, and lesbians.⁸⁹

In 1974, the Lesbian Herstory Archives was founded by a group of lesbian women in New York who believed that history had been written through "patriarchal eyes," and aimed to start a grassroots archive.⁹⁰ Lesbian Herstory Archives was first advertised as "now in the process of collecting all literature, materials and memorabilia of our lives. If you have lesbian materials that you would like to donate to us, please send them..." in *BMR* in 1975.⁹¹ These women became archivists and started collecting and cataloging the materials sent to them. Throughout the span of *BMR*, lesbian herstory film festivals, workshops, and educational classes or presentations were advertised in the newspaper's monthly feminist calendar. I will be borrowing this term from the many lesbian feminists and using it throughout this paper, as I have

⁸⁸ Dykes of Estes, "Mountain Musings," *Double Standard*, November 1981, 15.

⁸⁹ "Herstory of International Women's Day." *Big Mama Rag*, March 1976, 5.

⁹⁰ Lesbian Herstory Archives, "Our Herstory – Lesbian Herstory Archives," April 17, 2024, <https://lesbianherstoryarchives.org/about/a-brief-history/>.

⁹¹ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1975, 31.

come to think of my thesis as a lesbian herstory. Not only will I be focusing on the lesbian community of Colorado, but I will also be paying careful attention to the individual women who created Colorado's lesbian feminist culture.

Individual women, like the many on the collectives and staff of feminist publications and businesses are the core of this story. These women contributed largely to the rich lesbian feminist community emerging across the state. To properly tell their story, I will be naming the individual lesbian feminists when examining specific articles from *BMR* collective members or discussing the opening of various feminist bookstores. To tell these women's stories I will be utilizing Colorado-based newspapers *Big Mama Rag*, *Double Standard*, *Boulder Lesbian Newsletter*, *Gaynin*, and *Colorado's Gay and Lesbian Community's* newsletter. Many of these sources are available through careful archiving from the lesbian feminist community, like the Lesbian Herstory Archives and other special collections.

The lesbian feminists in Colorado's women's community were amateur archivists and herstorians themselves. *BMR* collective members like Jackie St. Joan and Tea Schook donated newspaper copies, conference and committee notes, and even photo albums to Colorado archives at Denver Public Library and History Colorado. Other women like Vicki Piotter of Woman to Woman bookstore, or Diane Buettner and Dee Farrell of the Women's Outdoor Club, offered oral histories, interviews, and other material to these special collections. Colorado lesbian feminists understood the importance of their work and aimed to preserve and record it in their own form of lesbian herstory. To tell their full herstory, I use these newspapers to track the movement of lesbian feminists across the state and explore the ways in which these women used leisure to form a women's community that centered around places like bookstores, festivals, and the outdoors.

Throughout this thesis I frequently use the phrase *lesbian leisure*. As I stated earlier in the introduction, I use the term lesbian to loosely define woman-identified women who prioritized a women-centric community. Many of the lesbian feminists in the second wave movement were political lesbians who may have given up these identities later in life. I am following definitions of lesbian from Radicalesbians, Adrienne Rich, and Ti-Grace Atkinson; Atkinson is credited with the famous feminist phrase, “feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice.”⁹² Lesbian leisure is used to describe the bookstore events, women’s clubs, and many outdoor recreation activities that Colorado lesbian feminists formed to have fun with other women. I consider fun and leisure to be an incredibly important lens of study within feminist scholarship. Many feminists, particularly the very active mobilizers, had issues like burnout, underpayment, and carried a heavy mental burden of their work. Lesbian leisure provided Colorado women with a way to release steam, take a break from work, and form meaningful friendships with other women. This thesis is an examination of Colorado lesbian leisure, and the ways in which these fun events helped to foster a women’s community across the state.

⁹² Zein Murib, “Feminism is the Theory, Lesbianism is the Practice,” *Terms of Exclusion: Rightful Citizenship Claims and Construction of LGBT Political Identity*, (New York, 2023), 67-70.

Chapter 2- *I like a place I can relax without men.*

In 1976 two *Big Mama Rag* (*BMR*) collective members, Deborah Taylor and Cheryl Peake wrote an article centered around Denver's women's bar, The Velvet Hammer. The two women interviewed various bar patrons and asked them what they liked or disliked about the "small, cozy" women's bar. One woman bluntly answered, "I like a place I can relax without men." Some women complained about the high cost of drinks, lack of political conversation, and the pressure to get hammered at bars like The Velvet Hammer.⁹³ In the 1960s and early 1970s, the lesbian and gay communities had been relatively centered around bar culture, but the rise of lesbian feminism had pushed many women out of this culture and into women's communities.⁹⁴ Publications like *BMR* helped to form Denver's lesbian feminist community through the advertisements of women's businesses, bookstores, and various events Colorado women could attend. The monthly feminist calendar published in *BMR* served the important function of compiling the spread of events and encouraged women to attend. The 1970s brought along more activities for women; *BMR* advertised about 175 events from 1974 to 1979.⁹⁵ These events ranged from support groups to potluck dinners. One 1977 event was advertised in *BMR* as "First Aid Class at Woman to Woman. 9:30am - 6:00pm. This class, upon successful completion will authorize you to carry a first aid card. Bring sack lunch. Free childcare."⁹⁶ Women could count

⁹³ Deborah Taylor and Cheryl Peake, "I like a place I can relax without men," *Big Mama Rag*, December 1976, 8.

⁹⁴ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 89. ; Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980): 631-60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834>.

⁹⁵ Data pulled from the author's own datasets.

⁹⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, March 1977, 12.

on *BMR* to advertise local feminist events that aimed to create a tight-knit and welcoming women's community in Colorado.

Throughout the 1970s print media would grow in importance to the broader feminist movement. Women across the United States read from feminist publications, whether they were local newspapers or popular magazines that had subscribers all around the nation.⁹⁷ Smaller, more localized publications like *BMR* continued to pop up all over the country throughout the 1970s. Women were growing more concerned with education, community, and forming feminist networks with other women. Print media was a way for women to do all these things and more. Newspapers and magazines gave women spaces to express themselves, critique other feminist articles, and even run classified advertisements to look for work or for pleasure.⁹⁸ Print media also often served as a way for lesbian women to make connections away from bars and feel less isolated in rural communities that may not have had large lesbian populations. Local publications like *BMR* had a lot of influence over their community's culture, and moving into the mid to late 1970s, *BMR*'s collective members began to find ways to form a community that often-rejected bar culture and focused on providing safe spaces for all women.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁹⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, April 1978, 16.; *Big Mama Rag*, March 1975, 3.

⁹⁹ Chocolate Waters, "The Trouble With Women's Bars in This Town," *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1979, 13.

Introduction

Out of a cramped basement on Gaylord Street in Denver, Colorado, and into the homes of women across the nation, *BMR* served as a printed feminist switchboard. Various women's events, workshops, and resources for Colorado women were included within each issue. *BMR* was a product of the 1970s media blitz; women around America were waking up to the casual misogyny spread on their print media, even the so-called Leftist men and their magazines. In the early 1970s feminist groups protested magazines and newspapers by hijacking them and renouncing their pornified image.¹⁰⁰ Leftist magazines, newspapers, and male staff members were under fire for their misogynistic jokes and omission of women's issues. The women on the staff of the popular Leftist paper, *RAT*, were fed up with the sexism and resented the sexualization of women with personal ads or sexist advertisements that treated women as commodities to be bought and sold. Feminist and *RAT* staff writer, Rita Mae Brown called out this toxicity in the women's takeover of *RAT*, writing, "Damned if I want our bodies to sell the leprous products of our great society."¹⁰¹ A second staff writer, Robin Morgan, then W.I.T.C.H., Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell member, spurned the aggressively masculine atmosphere in her article, "Goodbye to All That."

In this 1970 issue of *RAT*, Morgan wished "Goodbye to the illusion of strength when you run hand in hand with your oppressors; goodbye to the dream that being in the leadership collective will get you anything but gonorrhoea," and instead called for a complete women's takeover of the newspaper.¹⁰² Rather than work alongside men, Morgan stood firm that women

¹⁰⁰ Carolyn Johnston, *Sexual Power: Feminism and the Family in America* (University Alabama Press, 1992).; Annelise Orleck, *Rethinking American Women's Activism* (Taylor & Francis, 2022).

¹⁰¹ Rita Mae Brown, *RAT Subterranean News*, February 6-23, 1970, Roz Payne Sixties Archive, <https://rozsixties.unl.edu/items/show/715>.

¹⁰² *RAT Subterranean News*, February 6-23, 1970, Roz Payne Sixties Archive.

must create or take over papers to focus on women’s liberation and fight the patriarchal oppression that seeped out of most Leftist papers. There was no need to be well-behaved women, Morgan wrote for women to “Let it seem bitchy, catty, dykey, Solanisesque, frustrated, crazy, nutty, frigid, ridiculous, bitter, embarrassing, man-hating, libelous, pure, unfair, envious, intuitive, low-down, stupid, petty, liberating.”¹⁰³ The term Solanisesque referred to Valerie Solanis, the author of the SCUM manifesto (Society for Cutting Up Men) who was well-known for shooting Andy Warhol.¹⁰⁴ No need for the incoming feminist media to be perfect, it could be man-hating or woman-loving, it just needed to be women-focused. In culture dominated by men’s media catered toward male sexuality, the emergence of any form of women’s media was exhilarating for feminists.

The first major mainstream, nationwide feminist magazine, *Ms.*, was co-founded in 1971 by prominent feminist Gloria Steinem. For the first time in history, women were able to read media written by women, published by women, for women. In the 1970s, print media became the beating heart of the feminist movement, particularly the lesbian feminists, like Robin Morgan, who became writers, editors, and readers of feminist publications.¹⁰⁵ The rise of women’s print media continued through the 1970s as publications began popping up everywhere. From the bustling streets of New York to the farming towns in Wyoming, women were engaged with feminist media. Some publications, like *Ms.*, were criticized for their content and “dangerous” advertisements, like cigarette ads or male-owned businesses.¹⁰⁶ For many women, feminist

¹⁰³ “RAT Subterranean News, February 6-23, 1970,” *Roz Payne Sixties Archive*.

¹⁰⁴ Addison Price, “Politics, Pop-culture, and Patriarchy: What does feminism mean in Generation Z?” *The Macksey Journal*: Volume 4, Article 22, (2023), 8.

¹⁰⁵ Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2000).; Cameron Blevins and Annelise Heinz, ““Separated, but Far From Alone,”” *Pacific Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (January 1, 2024): 417–44, <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2024.93.3.417>.

¹⁰⁶ Farrell, 62.

media was not just a chance for women to educate themselves on politics within the women's movement, but also a way to challenge mainstream consumer culture. Feminist publications would often advertise women-owned businesses, lesbian artists, and women's herstory books.¹⁰⁷

In October of 1972, the first issue of *BMR* hit the stands, or more likely, were hand-distributed to local bookstores and shops by the *BMR* collective. The magazine, named both from the song "Rag Mama Rag," and as a cheeky reference to a woman's menstrual pad, is an example of the importance of women's culture.¹⁰⁸ Women's music, women's health, women's education, women's liberation: these were the key components of a women's community. *BMR* member Elissa Meyer looked back on the paper's start in 1974, writing years later, "Big Mama Rag was born out the need for expression, women's expression. She began as an idea conceived at a women's festival in Denver."¹⁰⁹ Unlike *Ms.*, *BMR* was a local paper that would slowly garner nationwide readership throughout the late 1970s, and moving into the 1980s. *BMR* offered international, national, and local politics in their issues, providing worldwide news to Colorado women.

Although *BMR* was primarily written by lesbian feminists, the collective wanted to create a paper that was "their voice, not male media" for ALL women.¹¹⁰ *BMR* was built to be non-hierarchical, rather than having some women in charge of others, the women were instead each in charge of their own focus, like culture or international politics. *BMR* was made up of a collective, contributors, and extra support. The collective bore the brunt of the hard work while

¹⁰⁷ Blevins and Heinz, "Separated, but Far From Alone."

Many lesbian feminists referred to history as herstory to create a more women-centric definition. Women's herstory became a prominent selling point in *Big Mama Rag* and the burgeoning archival project, the Lesbian Herstory Project that sought to create a new field of history.

¹⁰⁸ Kate Burns, "Resistance and Resilience: Feminist and Lesbian Activity in Colorado, 1970s-1980s," June 23, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWmQsKQLip4>.

¹⁰⁹ *Big Mama Rag*, May 1979, 5

¹¹⁰ Kate Burns, "Resistance and Resilience: Feminist and Lesbian Activity in Colorado, 1970s-1980s."

contributors or supporters provided extra help, articles, and opinion pieces in *BMR*. Each collective brought their own distinct culture to *BMR*. An early issue, published in January of 1973, contained a dedication from the *BMR* collective to “the memory of all the women whose lives have passed without the slightest understanding, and to their self expression, that lay somewhere beneath the caked layers of Softique and Jergen’s lotion.” *BMR* wanted to make sure every woman’s voice was heard and ensure that each woman knew her voice was important and deserving of being listened to. *BMR* ended their dedication with honest sincerity, writing, “We need each other, if not yet, then soon— in struggle we can learn to love and care and respect each other.”¹¹¹ No matter if the women were already fully conscious of feminisms’ critique of the patriarchy, or if they were still stuck in their traditional domestic roles, *BMR* would be there for them to pick up and feel less isolated in the world.

The first *BMR* issue introduced the typical spread a woman could expect from each monthly supply. There would be a list of resources, ranging from abortion counseling to childcare to women’s support groups. *BMR*’s first issue also introduced women’s literature with an endorsement of the Radical Information Project (RIP) Bookstore, which would go on to become an important feature of Colorado’s lesbian feminist community. Among the non-fiction articles and poetry there were little blurbs calling for advertisers and women’s organizers to have their groups advertised in *BMR*. One group Sisters in Solidarity (SIS) had their phone number and a small listing “to find other women interested in consciousness-raising groups.”¹¹²

Consciousness-raising was a trademark of second wave feminism. Women of different ages and races and classes would congregate in one room while a consciousness-raiser would

¹¹¹ *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1973, 1

¹¹² *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1973, 1

prod the group with various questions.¹¹³ Questions could be anything from “Do you consider yourself a nice girl” or “Have you ever faked an orgasm?”¹¹⁴ In turn, women would vulnerably voice their truth and often find areas of commonality despite their differences. Consciousness-raising groups were endorsed in most *BMR* issues over the course of the 1970s, although it was much more prominent in the early years. The second half of the 1970s brought along a shift of values, consciousness-raising was less significant as there was a widespread belief that women had been made aware of their personal association with politics. The emerging focus of the mid to late 1970s was the importance of women’s spaces— lesbian feminists often sought refuge in women-owned businesses, like bars, bookstores, and mobile coffeehouses, which would find temporary homes in the basement of churches, bookstores, or women’s centers.

“The Trouble with Women’s Bars in This Town”¹¹⁵

BMR had set their “intention [is] to serve as an effective communication system for surrounding area groups, actions and events,” and starting in 1974, they began publishing a Feminist Calendar of events taking place around Colorado.¹¹⁶ A woman could flip to the back page of an issue and scan through a list of events for that month. Her eye might catch a night of free films at Colorado University Boulder, or a “multi-media presentation on Denver women’s image from the turn of the century to the 1960s” at the Denver library.¹¹⁷ Many of these events were housed at college campuses, resource centers, or various rented out storefronts. It was not until August 15th, 1975, that the Woman to Woman bookstore, located at 2023 E. Colfax

¹¹³ “Notes From the Second Year: Women’s Liberation / Women’s Liberation Movement Print Culture / Duke Digital Repository,” Duke Digital Collections, n.d., <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/wlmpc/wlmms01039>; Orleck, *Rethinking American Women’s Activism*.

¹¹⁴ Addison Price, “Politics, Pop-culture, and Patriarchy: What does feminism mean in Generation Z?” *The Macksey Journal*: Volume 4, Article 22, (2023), p.3.; Kathie Sarachild, “A Program for Feminist ‘Consciousness Raising’.” *Notes From The Second Year: Women’s Liberation*, 1970, 10.

¹¹⁵ Chocolate Waters, “The Trouble With Women’s Bars in This Town,” *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1979, 13.

¹¹⁶ Chocolate Waters, *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1979, 13.

¹¹⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, 24.

Avenue in downtown Denver, was completed. Woman to Woman became a major hotspot for lesbian feminist programming. Around this same time women's bars sprouted along Denver's Capitol Hill neighborhoods.¹¹⁸

The Three Sisters and The Velvet Hammer were the two bars owned, operated, run, and made for women. Bars were almost ubiquitous with the lesbian and gay communities. Gay bars were hidden pockets of gay culture, typically tucked away in dangerous corners and often heavily policed with undercover officers ready to bust and book any sign of illicit activity.¹¹⁹ In the early 1970s, bars were often the main space for lesbians to meet other lesbians. Even with bookstores and lesbian support groups forming, the bars were still seen as spaces to go for leisure after work, or after a *BMR* collective meeting. Primarily, The Velvet Hammer was seen as a place to go for the company of other women, or as one lesbian put it, "I like to go here [The Velvet Hammer] because I like a place I can relax without men. I like to dance, cruise around."¹²⁰ Cruising around, or just the verb *cruise* was a lesbian and gay slang term meant to convey the search for a sexual or romantic partner while out at the bars. However, not all lesbian feminists had the same feelings about bars. By 1976, there was an increased focus on substance abuse, alcoholism, and the lack of conversation allowed in the crowded, cramped bars in feminist publications like *BMR*. One lesbian lamented that, "It is very rare to have a political conversation in a bar. Many women don't have political consciousness." Another woman echoed this sentiment and said it would be nice to have somewhere to go to "read and relax without having to drink."¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1975, 2.

¹¹⁹ Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, 2006.; Chocolate Waters, "The Trouble With Women's Bars in This Town," *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1979, 3.

¹²⁰ Deborah Taylor and Cheryl Peake, "I like a place I can relax without men," *Big Mama Rag*, December 1976, 8.

¹²¹ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1976, 8.

Feminist bookstores existed both in opposition to and worked in tandem with women's bars. Bookstores offered women a place for intelligent conversation, reading women's literature, and often held events, speakers, and different forms of entertainment. If the feminist community supported women's bookstores, then women's bookstores could in turn support the feminist community. Feminist bookstores, coffeehouses, and restaurants were likely to be owned and operated by lesbian feminists. These businesses connected into a larger network of community, signaling a safe space for women within the movement and often had advertisements in various feminist publications to spread awareness of their existence.¹²² *BMR* often listed events being held at or sponsored by bookstores or women-owned businesses in their feminist calendar.

BMR ran a monthly calendar, titled the "Feminist Calendar," and was often tucked in with the classified ads and resource listings on the back page.¹²³ The calendar would include events hosted by *BMR*, Woman to Woman, Lilith, and various women-owned businesses. The calendar would also advertise educational opportunities centered around women's studies or lesbian herstory that took place on Colorado's college campuses, particularly in Denver and Boulder.¹²⁴ From the years of 1975 to 1979, over 100 events, support groups, guest lectures, workshops, and more were held at women-owned bookstores and coffeehouses.¹²⁵ Two feminist bookstores were considered headquarters for lesbian feminist programming: the Woman to Woman bookcenter and Lilith, a woman's bookstore located in Boulder.

¹²² Kristen Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Duke University Press, 2016)., Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s.*, Alex D. Ketchum, *Ingredients for Revolution: American Feminist Restaurants, Cafes, and Coffeehouses* (Concordia University Press, 2022).

¹²³ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1976, 15.

¹²⁴ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, 24.

¹²⁵ Pulled from my dataset of transcribed references to bookstores/coffeehouses/etc. within *BMR*'s feminist calendar from the years 1975 to 1979.

Although The Velvet Hammer and the Three Sisters were popular stomping grounds for lesbian feminists, they did not always offer the same level of community support that bookstores and coffeehouses could. From 1975 to 1979, only 22 events at either bar were listed in *BMR*'s feminist calendar.¹²⁶ Many of these events were bands, musical groups, or theater troupes coming to entertain the lesbian feminists of Colorado. Leisure was an important feature of the lesbian feminist community. Women who worked as mobilizers within the movement were underpaid and overworked as feminist organizations were more concerned with furthering women's culture than they were with generating a profit.¹²⁷ Bars offered women a form of athletic leisure with dancing and pool, a game commonly enjoyed by the lesbian community. Many women in *BMR* commented on their love of the game, one saying, "When I came out, I took up pool," and another, "I met my lover at a bar; I first saw her when she was playing pool."¹²⁸ Bars created a sense of nostalgia for lesbians who could reminisce on their early venture into the lesbian community of the 1960s and early 70s, which existed primarily in bars. Not all lesbians felt this however, and many resented the oppressive environment of bars.

Arrests and police raids were not rare occurrences among Denver's gay and lesbian community. A study done by the Gay Coalition revealed that there were about 50 arrests made each month in the early 1970s.¹²⁹ In 1973 *Fourth Estate*, a newsletter from University of Denver, reported that The Gay Coalition had filed a complaint of harassment against the police

¹²⁶ Pulled from my dataset of transcribed references to events at bars within *BMR*'s feminist calendar from the years of 1975 to 1979.

¹²⁷ Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*; ——— "Women's Studies in Feminist Bookstores: 'All the Women's Studies Women Would Come In,'" *Signs* 33, no. 3 (February 15, 2008): 595–621, <https://doi.org/10.1086/523707>; Ketchum, *Ingredients for Revolution: American Feminist Restaurants, Cafes, and Coffeehouses*.

¹²⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1976, 8.

¹²⁹ Thomas Jacob Noel, "Gay Bars and the Emergence of the Denver Homosexual Community," *The Social Science Journal* 15, no. 2 (April 1978): 63, <https://lgbtqcolorado.org>.

department due to what one many referred to as a “witch hunt.”¹³⁰ A member of the coalition claimed that a male tour bus driver had “offered to cruise around the Chessman park, area and the state Capitol grounds, carrying Vice Squad members who would entice and elicit promises of a sexual nature.”¹³¹ This led to over 100 arrests, and later that year The Gay Coalition filed a lawsuit against the city.¹³² Although a majority of these arrests were gay males, the fear of undercover cops and arrests were clear in the lesbian community as well. Chocolate Waters, a *BMR* collective member, wrote about “a token policewoman who's probably a dyke herself but wants to haul you in just to prove she's not.,” in her 1979 article, “The Trouble With Women’s Bars in This Town.”¹³³ She also listed her other grievances like the tight quarters in crowded bars, costly drinks, and the fear of running into someone you “wouldn't care if you never saw again in your entire life or dodging the woman in the corner who likes you about as much as we all like the telephone company or taking the risk of being impaled on a cue stick.”¹³⁴

The other trouble with women’s bars was their exclusionary reputations. Black women, butch women, and older lesbians were less likely to support bar culture as they were more likely to be victims of discrimination by bartenders, owners, and even other patrons.¹³⁵ In her book *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*, scholar Kristen Hogan pointed to a Portland bookstore collective’s response to Portland’s Black Women’s Rap

¹³⁰ “Fourth Estate - University of Colorado Denver July 11, 1973 — Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection,” n.d., <https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.

¹³¹ “Fourth Estate - University of Colorado Denver July 11, 1973 — Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection.”

¹³² “The Straight Creek Journal July 10, 1973 — Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection,” n.d., <https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.

¹³³ “The Straight Creek Journal July 10, 1973 — Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection.”

¹³⁴ Chocolate Waters, “The Trouble With Women’s Bars in This Town,” *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1979, p.13.

¹³⁵ Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*, 56.; Hogan, “Women’s Studies in Feminist Bookstores: ‘All the Women’s Studies Women Would Come In,’” *Signs* 33, no. 3 (February 15, 2008): 595–621, <https://doi.org/10.1086/523707>.; Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, 115.

Group experiencing racism at their local women's bar.¹³⁶ Rather than let the black women face racism alone, the Woman's Place bookstore collective created a campaign with the rap group to educate other white women about racism.¹³⁷ This educational campaign was similar to a response from the Woman to Woman bookcenter collective; when a group of Colorado's black feminists raised awareness about their own experiences of discrimination, several members of the collective banded together and formed a consciousness-raising group to promote a more antiracist atmosphere in the bookcenter.¹³⁸

One of the women's bars, The Velvet Hammer also worked to eliminate racism and discrimination and held benefits for *BMR*, along with "countless benefits for women's groups," and hosted many poetry readings or musicians like Holly Near.¹³⁹ However, bars still supported an overwhelming population of young, white lesbians without children. Chocolate Waters had ended her article with "And the trouble with women's bars in this town is that we think we don't deserve anything better."¹⁴⁰ As bookstores centered women's groups, lesbian artists, and forms of lesbian leisure that created a stronger, inclusive community, more and more Colorado women began ditching the bar scene for better options, like bookstores and women's coffeehouses.

¹³⁶ Rap group refers to a group of women who have formed a group to discuss politics, social issues, and meet regularly for support. These groups show up across many feminist publications, including *Big Mama Rag*. Rap groups commonly held educational workshops, consciousness-raising sessions, and events to raise awareness for their core issues.

¹³⁷ Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*, 58.

¹³⁸ Author's interview with Kathy Riley, 2025.

¹³⁹ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1976, 9.

¹⁴⁰ Chocolate Waters, "The Trouble With Women's Bars in This Town," *Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1979, 13.

“Like the bookstore, our school will be a Woman Space.”¹⁴¹

In the mid 1970s, women had the option between joining the spirited haze of bars, or the many meetings, groups, and workshops available at bookstores and women’s centers.

Consciousness-raising had been an early feature of women’s groups but was replaced by skills-based courses that taught women how to establish credit, write poetry, and even fix a car.

Women could attend a “Women’s Survival School in the Mountains,” or take a course on “Finding a Good Lawyer.”¹⁴² Whether it be one or the other, or both, the lesbian feminist community of Colorado did not suffer a lack of options. Many women of the 1970s were becoming more aware of the necessity of women’s education and independence. Lesbian herstory, women’s studies, and a heightened focus on women’s literature contributed to the Colorado women’s culture, most of which was being created around the Denver area.

Not all Colorado lesbian feminists believed in institutional education from universities, and instead many relied on community education. In the *BMR* article “Redefining Our Own Worth,” members Sue, Vicki, Judy, and Connie opened a dialogue on the reality of education and a so-called decent or respectable job. Judy explained the tumultuous events in her life, pregnancy, childcare, medical jobs, and eventually her lesbian awakening, that made her rethink proper schooling, instead choosing “a job that would pay the bills without taking too much mental time.”¹⁴³ Many lesbian feminists worked odd jobs to make money, *BMR* even advertised classified ads from lesbian feminists requesting work like cleaning out gutters, babysitting, or the rare house sitter ad.¹⁴⁴ A rather common job was school bus driver. Colorado feminist-poet Janet Yench, Women’s Outdoor Club member Sharon Miles, and Kathy Riley, a *BMR* collective

¹⁴¹ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1975, 3.

¹⁴² *Big Mama Rag*, November 1974, 20.; *Big Mama Rag*, January 1975, 18.

¹⁴³ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1979, 9.

¹⁴⁴ *Big Mama Rag*, April 1976, 5.

member, all worked as bus drivers at one point while also working toward their feminist goals.¹⁴⁵ The schedule of a bus driver gave women plenty of free time during the day for poetry, meetings, or in Riley's case, for writing her *BMR* articles. Rather than put women's liberation on hold while going to school, then searching for a job, some feminists decided to switch gears and put feminism first. These lesbian feminists often supported community educational experiences, like the Woman to Woman school at the feminist bookcenter.¹⁴⁶

In an interview with Andy Lillich, feminist organizer and teacher at Woman to Woman school, she explained the significance of the "street school." Although Lillich was also a professor at Denver Metro University, and had an M.A. from Purdue, she understood the value of community education, saying, "This is a school by us, for us and about us... women who might feel remote from traditional educational institutions and who might feel intimidated by them."¹⁴⁷ Lillich was set to teach a class on literature with a focus on feminist literature or works written by women, but not all the courses offered at Woman to Woman focused on typical education. Other courses and workshops included, but not limited to, poetry, anarchy-feminism, feminist organizing on the job, and bicycling workshops.¹⁴⁸ In 1977 the Woman to Woman school continued through the summer, offering both outdoor and indoor education opportunities.

For women who wanted to spend their summer learning in the sun, there were free opportunities for volleyball, rugby, and a backpacking workshop that included two-day hikes. If those options weren't interesting enough, women could join Clair and Clare in Cheesman park for a folk-dance workshop with "international non-sexist folk dances." Then, "For those who want to spend at least part of the summer sitting down..." options ranged from a coming out

¹⁴⁵ Author's interview with Kathy Riley and Sharon Miles; *Big Mama Rag*, February 1977, 8.

¹⁴⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1975, 3.

¹⁴⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1975, 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, July 1976, 18.

group to learn about Denver lesbians, an 8-week consciousness-raising course, socialist and feminist theory, “Lesbo Lit” by Tea Schook to “recapture great moments of lesbian herstory,” or a racism workshop offered periodically through the summer.¹⁴⁹ One workshop promised to teach women how to do car tune-ups. Women from feminist childcare co-op offered childcare with an aim to keep prices low so every woman was able to join in on the summer school. Woman to Woman provided women with opportunities for education, self-improvement, and outdoor recreation, all centered around women and creating a women’s community in Colorado. *BMR* collective members worked hand-in-hand with Woman to Woman, ensuring women were aware of these events and even working as teachers at the school to provide women with knowledge and safety within their support systems.¹⁵⁰

“Women Unite, Take Back the Night, Self-Defense is Our Right!”¹⁵¹

Support groups for battered and abused women were often listed alongside the many dances, potlucks, and picnics in the *BMR* monthly calendar. Workshops and conferences centered on battered women were heavily endorsed by *BMR*, like the “Conference on Battered Women. This two-day workshop was aimed at community workers dealing with battered women.”¹⁵² Not only were women being provided with support, but community leaders were also being educated on how to best help these women. Resources like the Women in Transition House or the Women-in-Crisis refuge gave women a place to stay, eat, and occasionally partake in primal scream therapy.¹⁵³ Rape, abuse, and violence against women became issues that unfortunately grew increasingly important as rape and crime statistics rose in the 1970s.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹*Big Mama Rag*, July 1977, 17.

¹⁵⁰*Big Mama Rag*, October 1975, 3.

¹⁵¹*Big Mama Rag*, September 1978, 6.

¹⁵²*Big Mama Rag*, April 1977, 16.

¹⁵³Kate Burns, “Resistance and Resilience: Feminist and Lesbian Activity in Colorado, 1970s-1980s.”

¹⁵⁴*Big Mama Rag*, November 1977, 1.

In an emotional article titled “RAPE” by *BMR* member Carol Lease, she recounted her experience where she “pleaded with him not to hurt me- not to kill me.” Lease wrote about her fearful experience to inspire other women to speak out and demand change. In her work, Lease wrote that “The second rape takes place in the court room...,” explaining the trauma of being forced to relive the rape while being interrogated in a room full of people, including the rapist.¹⁵⁵ Alongside her story, *BMR* included graphics and blurbs explaining how to fight off a potential rapist. One image shows a woman with a weapon against a man’s throat, reading, “If you smoke, forget what mother told you about the kind of women who smoke on the street. You don’t have to smoke it, anyway; just carry it. It burns.” Although this article is included in *BMR*’s special issue “Rape: The All American Crime,” many other *BMR* issues contained resource listings and groups for battered or sexually abused women.

¹⁵⁵ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, 5.

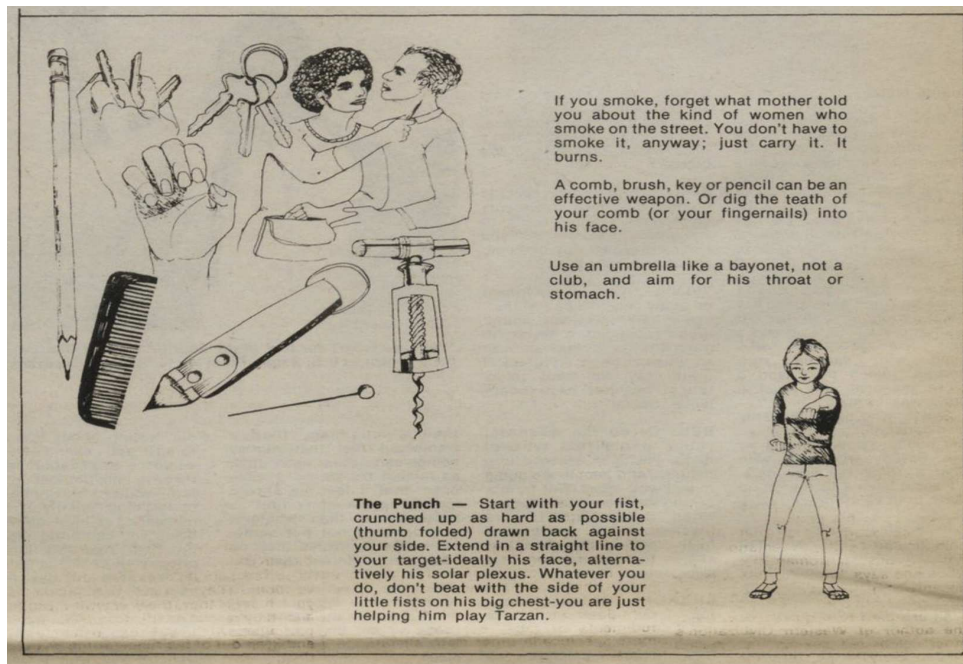


FIG: 2.1 Image from *Big Mama Rag's* August 1974 special issue on rape.¹⁵⁶ This issue contained several tips and examples for women to fend off attackers. (*Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, p.6.)

Denver's Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) was a group dedicated to increasing women's independence and helping to overcome trauma. This group renounced pornography, snuff films, prostitution, and the pornified mass media that commodified women to sell products.¹⁵⁷ This group of Denver women also worked to make the streets safe for women, sponsoring Take Back the Night marches down Colfax Avenue with chants of "Women Unite, Take Back the Night, Self-defense is Our Right!" In 1978 the group marched and distributed fliers with their demands which included a change in Colorado's sexual assault laws to include force used by husbands on their wives, free medical care for victims of rape, and

¹⁵⁶ "Big Mama Rag." *Big Mama Rag* 3, no. 2 (1974). *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* (accessed February 6, 2025). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SKMPPB389029195/AHSI?u=coloradosu&sid=bookmark-AHSI&xid=f6be163c>.

¹⁵⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, Nov 1977, 1.

decriminalization of prostitution to put punishment on the male Johns rather than the women.¹⁵⁸

Spousal rape was a hot-button issue that had not been openly discussed by women prior to the women's movement, and this newfound discussion often stemmed from women's experiences with consciousness-raising. By 1979 WAVAW had expanded and included a chapter made up of Boulder women who were "teaching ourselves to be articulate, and strong. We fight against woman-hating, the violence upon which our society is built."¹⁵⁹ Bookstores, universities, and women's resource centers often held workshops, benefits, and support groups for battered women.

The Boulder Women's Resource Center, Woman to Woman, and CU Boulder often sponsored or hosted events that drew awareness to battered women and raised money for safe houses.¹⁶⁰ In August of 1979, *BMR* advertised numerous conferences and benefits for battered and abused women. The National Conference on Violence Against Women brought in popular speakers like Del Martin and Robin Morgan, with ticket prices at a steep \$100.¹⁶¹ These events and benefits aimed to draw in large crowds to generate more funding for women's safe houses in Colorado or raised funds for WAVAW which helped women on a case-by-case basis. Del Martin was a major activist who fought for the end of domestic violence. In her 1976 book *Battered Wives*, Martin introduced domestic violence as a new political movement. She examined male domination over women as something that took place across cultures, races, social classes, and more.¹⁶² Colorado would frequently pull in celebrity activists like Del Martin, Robin Morgan, and even Audre Lorde for a poetry workshop in 1978 to hold benefits or lectures from influential

¹⁵⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, September 1978, 6.

¹⁵⁹ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1979, 1.

¹⁶⁰ *Big Mama Rag*, February 1978, p.18.; *Big Mama Rag*, November 1979, 4.

¹⁶¹ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1979, 26.

¹⁶² Annelise Orleck, *Rethinking American Women's Activism* (Taylor & Francis, 2022), 127.

women.¹⁶³ Women's groups, resource centers, and the support from the feminist community gave women the strength to refuse to be silent and submit to their fear. Throughout the 1970s Colorado lesbian feminists used bookstores, coffeehouses, and support groups to gain independence from the male institutions, and to strengthen women's sense of community.

“Poetry for the People”¹⁶⁴

Music, theater, and poetry were common forms of creating a sense of community. The creative arts brought women together and allowed women to vent, let out steam, or just to simply enjoy entertainment. Music brought women together, and even as mentioned earlier, inspired the name of *BMR*. Lesbian artists found a safe space in the feminist movement, and women felt inspired by the female musicians whose songs reflected how many women were feeling in the rising feminist movement. In a 1974 interview with *BMR* collective member Linda Fowler, lesbian musician Casse Culver explained why women found her music so influential, saying “Because women as a class are oppressed, it makes the music universal. That is why it touches as many women as it does.”¹⁶⁵ Culver had performed at *BMR*'s benefit and the crowd had been equally as supportive of her as she was of her women fanbase.

Musical guests and performances were common in Colorado's lesbian feminist community. Whether it be music groups at The Velvet Hammer or the many musical events at bookstores and coffeehouses, like the “Live classical music and poetry reading” at Lavender Coffeehouse or “An evening of music and poetry by Soupy Pierson, Jackie Earley, Chocolate Waters at Woman to Woman Bookcenter,” lesbian feminists supported the arts in any way they could.¹⁶⁶ Music could be a powerful political tool, or could provide women with some much

¹⁶³ *Big Mama Rag*, July 1978, 14.

¹⁶⁴ *Big Mama Rag*, January 1979, 2.

¹⁶⁵ *Big Mama Rag*, September 1974, 17.

¹⁶⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, July 1978, 18.

needed fun after a long day of work, organizing, and the many collective meetings that feminists belonged to. More often than not, music was accompanied by poetry readings and other artistic endeavors, creating a network of lesbian feminist artists within the women's community.

Lesbians and poetry had been linked since the days of ancient Greece, with the poet Sappho as the original lesbian, hailing from the isle of Lesbos.¹⁶⁷ In a similar vein of connection, lesbian feminists in Colorado used their pens to express their feelings, worries, and to celebrate their love for women. Poetry workshops at the Woman to Woman bookcenter or Lilith were often listed in BMR's feminist calendar. In 1978 Civil Rights activist, feminist, and lesbian poet Audre Lorde participated in a poetry reading and workshop event in Denver. Lilith, Boulder's feminist bookstore, and Woman to Woman were often the homes of these events, hosting full moon parties, poetry readings, and solstice celebrations.¹⁶⁸

Solstice events and full moon parties were a popular way for women to enjoy each other's company and celebrate nature. In August of 1974 *BMR* collective member Linda Fowler published a poem titled "SOLSTICE," which foreshadowed the importance of summer solstice events for Colorado's lesbian feminist community. This poem symbolized a connection between women and the earth:

"SOLSTICE"

"In the forest the women come and go
speaking of our mother, Sappho
Speaking of them all.
Speaking of woman, the beginning and end.
woman, the ever continuing force of life.
Speaking of Lilith and Cleopatra; the flaming Joan;
Madame Curie and Lucy Stone.
Speaking of them all.

¹⁶⁷ Chocolate Waters, "Sappho Was a Right on Woman, *Big Mama Rag*, October 1973, 10.

¹⁶⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1977, 17.

Woman, the regenerative. Balanced in swaying harmony
 between mother and daughter.
 Rocking out the phoenix.
 "I am the phoenix." Yes sister,
 you are the phoenix.
 Speaking of them all.
 The phoenix of the earth.
 The phoenix of woman.
 The phoenix of life force; all that is feminine.
 Rocking, rocking out
 Moving the ashes.
 Joan, we have come to regenerate you
 In the forest of the mother.
 In the power of our lives,
 In the fire of the night,
 Wrapped close to death, the wings unfold
 And the phoenix rises, rises
 Speaking of them all."
 -Linda Fowler¹⁶⁹

Fowler reflected on the women who came before her and the connection all these women had together through the simple idea of womanhood, and all that it carries. The poetry section was in every issue of BMR, filled with art of women's bodies, nature, and Mother Earth. Fowler's "SOLSTICE" poem was a representation of the importance of art, history, and nature within the women's movement, and connected women to nature similarly to male poets. Poetry served as a rhetorical tool for the various political issues lesbian feminists deemed important.

One workshop at Woman to Woman reflected the idea of music and poetry as political weapons, called the Poetry for the People workshop. As the women saw it, "Poetry for the People is part of a movement to popularize poetry in the US by de-mystifying it, taking it to the streets and putting it in a political context."¹⁷⁰ Women within the movement tried to make

¹⁶⁹ Linda Fowler, "SOLSTICE," *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, 17.

¹⁷⁰ *Big Mama Rag*, January 1979, 2.

poetry, and the act of publishing, accessible to the whole community. *BMR* collective member Kathy Riley planned a poetry anthology for Colorado women centered “around how each poet views her own process of acquiring self-knowledge and power over her life.”¹⁷¹ The *BMR* collective often made strides that encouraged women to branch out and develop their own art. In one issue, *BMR* made note of the history of anonymous poets, sustaining the belief that anonymous poets were primarily women who had been shamed or oppressed into silence. However, they note that “The repression did not halt the flow of the emotions and feelings...,” but rather forced them into anonymity.¹⁷² This history of oppression was why so many *BMR* members like Kathy Riley, Tea Schook, and Chocolate Waters consistently provided women with ample opportunity to write, read, and publish poetry.

Like music and poetry, theater became a noteworthy aspect of the women’s community, particularly in Boulder, Colorado. The Boulder Feminist Theatre Collective would often travel around Colorado, performing different plays like “Calm Down Mother,” or “Day after Day.”¹⁷³ The group was founded in 1975 and began by doing men’s plays with male actors, something that *BMR* collective member Tea Schook was not thrilled about. In her review of the collective’s play *Showgirl*, she wrote “Hopefully, they will be doing more plays where they need no men. Hopefully, it will be soon.”¹⁷⁴ The Boulder Feminist Theatre Collective’s problems were not irrelevant issues, Denver’s theatre group had also had troubles with finding feminist playwrights and filling the room with a large audience.

In a 1977 article by Mary Wadding in *BMR*, she asserted that the Boulder Feminist Theatre Collective’s goal was “to disseminate feminist ideals through theatre,” and “as most

¹⁷¹ Kathy Riley, “Colorado Anthology Needs Poets,” *Big Mama Rag*, January 1977, 5.

¹⁷² *Big Mama Rag*, July 1974, 9.

¹⁷³ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1976, 15.

¹⁷⁴ Theresa Schook, “Boulder Theatre Collective,” *Big Mama Rag*, May 1976, 13.

visual art is by men, they would like to work to express the female perspective.”¹⁷⁵ Wadding went on to discuss the issues that affected women’s theatre groups. Both Boulder and Denver’s feminist theatre groups struggled to find members and good scripts. The group members, Debbie Lester and Rachel Mailman voiced concerns about feminist writers and the shadow of doubt that crosses women’s minds when beginning a new project. The article ended with a call to action, requesting scripts written by women about women’s history and struggles to be to the feminist theatre groups. Denver’s theatre group often had advertisements in *BMR* issues, inviting “more dedicated women” to join the troupe.¹⁷⁶

Even with the struggles, the theatre collectives prevailed, and continued performing in bookstores, coffeehouses, and women’s centers through the 1970s. Coffeehouses at the Woman to Woman bookcenter often supplied guerilla theatre, improv and skit acting, along with workshops on how to write plays.¹⁷⁷ One event in April of 1978 promised “...live entertainment, guerrilla theater. There will be free childcare and food for sale.,” at Woman to Woman. This event was boasted about in *BMR*, with a claim that between 70 to 90 women crammed themselves into the Woman to Woman basement for free entertainment of music, theatre, poetry, and even a mime.¹⁷⁸ The Woman to Woman collective noted that they were “fulfilling the need for a non-alcoholic alternative meeting place for women of all ages,” and offering support for women in the arts.¹⁷⁹ This same article confirmed that free childcare had been available at the Gay Community Center and would continue to be offered at future coffeehouses. It was not uncommon to see listings for childcare, daycares, and available or free childcare during feminist

¹⁷⁵ Mary Wadding, “Local Feminist Theatre: Two Different Approaches,” *Big Mama Rag*, July 1977, 13.

¹⁷⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, February 1973, 1.

¹⁷⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, July 1978, 9.

¹⁷⁸ Dona Calacone, “Woman to Woman Coffeehouse: A Great Success,” *Big Mama Rag*, June 1978, 6.

¹⁷⁹ *Big Mama Rag*, June 1978, 6.

events. Concerns of childcare and children-friendly events became a growing concern as the community sought to be more inclusive to divorced and single mothers, as well as the increasing population of lesbian mothers.

“So You Want To Be A Mother”¹⁸⁰

Events at Woman to Woman bookcenter often featured free childcare or offered available childcare for a small fee. Workshops designed for bettering women were likely to offer free childcare, like a First Aid course at Woman to Woman or a feminist meeting marketed with “Childcare available. Donations appreciated.”¹⁸¹ Lesbian mothers were a new phenomenon for many women in the movement. In a *BMR* interview with Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon the two lesbian feminists discussed the concept of childcare at lesbian conferences that led to the founding of the Lesbian Mothers Union.¹⁸² Prior to the 1970s, lesbianism was seen as an opposition to motherhood. However, as more women became associated with political lesbianism, or came out of the closet after heterosexual marriages, lesbian mothers became a more common sight amongst feminist communities. Not only did *BMR* advertise events that supported lesbian mothers, but there were also countless articles dedicated to the subject.

Motherhood and maternity were hot topics in *BMR*, and many articles reflected on the reproductive politics of the 1970s. In one article, “Politics of Maternity,” *BMR* collective member Kathy Riley examined the state of maternity and birthing procedures in the United States. Like many other feminists of the era, Riley debated the safety of hospital births and the overwhelming presence of male doctors and explored the other options for women. “Homestyle” hospital births were gaining popularity, but prices were much more expensive than the standard

¹⁸⁰ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1977, 6.

¹⁸¹ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1976, 16.

¹⁸² *Big Mama Rag*, June 1974, 7.

hospital birth. A homestyle birth included a furnished hospital room, shorter stay, and “less emphasis on drugs and instruments.”¹⁸³ Riley ended her article with a critique of medicalized birthing procedures and highlighted the protests of women in California and Tallahassee who were fighting for cheaper costs, inspections of medical staff, and changes in policy to allow physicians to aid in non-emergency home births. Motherhood, specifically lesbian motherhood, was becoming so common that feminists worked to provide a wide array of information for women interested in becoming mothers. Another *BMR* article examined developing technology in maternity for lesbian mothers—artificial insemination.

In the article “Artificial Insemination– Do it Yourself,” self-induced artificial insemination (A.I) was offered as an alternative route for lesbians who had been struggling to become patients at A.I clinics, and who had been rejected from adoption agencies due to sexual orientation. Homophobia was not the only issue for women wanting to be mothers, high costs, marriage status, and stigmas against non-traditional jobs limited women’s access to maternity and motherhood. The idea self-induced A.I blended seamlessly with lesbian feminists’ DIY culture.¹⁸⁴ Lesbian feminists were often taking matters into their own hands, like publishing lists or guides of safe resources, and in the 1970s artificial insemination became their newest project. The article continued, explaining the process of insemination and offered a step-by-step guide on how to inseminate once the sperm had been properly sourced. The DIY culture did not mean lesbian feminists acted alone, as the article explained, “Although you can do it yourself, it helps to have friends assist with the insemination.”¹⁸⁵ Lesbian feminists relied on community support for many avenues of life, and motherhood was no different. Community support included a wide

¹⁸³ Kathy Riley, “Politics of Maternity,” *Big Mama Rag*, June 1977, .3.

¹⁸⁴ Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*.

¹⁸⁵ “Artificial Insemination, Do It Yourself,” *Big Mama Rag*, April 1979, 11.

birth of women's groups, resource centers, and the various financial programs to provide aid for mothers involved in legal battles.

The Lesbian Mothers Defense Fund was started in Washington state in 1974 and was heavily advertised in *BMR* across the span of the decade.¹⁸⁶ The fund worked to help mothers who were in contentious custody battles during a time when custody laws became more gender-neutral, meaning men were more likely to gain custody than they had been in the 1950s or 60s. From 1974 to 1977, numerous cases of lesbian mothers' custody battles were published in *BMR*. The Velvet Hammer even held benefits at the bar to raise funding for lesbian mothers, By 1979, *BMR* was regularly including the Lesbian Mothers support group in events, often meeting at Woman to Woman bookstore. In one editorial, titled "Lesbian Mothers Unite!!," the group wrote to "...welcome more lesbian mothers and their friends, lovers, and any other interested women to join us."¹⁸⁷

Many lesbian mothers began to form childcare networks, helping to ease the burden of full-time childcare and provide more available time for leisure. *BMR* member Kim Womantree wrote about the issues surrounding exclusion of mothers from feminist events in her article "Childfree Should Not Mean Carefree: The Feminist Responsibility in Childcaring and Child Sharing."¹⁸⁸ Womantree explains what she calls "crying baby syndrome," or the moment in a feminist meeting when a woman's kid begins crying, and instead of someone helping, everyone simply holds their breath until the mother takes her kid and leaves in embarrassment. Rather than exclude the mother, Womantree urged non-mothers to join in on these childcare networks, and enjoy the experience of being around the children, while also sharing the burden of childcare.

¹⁸⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, September 1974, 5.

¹⁸⁷ Pandoura, "Lesbian Mothers Unite!!," *Big Mama Rag*, June 1979, 21.

¹⁸⁸ Kim Womantree, "Childfree Should Not Mean Carefree," *Big Mama Rag*, July 1979, 15.

Many women in the movement were childfree, but that did not mean the lesbian feminist movement was childfree. Regardless of self-interest, Colorado's lesbian feminist community was working at forming a welcoming environment that provided space for women of all different lifestyles and backgrounds. As lesbian feminists strove for this woman's community in Colorado, many began moving out of bars, bookstores, or basements, and headed outside to appreciate the natural world. Moving into the late 1970s, there was an increased focus on women's health, Mother Earth, and outdoor recreation.

“TAKE CONTROL OF OUR BODIES, TAKE CONTROL OF OUR LIVES”¹⁸⁹

Women's health is often tied to the environment and nature.¹⁹⁰ Both spirituality and reproduction tie women to nature through Goddess-imagery of the Earth Mother and motherhood grants women “special access to the natural world.”¹⁹¹ Many women in Colorado, like the Coalition of CO Women Against Nukes group saw this connection between motherhood, women, and the environment. In one 1979 *BMR* article, titled, “Nuclear Radiation: A Daily Threat to Every Mother's Child,” collective member Terra discussed the need to protect the environment from radiation to then protect women's reproduction.¹⁹² In 1978 *BMR* ran a piece titled “No More Nukes,” which discussed women's connection to the environment, and therefore radiation. The article ended with a powerful reminder to women reading that radioactivity “is especially a women's issue. Women and children are eleven times as sensitive to radiation as men are. Our mother, the earth, is in enemy hands. We will not abandon her.”¹⁹³ Women were

¹⁸⁹ Vicki Ziegler, “TAKE CONTROL OF OUR BODIES, TAKE CONTROL OF OUR LIVES,” *Big Mama Rag*, October 1975, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Susie Jacobs, “Gender, Land and Sexuality: Exploring Connections,” *International Journal of Politics Culture and Society* 27, no. 2 (October 26, 2013): 173–90, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-013-9156-5>.

¹⁹¹ Susie Jacobs, 175.

¹⁹² Terra, “Nuclear Radiation: A Daily Threat to Every Mother's Child,” *Big Mama Rag*, July 1979, 17.

¹⁹³ “No More Nukes,” *Big Mama Rag*, June 1978, 4.

both connected to the environment through a spiritual belief in Mother Nature and their reproductive health that was ultimately tied to the natural world.

Lesbian feminists in Colorado embraced the connection of women with the environment and found themselves in the beginnings of a unique community centered around outdoor recreation. However, this lesbian nation in the Rockies did not happen overnight, it was a gradual process that started with an increased interest in full moon parties, solstice celebrations, and women's health workshops. From 1976 to 1979 there were 12 events advertised in *BMR* that centered on women's health and outdoor leisure.¹⁹⁴ Like the arts, many of these health-centric events were sponsored by or taking place at local bookstores and coffeehouses. *Woman to Woman* encouraged women's independence in caring for their own health and *Lilith*. Boulder's women's bookstore, regularly celebrated the full moon and advocated for natural lifestyles through birth control methods, healthy eating, and women's health.¹⁹⁵

In December of 1976 *BMR* listed "Feminist football in Cheesman Park. All women welcome; you don't have to be good.," in their monthly feminist calendar of events.¹⁹⁶ Outdoor sporting events included a large variety of women and gave them a space to try out new hobbies with a group of women-identified women. The supportive environment contributed to the feeling of a safe space, and the calls for "all women," gave a wide berth to who was allowed to join. Cheesman park in Denver became a hotspot for lesbian feminist leisure, and children were almost always welcomed. In 1977 there was a "potluck picnic for women and children at Cheesman Park in Denver. Assemble at the 12th ave side of the park at 11:00am. Bring frisbees, softballs, etc."¹⁹⁷ Potlucks and picnics also became commonplace for the lesbian feminist

¹⁹⁴ From the author's own dataset. Pulled from *BMR* events from 1974-79.

¹⁹⁵ *Big Mama Rag*, March 1976, 17.; *Big Mama Rag*, September 1978, 14.

¹⁹⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1976, 16.

¹⁹⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, April 1977, 15.

community. Lilith, the feminist bookstore in Boulder, frequently enjoyed full moon potlucks and workshops that provided education for women on topics of health, motherhood, and nature. These events were like the workshops offered at Woman to Woman in Denver. Women could attend these events and gain a newfound energy for healthy living and independence from government regulated doctor's offices.

In her book *Rethinking American Women's Activism*, Annelise Orleck examined the rise of health consciousness in the feminist movement. In 1971 *Our Bodies Ourselves* was published by the Boston Women's Health Collective as a self-help book dedicated to educating women on how to take care of their own bodies.¹⁹⁸ This self-help philosophy was a form of DIY culture that was prominent throughout feminism in the 1970s. Orleck noted the vast number of health-focused collectives being formed in women's communities by feminists. She mentioned the increased focus on self-examination through an example of the Evergreen State College women's health center in Washington. The center had a poster of a woman's fist holding a speculum that read, "With My Speculum I Can Fight!"¹⁹⁹ Colorado lesbian feminists joined in this health consciousness and focused on physical health through the outdoors, natural living, and local women's clinics like the Boston Women's Health Collective.

The Woman to Woman bookcenter offered many health-based workshops, one was advertised in *BMR* with "Pelvic self exam - bring your own speculum (they will be available to buy)."²⁰⁰ This was not the only event that aimed to teach women how to take care of themselves. Woman to Woman held multiple lessons on how to give yourself a pelvic exam, and hosted different health organizations, like the Colorado Springs Women's Health Care collective for a

¹⁹⁸ Orleck, *Rethinking American Women's Activism*, 132.

¹⁹⁹ Orleck, *Rethinking American Women's Activism*, 133.

²⁰⁰ *Big Mama Rag*, January 1979, 16.

meeting open to all women.²⁰¹ Self-examinations were not exactly rare in *BMR*'s diverse array of issues. In one 1974 issue, *BMR* ran a graphic that detailed a how-to guide on self-breast exams.²⁰² A summer solstice event in 1974 was described by Chocolate Waters in *BMR* as a weekend of fishing, hiking, and women trading knowledge. Waters wrote that there were "Women with their speculums, seeing their cervixes for the first time." Women were taking of themselves without masculinized, medical intervention.²⁰³ Although *Lilith* did not offer any self-exams, they did hold a "NATURAL BIRTH CONTROL class on the ovulation method..." and many other workshops that inspired women to draw back from the male-dominated medical field.²⁰⁴ Lesbian feminists had a continued focus on women's independence and leaned away from trusting establishments they believed to be non-feminist health centers. In 1975 the Colorado Springs Women's Health Collective published a women's guide for pelvic and breast exams, birth control, abortion, childbirth, masturbation, and the vaginal orgasm.²⁰⁵ Guides and workshops like these made health care accessible for all women, especially those who may be wary of doctors, could not afford health insurance, or those who wanted to live an anti-establishment lifestyle.

The Colorado Springs Women's Health Collective was originally founded with these core values in mind. *BMR* described the clinic as the "first of its kind in the Rocky Mountain Area..."²⁰⁶ The clinic was owned, operated, and staffed by feminist women who wanted to provide high-quality care at a low cost for all Colorado women. *BMR* contributor, and Colo.

²⁰¹ *Big Mama Rag*, April 1978, 1.

²⁰² *Big Mama Rag*, November 1974, 15.

²⁰³ "Summersolstice," *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, 12-13.

²⁰⁴ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1977, 15.

²⁰⁵ *Big Mama Rag*, May 1975, 14.

²⁰⁶ Vicki Ziegler, "TAKE CONTROL OF OUR BODIES, TAKE CONTROL OF OUR LIVES," *Big Mama Rag*, October 1975, 1.

Springs Women's Clinic member, Vicki Ziegler expressed the importance of feminist health centers, writing, "We firmly believe that knowledge is power; that taking control of our bodies is the first step toward taking control of our lives."²⁰⁷ Being in control of their own health was a growing thought for many lesbian feminists. In the 1979 BMR article, "Becoming Independently Healthy Women," Kate Sharp offered some recommendations for women in Colorado to manage their own health. Sharp emphasized the importance of managing stress through means such as "a walk in the woods, a massage, deep breathing, creating a work of art or performing music." Arts and recreation were important factors of Colorado's feminist community. Sharp also explored the benefits of exercise, writing:

"Don't be seduced by expensive exercise programs and spas.....But do find some energetic friends with a football or volleyball. Read up on and try a few aerobic and calisthenic routines. Take advantage of free recreational resources in your area. Buy some running shoes and start running. Take a yoga class. Join a women's athletic team. Do something!"²⁰⁸

Her words hinted at the incoming significance of outdoor recreation, and the importance of women enjoying free leisure without giving money to large corporations to better their health. The Colorado lesbian feminist community was growing more and more liberated, from support groups to self-exams, these women fought to gain independence and promote feminism in every aspect of their lives. Bookstores, women's centers, and feminist publications were great ways to promote natural living and women's health, but many outdoor recreation events were on a larger scale than a potluck or picnic. Festivals, solstices, and the occasional outdoor hiking excursion were advertised in *BMR*'s feminist calendar.

²⁰⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, Oct 1975, 1.

²⁰⁸ Kate Sharp, *Big Mama Rag*, December 1979, 17-18.

The lesbian feminist community slowly embraced outdoor recreation through events like Take Back the Night, outdoor retreats, and trail hikes, but festivals remained the most likely to bring in large crowds and profits. Summer solstices events were popular, but frequently took place out-of-state, finding campgrounds in New Mexico, Wyoming, or other neighboring states as a chance for women to explore new terrain and travel safely in a group.²⁰⁹ Feminist groups like Womenquest or the Lesbian National Organization were often planners of large-scale events like women's festivals and outdoor solstice parties. These events typically took place on college campuses or other venues that had the capacity to support the crowds. *BMR* and local bookstores were not absent from these celebrations. At the Third Annual Colorado Women's Festival feminist bookstores helped run booths and workshops, and *BMR* offered a free subscription in the raffle contest. Tea and Terra of *BMR* wrote about the event, explaining "Women and children, all, took this time away from the patriarchy to celebrate their strength and the spirit of women." Pictures from the festival show children running amok with face paint while their mothers lounged on the warm grass, basking in the sun.²¹⁰

Festivals and large-scale conferences were not always a perfect women's paradise as issues over space, electricity, funding, and even complaints about men were standard grievances of women's festivals. At the Third Annual Colorado Women's Festival, which took place September 18th in 1976, the entertainment portion started hours late due to mechanical errors with sound equipment and speakers.²¹¹ In 1977 *BMR* contributor Janie Hoback wrote about the Women's Festival committee reports which included an explanation of how the money raised was donated to Colorado's Feminist Credit Union to support women with financial assistance,

²⁰⁹ Pat Sexton & Chocolate Waters, "Summer Solstice," *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, 13.

²¹⁰ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1976, 10.

²¹¹ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1976, 10.

and issues brought up by the community. Hoback wrote that the committee received two complaints about men's presence at the event. She explained that legally they could not bar men from the festival, but that they "...try every way we can, however, to discourage their involvement."²¹² Even with these minor bumps in the road, women's festivals and the annual Colorado women's festival continued to be popular and profitable events.

These events were particularly helpful for feminist finances; craftswomen could sell art, jewelry, and merchandise, and others profited from selling refreshments. The Fifth Annual Colorado Women's Festival generated a crowd of over 500, with about 100 workers, and 58 booths to peruse. *BMR* member Dona Calacone wrote that "Woman to Woman bookcenter made a tidy profit primarily through the sale of lemonade."²¹³ This was a significant issue for lesbian feminist businesses and organizations. Feminist businesses often went under from lack of attention to generating revenue. Even the name *Woman to Woman bookcenter* seemed to be a push against a capitalist store. *Woman to Woman* was not alone in this rejection of capitalism, in a set of goals from the 1976 *BMR* collective, the members wrote, "*Big Mama Rag* is not a business in that it does not intend to make a profit. Any profit incidentally made will be recycled into other feminist projects or back into the paper itself."²¹⁴ This was a common way of thinking for many feminist businesses and projects in Colorado. As the 1980s grew near, many Colorado women's businesses went under because of lack of grants, support, and the feminist lack of interest in profits due to a heightened focus on providing free and accessible programming for women.²¹⁵

²¹² Janie Hoback, "Women's Festival Committee Reports," *Big Mama Rag*, October 1977, 11.

²¹³ Dona Calacone, "Women's Festival Celebrates Fifth Year," *Big Mama Rag*, October 1978, 1.

²¹⁴ "Goals for *Big Mama Rag*," August 1976.

²¹⁵ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1978, p.1.



FIG: 2.2 First Colorado Women's Festival in Denver in September of 1974.
 ("Women's Festival," *Big Mama Rag*, October 1974, p. 11.)



FIG: 2.3 Photo of children getting their faces painted at the Third Annual Colorado Women's Festival in Denver in September of 1976. (Tia and Terra, "Third Annual Colorado Women's Festival," *Big Mama Rag*, October 1976, p. 10.)

“Lack of Funds?”²¹⁶

March 15th, 1979, Denver’s most popular women’s bar, The Velvet Hammer, shut down.²¹⁷ In the next month’s issue, *BMR* published an editor’s note claiming that the bar may reopen if the owners could get enough money together.²¹⁸ Based on the lack of references to The Velvet Hammer after 1979, the bar presumably shut down for good. Money troubles were not uncommon for women-owned, often feminist, businesses. A year prior in 1978, Boulder’s feminist bookstore Lilith was “forced to close” due to a lack of financial support.²¹⁹ Finances were not the only contributor to women’s businesses closing, many struggled with vandalisms and adapting to community needs.²²⁰

Four years earlier the *BMR* office had been vandalized, and in 1976 Tea Schook wrote about the increase in vandalisms of Boulder’s Abortion Clinic.²²¹ Boulder’s Abortion Clinic had recurring vandalisms, often coming after a picketing or protest, where words like “Butchers” and “Murder Inc” were painted onto the building.²²² *BMR*’s vandalisms led to destruction of several newspaper bundles, decorations were ripped off the wall, and glue was poured into typewriters; whoever vandalized *BMR* wanted to stop the distribution of feminist material.²²³ Break-ins at the Socialist Workers Party office, and years later Woman to Woman bookcenter, led to more suspicions about the perpetrators.

²¹⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, April 1980, 1.

²¹⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1979, 14.

²¹⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, April 1979, .2.

²¹⁹ *Big Mama Rag*, June 1978, 9.

²²⁰ *Big Mama Rag*, February 1976, 3.

²²¹ *Big Mama Rag*, September 1975, 1.; *Big Mama Rag*, February 1976, 3.

²²² *Big Mama Rag*, February 1976, 3.

²²³ *Big Mama Rag*, September 1975, 1.

In 1977 Tea Schook and Kathy Riley exposed the truth of these break-ins in their article, “FBI Informant Admits BMR Break-In.”²²⁴ In this article the *BMR* collective members revealed Tim Redfearn, a former student at Metropolitan State College in Denver, had been spying on the newspaper collective, and its local bookstore, Woman to Woman. Redfearn had been watching the women’s groups for any socialist activity, and believed socialist women “are hanging out now at the Woman to Woman feminist bookstore. . .The radicals running the store are not only selling lesbian homosexual and women's liberation works, but also selling radical literature.”²²⁵ Redfearn had allegedly been trained by the FBI and paid monthly stipends of \$300 through the years of 1973 to 1975, then received an increase to \$400 for the rest of his time in 1976.²²⁶ Redfearn, under the code name Lennon, provided the FBI with details of group meetings from the Student Democratic Committee, the Socialist Workers Party.²²⁷ Not only did Redfearn sit-in on meetings and break into feminist businesses, he also burglarized the home and office of Representative Patricia Schroeder, a politician who was incredibly active in Denver’s feminist community.²²⁸ These break-ins both scared the women and often involved robbery or expensive equipment broken, leading to extra financial stressors for feminist organizations. Money troubles and the dangers of running feminist businesses often pushed women into closing shop, but in some cases lesbian feminist culture demanded the change.

In August of 1979, months after the closing of her bar Linda Ryan, owner of The Velvet Hammer, explained her different reasons the bar “failed.”²²⁹ In the *BMR* interview Ryan, along

²²⁴ Tea Schook & Kathy Riley, *Big Mama Rag*, May 1977, 2.

²²⁵ Tea Schook & Kathy Riley, *Big Mama Rag*, May 1977, 2.

²²⁶ “The Straight Creek Journal March 24, 1977 — Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection,” n.d., <https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.

²²⁷ “Cherry Creek Pioneer - Metro State August 11, 1976 — Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection,” n.d., <https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.

²²⁸ “The Straight Creek Journal November 22, 1979 — Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection,” n.d., <https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.

²²⁹ Judy Barlow, “The Velvet Hammer— A Difficult Lesson,” *Big Mama Rag*, August 1979, 14.

with co-founder Linda Foley, explained the vast number of issues going on within the bar's community. The women had aimed to create a women's place for feminists to get together and have fun, but were not prepared to the level of alcoholism many lesbian feminists were struggling with, or as Ryan put it, "Another thing that it took us a long time to realize was that probably 80% of the women we dealt with regularly had drinking problems."²³⁰ Alcoholism was a difficult issue in the lesbian community, with women often coming out of the closet and finding themselves at the bottom of the bottle.

LUNA, or Lesbians United to Nip Alcoholism/Drug Abuse, was a substance-abuse support group formed in 1977. The group defined substance abuse as the use of any substance (aspirin, alcohol, sugar, caffeine, etc...) that was causing negative effects in a woman's life.²³¹ LUNA believed alcoholism and substance abuse to be feminist issues, and that the community should work together to support women struggling with these addictions. Many lesbian feminists felt this way about addictions, *BMR* member Kathy Riley referred to these as "little suicides," and theorized that dependency on cigarettes was political as feminist smokers were giving power to the industry. In this article, "The Little Suicides: Is it Personal or Integrity," Riley admitted to her own struggles with a nicotine addiction and shared her experience of being a "co-alcoholic." A co-alcoholic was the person who offered drinks and rides to or provided excuses for someone struggling with their alcoholism. Riley had a message about the importance of groups like LUNA, writing, "Since I've known the women of LUNA...in Denver, it infuriates me, it surprises me, that anyone would drink with or offer a drink to anyone she knows is alcoholic."²³² Riley's article sent a message to women to keep both their dependencies in check and to watch

²³⁰ Judy Barlow, "The Velvet Hammer— A Difficult Lesson," *Big Mama Rag*, August 1979, 14.

²³¹ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1979, 11.

²³² Kathy Riley, "The Little Suicides: Is it Personal or Integrity," *Big Mama Rag*, 16

out for the women around them who may need community support. LUNA wanted to become that community support for lesbian alcoholics. LUNA was not a typical AA group and instead aimed to provide a women's group that could enjoy a non-alcoholic way of living.

The women of LUNA not only held a regular support group that met each Tuesday, which would go on to be advertised well into the 1980s.²³³ LUNA also published articles, essays, and educational pieces in BMR. One essay compared alcoholism to another closet that lesbian women needed to come out of, writing, "For many of us it took years to be able to accept the fact that we are alcoholics and sometimes, just as long to begin doing something about it." The women of LUNA believed that the process of declaring themselves an alcoholic was not only a long and grueling one, but also one that needed to be met with understanding, similar to coming out as a lesbian.²³⁴ LUNA partnered with both the Woman To Woman bookcenter and *BMR*, with the center hosting support events and even having collective members in the group while *BMR* advertised these events and provided opportunity to the countless women writing in to the paper about their sobriety journeys.²³⁵ As bars shut down and lesbian feminists gained a heightened awareness of alcoholism within the community, Colorado women fully prioritized the women's centers and feminist bookstores still left standing. Colorado's lesbian feminist community revolved around bookstores, support groups, and sometimes, outdoor recreation. From 1974 to 1979, Denver was the epicenter of Colorado's lesbian feminist community.

²³³ *Big Mama Rag*, September 1978, 2.; *Big Mama Rag*, October 1981, 18.

²³⁴ "What? Another Closet?" *Big Mama Rag*, October 1978, 7.

²³⁵ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1979, 15.

“Women’s Community Conceived: We Gotta Live Together”²³⁶

BMR’s monthly issues often featured a feminist calendar. From the years of 1974 to 1979, a feminist calendar was included in each monthly issue, normally included amongst classified ads and resource listings on the back page.²³⁷ These calendars included the events happening around Colorado, particularly in the Denver and Boulder areas. I transcribed 175 events that detailed a specific location, ranging from support groups at Woman to Woman to large-scale women’s festivals at East High School in Denver.²³⁸ The events were categorized into eight categories: bookstores, festival/benefit/party, women’s groups, education, arts, workshops, coffeehouses, and outdoor recreation. Of these 175, 68 took place at or were sponsored by a bookstore (Lilith and Woman to Woman), 31 were women’s groups (BMR meetings, Lesbian Task Force, and various support groups like LUNA and WAVAW), 25 were educational based (Women’s Studies, presentations, free films, and guest speakers), and 21 were festivals, benefits, or parties that celebrated women’s community. The other four categories were smaller but still noteworthy: 12 events centered around outdoor recreation (hikes, picnics, and outside marches), 8 were workshops (Including, but not limited to auto-repair, outdoor education, and poetry, etc....), 5 were gay and lesbian coffeehouses, and 4 were related to the arts but did not take place at any bookstore or women’s center, instead these were often located at college campuses.²³⁹

²³⁶ Woodwoman, “Women’s Community Conceived: We Gotta Live Together,” *Big Mama Rag*, June 1975, 4.

²³⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1979, 15.

²³⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1976, 6.

²³⁹ *Big Mama Rag*, January 1974-November 1979.

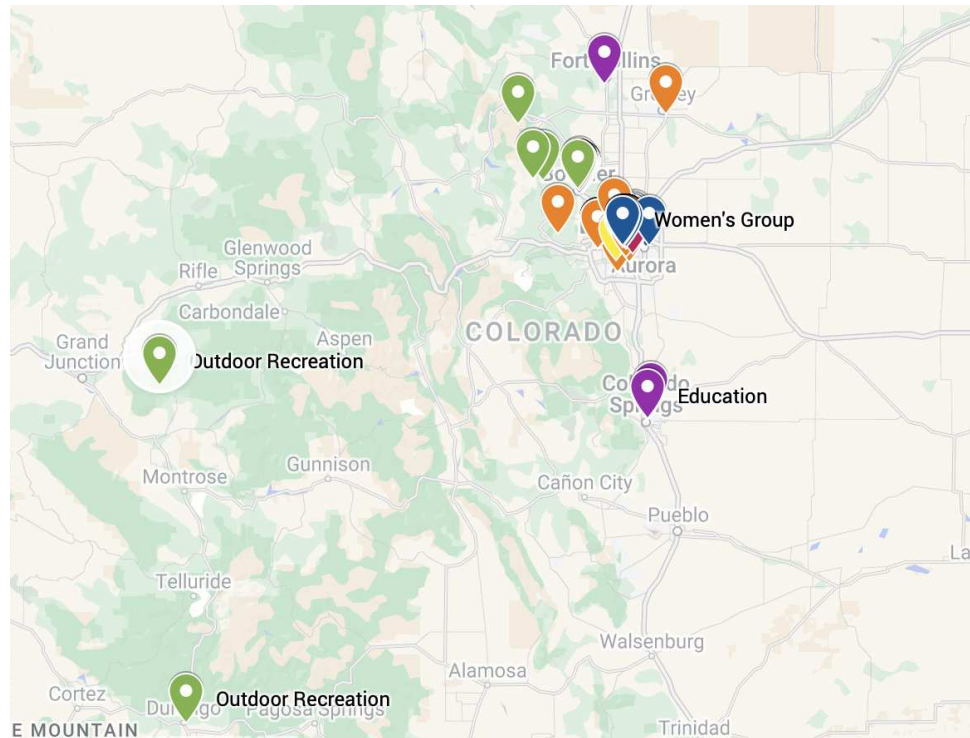


FIG:2.4 Event locations advertised in *Big Mama Rag* from 1974-79. (Google My Maps)

The above figure, FIG:1.4, shows the spread of events across Colorado, color-coded to show the different events. Feminist events seem to be concentrated in the Denver and Boulder areas, with some outdoor recreation events sparsely dotting the map in cities like Durango, Colorado Springs, and Grand Junction. One of these outdoor events was a trail hike at the Mesa Trailhead and the other was a bicycle trip; a woman, Clare, wrote in to *BMR* and invited women to join her on a “ride from Durango to the Summer Solstice in Albuquerque during week of June 16,” she went on to add “This is my first trip, you can do it too.”²⁴⁰ Although there were events like these that happened outside of the Denver/Boulder area, most events remained in the two cities, often even clustering in one neighborhood or across a single street.

²⁴⁰ *Big Mama Rag*, May 1975, 14.

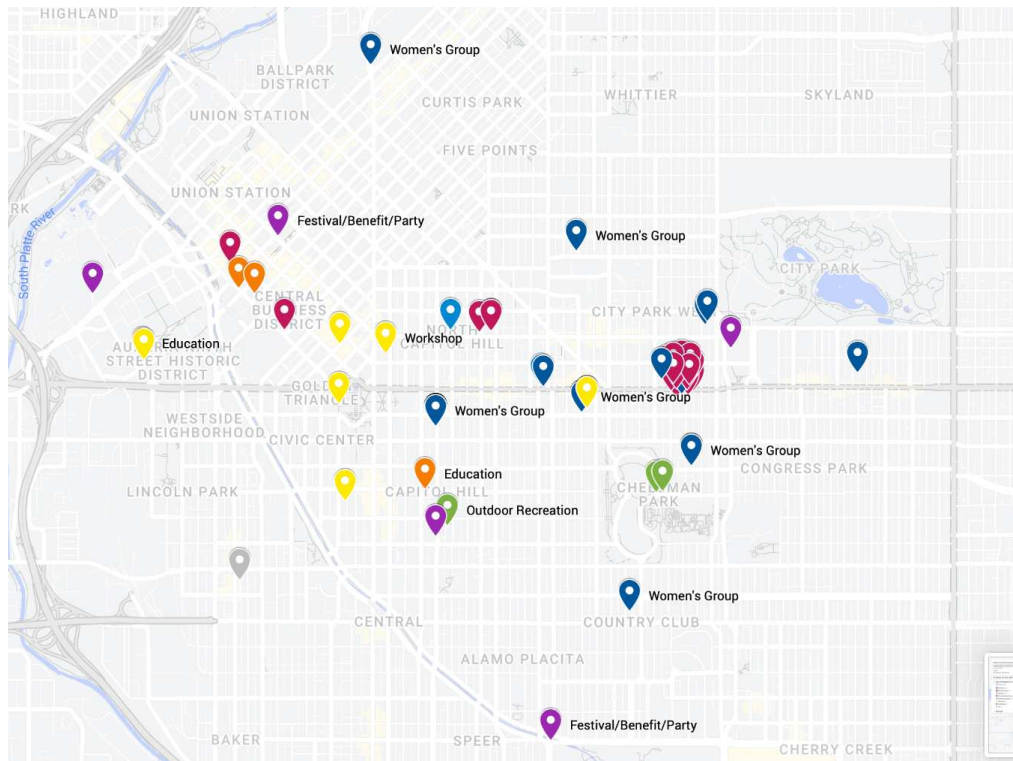


FIG:2.5 Event locations referenced in *Big Mama Rag* around the Denver area 1974-79. (Google My Maps)

Through the 1970s, Denver became a major hotspot for lesbian feminist events. The main street cutting through the center of FIG:1.5 is Colfax, where *Woman to Woman* was located, along with the many events the collective hosted in their basement.²⁴¹ Many of the Denver events were centralized in the Capitol Hill area. The Capitol Hill neighborhood was where many businesses were located, like *The Velvet Hammer*, the women's bar, and the *Woman to Woman* bookcenter.²⁴² The large cluster of dark pink dots on the map are on Colfax Avenue, showing the many events that took place at *Woman to Woman*. The BMR collective were no strangers to the neighborhood; the office was located nearby on Gaylord Street, and many members lived in Capitol Hill themselves.²⁴³ About 50 events of the 175 took place in the greater Denver area, with the majority being in Capitol Hill or on Colfax Avenue. Denver's Cheesman Park is in the

²⁴¹ *Big Mama Rag*, April 1978, 16.

²⁴² *Big Mama Rag*, February 1977, 1.

²⁴³ Author's interview with Kathy Riley; *Big Mama Rag*, January 1973, 3.

bottom right quadrant of the map. Cheesman Park was the main source of outdoor recreation events in Denver, mainly consisting of picnics, potlucks, and sports at the park.²⁴⁴ Denver's lesbian feminist community was often immersed in bookstores, coffeehouses, and educational workshops. Denver was home to many feminist and women-owned businesses and bookstores like Woman to Woman, Radical Information Project bookstore, Militant books, The Velvet Hammer, and *BMR*.²⁴⁵ Denver was home to a very active lesbian feminist community, but as the 1970s marched on, the community began to spread around the state.

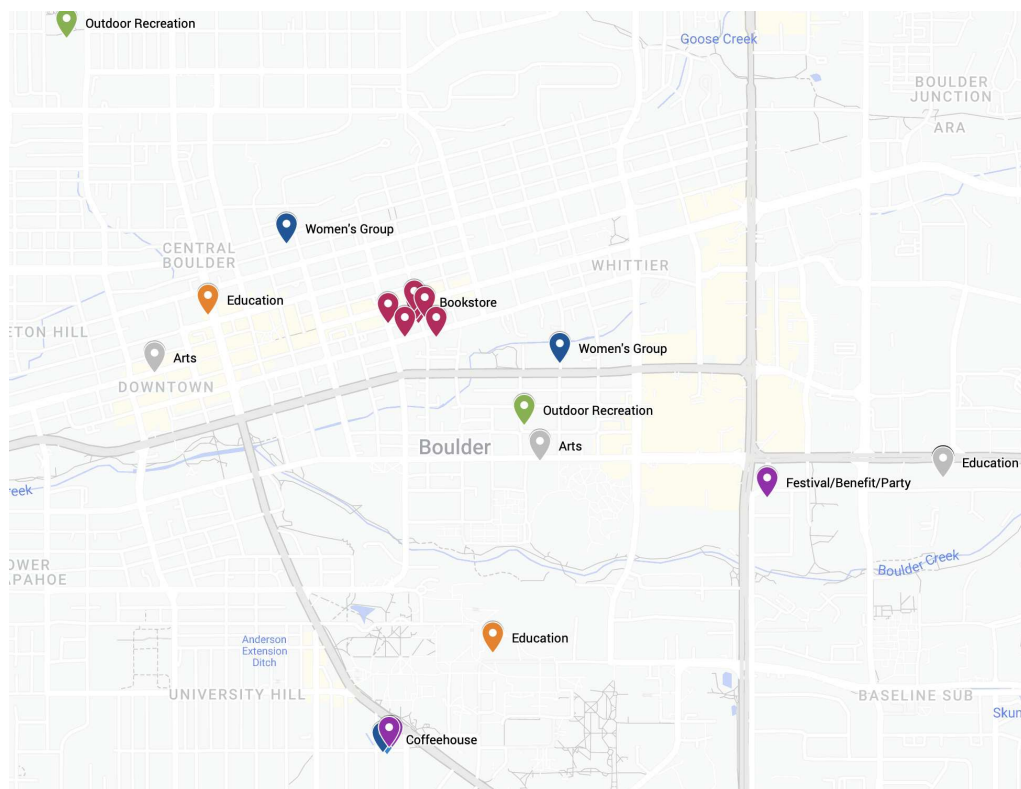


FIG:2.6 Event locations referenced in *Big Mama Rag* around the Boulder area 1974-79. (Google My Maps)

Boulder's lesbian feminist community was a growing population. Feminist events took place across the city, mainly downtown or near the university, Colorado University Boulder.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ *Big Mama Rag*, April 1977, 16.

²⁴⁵ *Big Mama Rag*, May 1975, 14.

²⁴⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, February 1975, 18.

Unlike Denver, Boulder did not house as many feminist or woman-owned businesses; the feminist bookstore, Lilith, was one of the main sources of lesbian feminist community. The cluster of dark pink points represent the events at Lilith. Although Lilith shut down in 1979, it had been a popular site of lesbian feminist culture with the many celebrations, workshops, and poetry readings that took place there.²⁴⁷ Feminist businesses needed community support to function, and most of the Colorado's feminist community seemed to rarely stray from Denver's city limits. Even with the smaller community, Boulder found its own lesbian feminist niche with the arts. Boulder's events often revolved around the arts, primarily the Boulder Feminist Theatre Collective.²⁴⁸

Lesbian feminist communities were not uniform conglomerates of women. Communities take the shape of what is offered around them; Denver lesbians utilized their feminist businesses as spaces for support and community, while Boulder lesbians tended to create spaces where they could. This often-meant Boulder lesbian feminists rented out buildings for coffeehouses, joined women's groups that never settled in a permanent location, and attended feminist lectures on college campuses.²⁴⁹ Community needs also impacted the geographic layout of lesbians. When alcoholism became a larger feminist issue, lesbian feminists began holding more and more events at bookstores, parks, and places where a woman could enjoy a non-alcoholic night out.²⁵⁰ The lesbian feminist reliance on bookstores, businesses, and formerly, bars was causing the community to be reliant on money and consumerism. As businesses went under and women searched for a space to build community, outdoor recreation became a place of free, welcoming, and accessible leisure.

²⁴⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, June 1978, 9.

²⁴⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1976, 15.

²⁴⁹ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1976, 15.

²⁵⁰ *Big Mama Rag*, June 1978, 6.

Conclusion

In each monthly issue of *BMR*, a collective member updated their audience with a column titled “BMR: Where We’re At.”²⁵¹ This column often provided a space for the BMR collective to request funds, announce outcomes from benefits or *BMR* meetings, or to write a “gentle reminder to keep your local impoverished BMR collective in mind if you ever have any odd jobs you need done. We clean, paint, babysit, wash windows etc. etc. etc....Spring cleaning anyone?”²⁵² This column often reflected the different issues BMR faced with funding, vandalism, and even a “borrowed” typewriter that the collective seemed desperate to get back.²⁵³ This column served as a way for BMR members to wrap up any loose ends from collective meetings, festivals, and explain any problems with former issues like spelling or printing errors.

By 1979 this column had announced the departure of collective members like Tea Schook, Linda Fowler, Kathy Riley, and others. *BMR*’s collective was a revolving group of women, mostly lesbian feminists, who would eventually leave *BMR* to pursue other ventures, like opening bookstores or starting law school.²⁵⁴ Each collective member brought unique goals and ideas to *BMR*. For example, the 1976 collective of *BMR* had a set of eleven goals including, but not limited to, “pass on skills related to newspaper production within the women’s community,” “publicize local resources for women,” and “make BMR accessible to as many women as possible through distribution, coverage, and editorial accessibility.”²⁵⁵ The *BMR* collective of 1979 was made up of six women, one being Vicki Piotter, and had several

²⁵¹ *Big Mama Rag*, January 1975, 5.

²⁵² *Big Mama Rag*, April 1976, 5.

²⁵³ *Big Mama Rag*, March 1976, 5.

²⁵⁴ *Big Mama Rag*, June 1977, 5.

²⁵⁵ “Goals for Big Mama Rag,” August 1976. From the author's personal archive.

contributors like Chocolate Waters and the Women of LUNA.²⁵⁶ Often women would step down from being collective members and move into categories that required less of a time commitment, like contributor or supporter.²⁵⁷ Collectives, contributors, and supporters set the tone for what issues, events, and resources would be advertised in *BMR*.

As a new collective moved into the basement on Gaylord Street, *BMR* would begin undergoing the usual changes. The 1980s brought a new assortment of issues and politics for women to focus on. *BMR* grew a bigger focus on women in prison, lesbian mothers, and more support groups, like Beyond Bitching, a “support group for lesbians who are terminating relationships” moving into the 1980s.²⁵⁸ To give context on the organization of Colorado’s lesbian feminist community, a report by Lesbians-Colorado provided intel from some women who attended the Lesbians-Colorado Conference in 1979. Of the 619 women who attended, 250 women provided answers to the polls; “61% live in Denver, 20% from northeastern Colorado (Greeley, Fort Collins, Longmont, Broomfield, Boulder, and outlying areas). 13% from mountain areas, and 6% from southeastern Colorado.” Of the lesbian women pulled, 89% had gone to a women’s bar, 79% had gone to Woman to Woman bookcenter, and 62% said they had read *BMR* within the last year. About 70% of the women said they wished for other events to be available, frequently mentioning outdoor recreation, sports, and coffeehouses.²⁵⁹ Also at this event was the Women's Outdoor Club, founded in 1979, which would fulfil some of these wishes.

Lesbian feminists still largely concentrated at bookstores, coffeehouses, and women’s centers, but there was a bigger emphasis on outdoor recreation to come in the 1980s. Along with

²⁵⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1979, 3.

²⁵⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, January 1980, .3.

²⁵⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, February 1981, 15.

²⁵⁹ “Lesbians—Colorado Committee Releases Report,” *Big Mama Rag*, December 1979, 2.

a new *BMR* collective, a new Colorado-based publication emerged in 1980. *Double Standard*, a newspaper for Colorado lesbian feminists, joined *BMR* as a source of news, entertainment, and local events.²⁶⁰ *Double Standard*, paired with the newly developed Women's Outdoor Club, led to a push for outdoor recreation.²⁶¹ Throughout the 1970s Colorado's lesbian feminist community had rarely strayed from the streets of Denver, but the Women's Outdoor Club would push women out from the city and into the mountains.

²⁶⁰ "Double Standard." *Double Standard*, June 1981, p. [1]. *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/RCSNMF315822035/AHSI?u=coloradosu&sid=bookmark-AHSI&xid=ea9e4cbb. Accessed 17 Feb. 2025.

²⁶¹ *Double Standards*, June 1981, 8.

Chapter 3- *the Earth, our Mother, is the basis of our real health*

A 1993 article in *Big Mama Rag (BMR)* examined radiation exposure, alcoholism, and reproductive health through a focus on Native American women in communities across the West, from Canada to Arizona. Although the article focused on Native women, it spoke to the larger context of the lesbian feminist community and the spread of ecofeminism through *BMR* and *Double Standard*. The 1983 article connected Native matriarchal deities like The Great Goddess and women as a “carrier of life” being foundational to Native American culture. The article read, “the integrity of our reproductive power, and that of all female life, including the Earth, our mother, is the basis of our real health.”²⁶² Throughout the 1980s, Colorado’s lesbian feminist movement would gain exposure to ecofeminist literature and ideology from *BMR* and *Double Standard*. The two publications had staff writers such as Jane Hoback, Jessica Lipknack, and *BMR*’s Rose, who each focused on physical, mental, and spiritual health. These three categories were often tied together with a throughline of women’s bodies, reproduction, and motherhood.²⁶³

This chapter will provide an outline of the broader feminist movement and how Colorado’s lesbian feminist community fits into the big picture of 1980s ecofeminism. From nuclear radiation to artificial insemination, Colorado lesbian feminists were producing a community that prioritized natural living and nature-based solutions to modern, masculinized institutions like medical science and psychiatry.²⁶⁴ Reproductive and environmental health were

²⁶² *Big Mama Rag*, January 1983, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/AWSHXV600444478/AHSI?u=coloradosu&sid=bookmark-AHSI&xid=31b3f185. Accessed 1 Mar. 2025, 9.

²⁶³ “Women for Survival,” *Double Standard*, April 1980, 14.

²⁶⁴ Lori Bradford, “Mental Illness: Myth or Madness—A Legacy of Psychiatric Abuse,” *Big Mama Rag*, May 1981, 10.

at the forefront of many Colorado women’s minds. This ecological lens of feminism began to slowly push women outdoors, which I will discuss more in Chapter Four, but the first inklings of outdoor recreation are often tied to the spread of ecofeminism in Colorado’s lesbian feminist community.

Introduction

The public memory of feminism’s second wave is often centered around the 1960s through the 1970s. The 1980s are often thought of as a decade of conservative backlash politics field by former President Ronald Reagan’s anti-feminist and anti-gay stances.²⁶⁵ However, many feminist scholars examine the mobilization tactics of the feminist community that carried over from the 1970s into the 1980s. Historians Annelise Heinz and Cameron Blevins explored the significance of lesbian newsletters in their article, ““Separated, but far from alone”: Forging Lesbian Networks in the 1970s–1980s.”²⁶⁶ In this article the two scholars examined *Lesbian Connection*, a nation-wide newspaper for lesbian feminists, and tracked the spread of “Contact Dykes.” Contact Dykes were lesbian women who willingly allowed their names and contact information to be published in the Contact Dyke Directory of *Lesbian Connection*, giving women widespread connection through print. Throughout the 1980s the number of Contact Dykes steadily increased, showing the growing engagement in the lesbian feminist movement.²⁶⁷

At the end of their article Heinz and Blevins acknowledge that though “dominated by social conservatism” that “the 1980s were also a time of sustained progressive activism and community building by women of color and lesbian feminists, from the welfare rights movement

²⁶⁵ Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, “Feminism Within American Institutions: Unobtrusive Mobilization in the 1980s,” *Signs* 16, no. 1 (October 1, 1990): 27–54, <https://doi.org/10.1086/494644>.

²⁶⁶ Cameron Blevins and Annelise Heinz, ““Separated, but Far From Alone,,:” Forging Lesbian Networks in the 1970s-1980s,” *Pacific Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (January 1, 2024): 417–44, <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2024.93.3.417>.

²⁶⁷ Blevins and Heinz, ““Separated, but Far From Alone:” Forging Lesbian Networks in the 1970s-1980s,’20.

to alternative publishing presses.”²⁶⁸ Different types of feminisms were popping up around the nation, even during the conservative political era. Women were using older forms of networking like print media and finding new ways to challenge the system while fostering community. Many lesbian feminists further developed previous goals, like forming women’s groups and setting up women’s associations in fields that had been historically oriented toward men.

In Denver in the 1970s there had been many women’s clubs, support groups, and health associations created to form a tight-knit women’s community and these groups seemed to thrive in the 1980s, even with the dark shadow of more conservative politics looming ahead. Women continued to form women’s only clubs and spaces, which were often centered on activities deemed too masculine for women, like outdoor recreation or medical technology. Colorado-based publications like *BMR* and *Double Standard* had increased rates of engagement from subscribers moving into the 1980s. In June of 1981 the Denver-based publication, *The Word is Out* became *Double Standard*. In the issue the collective wrote that they “may have changed our name and our face, but as Colorado's only lesbian newspaper, we haven't changed our commitment to providing as much information as we can for and about Colorado's active and diverse lesbian community.” The change of name also brought a slight change in content. During the 1980s *Double Standard* provided much more content dedicated to outdoor recreation and advertised events that happened all over the state with no prioritization of Denver.²⁶⁹

Like *BMR*, *Double Standard* was a Colorado-based publication that revolved around women’s issues, feminist politics, and included the many events women could attend each month in their own calendar. Unlike *BMR* however, *Double Standard* was explicitly lesbian.²⁷⁰ *BMR*’s

²⁶⁸ Blevins and Heinz, ““Separated, but Far From Alone:” Forging Lesbian Networks in the 1970s-1980s,” 444.

²⁶⁹ “Yes, You Have the Right Paper.” *Double Standard*, June 1981, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* (accessed February 22, 2025), <https://link.gale.com>, 1.

²⁷⁰ *Double Standards*, June 1981, 1.

collective was primarily made up of lesbian feminists, but their paper was aimed at all women. *Double Standard* did not exclude heterosexual women, but rather they saw themselves as a paper for Colorado lesbians. As seen in both *BMR*'s and *Double Standard*'s monthly calendar, women's clubs and events were continually sprouting up all over Colorado, with the Women's Outdoor Club having over 100 members in the state in 1981.²⁷¹ An increased focus on feminist organizing outside of protests and picketing came along with the 1980s. Women were moving off the streets and into local women's groups and organizations.

In her article, "Feminism within American Institutions: Unobtrusive Mobilization in the 1980s," political scientist and researcher of feminist activism, Mary Katzenstein examined women's associations formed in the 1970s and 80s within institutions that often ignored or were historically inaccessible to women. Katzenstein argued that "What was new in the 1970s and proliferated in the 1980s is the mobilization of women inside institutions *that have long been male dominated*." She goes on to give her examples of women's groups in the Catholic church and the U.S military force.²⁷² Women, particularly lesbian feminists, aimed to take over male-dominated institutions and activities. Many were also working toward creating spaces for women in other predominantly male-centric spaces, like higher education, health and science, and gender-atypical jobs in the skilled trade industry were in the 1980s.²⁷³ A *Double Standard* report, titled "A Few Revealing Statistics" showed what issues lesbian feminists of the 1980s were interested in. One section report read, "Among persons 18 to 24, 34 percent of women are likely to be enrolled in college (34 percent of men), 23.4 percent of graduating doctors are female, as are 30.2 percent of lawyers," and mentioned that the workforce had gone from 38% female in

²⁷¹ Jane Hoback, "Women's Outdoor Club faces uncertain future," *Double Standard*, October 1981.

²⁷² Katzenstein, "Feminism Within American Institutions: Unobtrusive Mobilization in the 1980s," 34.

²⁷³ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1979, 18.

1962 to 52% female in 1982.²⁷⁴ Colorado women were growing more aware of the gender imbalance in many institutions, and worked to change it themselves.

“we see the land being violated as women's bodies are violated.”

The “Anti-nuke Statement” from a group of feminists in Colorado Springs spoke to the heightened awareness Colorado feminists had on environmental protection moving into the 1980s. Published in *BMR* in 1978, the “Anti-nuke Statement” emphasized women’s connection to the Earth and the ways in which Colorado’s community must make changes. The women wrote that they had begun to “see the earth as mother and sister; we see the land being violated as women's bodies are violated.” The women ended their statement with a call for others to join them in their new consciousness, which centered on a healthy relationship with the earth and their own bodies.²⁷⁵ Colorado lesbian feminists were becoming much more ecofeminist in practice than they had been in the 1970s. Colorado women aimed to reclaim nature, spirituality, and the environment through various clubs, workshops, and associations. Ecofeminism or “ecoféminisme” was first coined by French environmentalist and feminist theorist Françoise d'Eaubonne. In her 1974 book, d'Eaubonne connected nature and women through male-domination.²⁷⁶ Though Colorado women were not claiming to be ecofeminists, their dedication to Mother Earth, the Goddess, and continued support of full moon celebrations and solstice events showed an inclination to connect feminism with Earth’s ecosystem.²⁷⁷

Throughout the 1980s there was an emergence of women scholars connecting women, social justice, and the environment. In 1978 Susan Griffin’s *Woman and Nature* and Carolyn

²⁷⁴ “A Few Revealing Statistics,” *Double Standard*, June 1983, 7.

²⁷⁵ “Anti-nuke Statement,” *Big Mama Rag*, December 1978, 2.

²⁷⁶ Barbra T. Gates, “A Root of Ecofeminism Ecofeminisme,” *ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 3, no. 1 (July 1, 1996): 7–16, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/3.1.7>.

²⁷⁷ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, November 1981, 10.

Merchant's *Death of Nature* in 1980 both worked to connect women's subordination and oppression with the domination of nature, animals, and medical science. Similar to these foundational ecofeminist texts, Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* in 1978 "exposed the historical and cultural persecution of women as legitimized by the various male-dominated institutions of religion, culture, and medical science," explained scholar Greta Gaard in her article "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism."²⁷⁸ Gaard examines the ways in which 1980s feminist activism was often linked to antinuclear and peace protests due to an emerging ecological focus of feminism.²⁷⁹ Although Gaard's article centered on ecofeminism in the 1990s, her historical analysis showed the introduction of ecofeminism and maternalism in the 1980s. Gaard pointed at Lois Gibbs as an example of ecofeminist mobilization. Gibbs was a former housewife turned environmental activist when she discovered her son's elementary school was located on a toxic waste dump and formed the Love Canal Parents Movement. Gibbs's action worked and the school was eventually shut down and pregnant women and children were urged to move from their homes surrounding the area.²⁸⁰

Many scholars have examined maternalism and its connection to essentialism through antinuclear protests. This type of maternalism is seen to have reduced women's roles to reproductive labor.²⁸¹ Maternalism is often defined as women using motherhood and their

²⁷⁸ Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism," *Feminist Formations*, (2011), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41301655>, p. 28.; Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1989.; Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1978).; Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, 1979.

²⁷⁹ Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism," 28-31.

²⁸⁰ Lois Marie Gibbs and Murray Levine, *Love Canal: My Story* (Sunny Press, 1982), 8-16.

²⁸¹ Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism," 28-31.

domestic role to insert themselves in political discussions on issues like reproductive rights or childcare and welfare policies. In her 1993 book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Australian philosopher and ecofeminist Val Plumwood explored ecofeminism's maternalist lens. Plumwood explained that from a Western perspective, Mother Earth had been seen as feminine and therefore passive. The idea of a female earth had provided men with justification for exploitation under the guise of caretaking.²⁸² This is similar to Carolyn Merchant who was a prominent ecofeminist, historian, and philosopher who argued that the Scientific Revolution led to the "death of nature," and the Earth went from being seen as a dynamic and living being to a passive object.²⁸³ Like in the "Anti-nuke Statement," Colorado women were also gendering the Earth as female, and connected themselves to it through the domination of men. Plumwood and Merchant both position Native American and indigenous cultures' belief in Mother Earth and women's reproduction as inherently different to the Western perspective. Colorado lesbian feminists often borrowed from Native culture when forming their ideas of feminist spirituality. Rather than continue building on patriarchal ideas of Mother Earth and religion, Colorado women were inspired by Native feminist's ideologies printed in *BMR* and *Double Standard*.²⁸⁴

BMR and *Double Standard* focused on maternalism through authors like Gena Corea and staff writers who wrote pieces on childbirth and reproduction as one of women's ties to Mother Earth.²⁸⁵ Groups like the Colorado-based T.E.R.R.A, or Women for Survival in New Mexico were primarily organized by Native women who focused on connections between women and

²⁸² Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Routledge, 2002), 19.

²⁸³ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

²⁸⁴ *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 16.

²⁸⁵ Gena Corea, "Baby Factories, Glass Wombs, and Mother's Rebellion: Childbirth in the Year 2000 A.D.: Man's Conquering of Inner Space," *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, 8-9.

the environment.²⁸⁶ Historian Annelise Orleck pointed at Native women's roles in both the Native American and feminist movements as health and mother focused. Native mothers were at the forefront of their movement, fighting policies that restricted land treaties or exposed reservations to harmful chemicals and radiation.²⁸⁷ Women of All Red Nations (WARN) was a group of Native American women who were concerned with health and safety. WARN was frequently advertised in *BMR* across the 1980s; *BMR* collective members tried to secure travel and printing funds for the women of WARN.²⁸⁸ These women sought out ways to protect their community from dangers of alcohol and drug abuse, contamination of land and water, and the physical safety of Native women. Orleck argues that these women helped to pioneer environmental justice and tied the health and security of women with that of the planet.²⁸⁹

Like Native women, lesbian feminists in Colorado often used maternalism and spirituality to encourage more women to join protests and antinuclear groups to both take care of their Mother Earth and their own reproductive health.²⁹⁰ Colorado feminists were akin to scholars like Mary Daly or Carolyn Merchant as they grew increasingly concerned with men's domination of nature and women through women's limited opportunity in labor, male-dominated medical science, and patriarchal religions. Women in Colorado began to form groups and organizations to combat male-domination and focused on reconnecting with nature through childbirth, antinuclear protests, and Goddess spirituality.²⁹¹

Although many lesbian feminists were dedicated to entering male-dominated institutions, there was often argument over how to successfully accomplish this. Fighting within the

²⁸⁶ "Women for Survival," *Double Standard*, April 1980, 14.

²⁸⁷ Annelise Orleck, *Rethinking American Women's Activism* (Taylor & Francis, 2022), 139.

²⁸⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1983, 23.

²⁸⁹ Orleck, *Rethinking American Women's Activism*, 143.

²⁹⁰ Hearsay, "Every Mother's Duty," *Big Mama Rag*, March 1980, 5.

²⁹¹ *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 16.

community was common in the feminist movement writ large. These community debacles, paired with a continuing lack of funds led to the closure of other feminist businesses, like Woman to Woman bookcenter whose collective disbanded in the early 1980s.²⁹² The closing or temporary halts of feminist businesses forced women to rethink how and where to find community. Other bookstores remained open and available, and new ones were founded in the 1980s, however, there was an increase in the number of coffeehouses, which were mobile events often sponsored by one specific group. Many of these coffeehouses moved outside, using free parks in Denver and Boulder to hold group picnics, sports, and more.²⁹³ Rather than remain cooped up in the basements of businesses, or more frequently Denver's First Unitarian Church basement, coffeehouses moved to free and accessible locations, like the outdoors, and the lesbian feminist community moved with them. Colorado lesbian feminists' dedication to the women's community can be seen through their refusal to give up even when things got tough, financially, politically, or spiritually.

The lesbian feminist community of Colorado formed niche interests that welcomed more women into the community and increased their independence through community-based support groups, workshops and education, and outdoor recreation. This chapter will explore how ecofeminist ideology influenced women in 1980s Colorado. As Plumwood argued in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, women and nature had been othered and considered objects without agency for men to control.²⁹⁴ The masculinization of medicine, patriarchal religions, and women's physical health and safety were growing increasingly more important for Colorado women. Like Carolyn Merchant, Colorado lesbian feminists were concerned with the overreach

²⁹² Judy Powell, "Feminist bookstore opens re-opens after upheaval," *Double Standard*, August 1981, 1.

²⁹³ "Colorado Calendar," *Double Standard*, November 1981, 10.

²⁹⁴ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Routledge, 2002), 10-18.

of science and technology and saw a return to nature as a solution to these advancing modern issues.²⁹⁵ Male-dominated institutions were of a vested interest to lesbian feminists, and Colorado women actively fought for their place in conversations around science, religion, and the environment.

“Shock And Lock And Drug And Shut em’ Up So That Their Cries Are Not Heard”²⁹⁶

Women’s support groups were not new creations of the 1980s, but many of the groups formed were new to Colorado women. *BMR* had previously advertised groups like Lesbians United to Nip Alcohol (LUNA), which had become a weekly meeting group, or various support groups for battered women and lesbians.²⁹⁷ The 1980s brought a vast assortment of support groups and women’s workshops, often centered on more specific concerns or issues, like Beyond Bitching, a support group for lesbians terminating relationships.²⁹⁸ In 1981, many support groups and events were still held at the Woman to Woman book center in Denver, and eventually events would be held at the reopened store, Rocky Mountain’s Womyn center, located in the same building on Colfax Avenue in Denver.²⁹⁹

A scan of *BMR* calendars in 1980 would show that LUNA, the Feminist Action Group, Violence Against Women group, and the Lesbian Mothers Group met regularly at Woman to Woman in Denver. LUNA and the Feminist Action Group held weekly meetings in the store's basement level.³⁰⁰ In 1979 the group Daughters of Rosie the Riveter was founded in Denver, and

²⁹⁵ Patricia Johnston & Jane Hoback, *Double Standard*, June 1981, 12.

²⁹⁶ Lori Bradford, “Shock And Lock And Drug And Shut em’ Up So That Their Cries Are Not Heard,” *Big Mama Rag*, December 1983, 12-13.

²⁹⁷ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, August 1981, 8-9.

²⁹⁸ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, October 1981, 8.

²⁹⁹ Judy Powell, “Feminist bookstore opens re-opens after upheaval,” *Double Standard*, August 1981, 1.

³⁰⁰ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, November 1981, 10.

they continued to meet throughout the 1980s. One *BMR* advertisement for the group read, “Daughters of Rosie the Riveter, a support group for women in the skilled trades, would like you to join them from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m., at 1038 Bannock in Denver. The topic will be on job safety. Then there will be an open rap session. Free childcare provided.”³⁰¹ The group met once a month to talk about different topics like workplace discrimination, job security, and more. Not only did the group provide support and open discussions on women’s experiences working in blue collar jobs, but they also sponsored conferences and panels to educate women on issues like job discrimination and employee protection for women. The popularity and consistent advertisement of this group, along with a special issue of *BMR* on trade labor jobs, shows the importance of non-traditional jobs for lesbian feminist women. One ad for the group ran in *BMR*, reading, “Today, Rosie the Riveter has been replaced by Pam the Carpenter, Debbie the Mechanic, Dikka the Cabinetmaker, and Karen the Painter.”³⁰² More and more women were taking these jobs, and there was often more press coverage in *BMR* to solidify this movement.

Educational groups and conferences dedicated to jobs and women’s employment continued to be advertised throughout the 1980s. One meeting in 1981 focused on women who had gone on strike against discrimination at work and showed the film “The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter.”³⁰³ But the workplace was not the only area lesbian feminists were fighting oppression. In the early 1980s there was a lot of feminist critique of the psychiatry field and the many institutional branches that grew from it, like standard therapy and “chemical straightjackets.” The term chemical straightjackets often referred to the various medications, pills, shots, and more that women would be prescribed by doctors, or forced to take against their

³⁰¹ *Big Mama Rag*, April 1980, 19.

³⁰² *Big Mama Rag*, August 1979, 18.

³⁰³ *Big Mama Rag*, November 1981, 15.

will while in psychiatric holds. In her 1983 *Double Standard* article, “Psychiatric abuse: endless fears, nightmares,” Morgan Ahern described the acts of violence, forced drugging, and “genital shock for lesbianism” that she endured at psychiatric facilities.³⁰⁴ Ahern went on to explain the ways in which women who are survivors of rape and incest were abused again by psychiatrists and therapists, including feminist therapists. Rather than blame a specific group or certain kind of person, Ahern argued that the problem is the state of the psychiatry field in general. Lori Bradford, *BMR* collective member, joined Ahern in criticizing the psychiatric industry, writing her article “Mental Illness: Myth or Madness --A Legacy of Psychiatric Abuse,” in *BMR* in 1981. In this article Bradford explored the forced druggings and various abuses of psychiatric patients like herself.³⁰⁵ Many lesbian feminists agreed with this argument and distanced themselves from the institution, while others joined the field in a desire to change it from the inside through women’s clinics or counseling services.³⁰⁶

The anti-psychiatry movement was not a small group. There were conferences, meetings, and even journals dedicated to the liberation of “mad” women.³⁰⁷ *Madness Network News* was a California-based journal for the anti-psychiatry movement, and in 1984 the Twelfth Annual International Conference for Human Rights and Against Psychiatric Oppression was held in Denver.³⁰⁸ Smaller and more localized organizations also fought against psychiatry by forming their own support groups, like the Support Group for Childhood Survivors of Sexual Abuse, which advertised in *BMR* as “not a Therapy Group but a place to meet & talk of shared incestual

³⁰⁴ Morgan Ahern, “Psychiatric abuse: endless fears, nightmares,” *Double Standard*, September 1983, 11.

³⁰⁵ Lori Bradford, “Mental Illness: Myth or Madness—A Legacy of Psychiatric Abuse,” *Big Mama Rag*, May 1981, 10.

³⁰⁶ Patricia Johnston & Jane Hoback, *Double Standard*, June 1981, 4.

³⁰⁷ Morgan Ahern, “Psychiatric abuse: endless fears, nightmares,” *Double Standard*, September 1983, 11.

³⁰⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, February 1984, 19.

experiences in our lives & learn to trust.”³⁰⁹ Other groups like RUTH, a support group for battered lesbians, and CHOICES, a support group for women alcoholics, were formed to give women more options for mental health support. CHOICES operated as an “alternative for women who need a different kind of support in their struggle for a non-addictive lifestyle,” and met weekly on Thursdays at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center in Denver.³¹⁰ Increased opposition to alcohol and drugs was prominent during the 1980s as many concentrated on personal health. Therapy groups served as an opposing way for women to support each other and sustain community ties.

As in the 1970s, Colorado lesbian feminists had an increased focus on health and wellness in the 1980s. There were various organizations and clubs that helped support physical and mental health formed throughout the 1980s. Many of these clubs or groups were sponsored by larger organizations, or were held at bookstores like Woman to Woman, but some of these were more specifically tied to health centers or women’s health clinics. The Colorado Springs Women’s Health Service Clinic had been first opened in the 1970s but had grown over the course of the 1980s.³¹¹ Other clinics and centers would follow in its footsteps, increasing women’s consciousness about their own physical health.

³⁰⁹ *Big Mama Rag*, December 1981, 24.

³¹⁰ *Big Mama Rag*, March 1984, 17.

³¹¹ *Double Standard*, December 1981, 2.

“Women’s clinic isn’t just another doctor’s office”

The 1981 article in *Double Standard* explained how the Colorado Springs clinic was a collective of 11 members which “stresses self- health: women become experts on their own health as they learn more about their bodies through self-examination.” The DIY energy of lesbian feminists was still very much alive in the 1980s, and clinics like the one in Colorado Springs helped women to have the knowledge to safely do-it-themselves. Whether it be breast exams or home remedies for common vaginal infections, the Colorado Springs clinic helped women to be healthy independently.³¹² Not only had the clinic expanded their array of services to gynecological exams, birth control, lesbian counseling, abortion procedures, and artificial insemination, they had also grown past the point of being unpaid volunteers.³¹³ DIY lesbian feminists typically centered low-technology, health-conscious lives. Like the health consciousness of the 1970s, Colorado women in the 1980s found nature to be a solution to the advanced medical technologies and focused on controlling their own lives with minimal interference from institutions. The Colorado Springs health center wasn’t “just another doctor’s office” and instead encouraged this DIY culture through different groups, educational courses, and community engagement through festivals or working with local organizations.³¹⁴

In 1975 the clinic had been staffed by women who were volunteering with no pay, however by 1980 the staffing situation had changed. The members of the clinic stepped up into full-time positions and began taking salary from their client fees and expenses. Along with steady wages, the women also took regular vacations and had a stocked lunchroom to try and prevent burnout. The women in the Colorado Springs collective were dedicated to community

³¹² Patricia Johnston & Jane Hoback, *Double Standard*, June 1981, 4.

³¹³ Patricia Johnston & Jane Hoback, *Double Standard*, June 1981, 4.

³¹⁴ *Double Standard*, December 1981, 2.

education and outreach, which explained the heightened focus on burnout. One member spoke about their full range of feminist goals, quoted by *Double Standard* with “We want women who work here to feel safe in this environment so we can go out and do political work as well as provide services.”³¹⁵ Other women in the movement had these same goals, like the founders of Womanwise, a Denver-based women’s health clinic.

Jane Hoback, editor of *Double Standard*, compared Womanwise to the Colorado Springs clinic as an “outgrowth of the women's health movement.”³¹⁶ Both organizations struggled with pricing at what they considered to be fair for Colorado women while also making enough profit to afford salaries. At the Colorado Springs clinic one employee, Rose Kotlar, discussed her \$6 an hour wage, and remarked that she was “hardly getting rich.”³¹⁷ At Womanwise, prices had been raised in order to stay afloat. In her interview with *Double Standard*, Womanwise co-founder Margaret Norton said, “We thought that since women get paid less, we could charge less. But then we couldn't pay our bills. We had to get some business sense.”³¹⁸ Many Colorado feminist organizations learned the cost of financial struggles as Womanwise did in the late 1970s, when women’s bars, bookstores, and clubs shutdown. Though there were significant struggles, women’s clinics understood how significant they were to the women’s community, providing accessible healthcare was a necessity, especially in terms of reproductive care.

In 1981 the Women’s Health Service Clinic of Colorado Springs formed seven support groups. The groups were centered around women’s health and aimed to provide both information and support for women about various topics, such as menopause, unhealthy habits, fertility, herpes, and even a “pre-orgasmic group” for women struggling to orgasm that centered on

³¹⁵ Patricia Johnston & Jane Hoback, *Double Standard*, June 1981, 12.

³¹⁶ Jane Hoback, “Womanwise Puts Dignity in Women's Health Care,” *Double Standard*, July 1981, 5.

³¹⁷ Patricia Johnston & Jane Hoback, *Double Standard*, June 1981, 12.

³¹⁸ Jane Hoback, “Womanwise Puts Dignity in Women's Health Care,” *Double Standard*, July 1981, 5.

“experimentation and...greater satisfaction and enjoyment from sex.” One group was dedicated to women struggling with pregnancy terminations, either through miscarriage or abortion. Many groups focused on older women, like the “SUPPORT GROUP FOR OLDER WOMEN LIVING ALONE: A group for women finding themselves categorized as senior citizens and wanting to share their feelings about the label and discuss ways of maintaining a healthy sense of self,” or the menopause group that aimed to “offer support to women concerned about aging in a society that devalues older women.”³¹⁹ These support groups were not the only thing that made the Colorado Springs clinic so significant to women in Colorado. Since 1975 the clinic had been offering services to women like abortions and check-ups for those without insurance. Moving into the 1980s, the clinic had gained more public attention and borrowed money to get their business on track.³²⁰

A 1981 article in *BMR* “Feminist Clinic: Working for Our Lives,” connected the Colorado Springs Women’s Health Service Clinic to Mother Earth and more natural approaches to women’s health. The women of the clinic wrote, “We have begun to return to our pasts and gather more knowledge from women who lived closer to earth. We’ve remembered how to be in touch with our menstrual cycles and fertile cycles, how the food we eat can keep us healthy and strong, how to prevent pregnancy with methods that aren’t lethal to our health...,” and that they were dedicated to “sharing this information and keeping it alive in the future amid threats from those who would destroy us and our mother earth.” The article went on to explain the ways in which the clinic had changed in the six years since its original opening, which reflected how feminist organizations and businesses adapted to community needs.³²¹

³¹⁹ *Double Standard*, December 1981, 2.

³²⁰ Jane Hoback, “Womanwise Puts Dignity in Women’s Health Care,” *Double Standard*, July 1981, 5.

³²¹ “Feminist Clinic: Working for Our Lives,” *Big Mama Rag*, May 1981, 13.

Colorado's lesbian feminist community was becoming more worried about environmental and natural reproductive health, so the clinic listened to their community members to offer services like counseling, support groups, and fertility awareness. The clinic encouraged women to make informed decisions about their own bodies and provided education on things like birth control, abortions, and "fat consciousness." Natural remedies like yogurt insertion and herbal alternatives for common vaginal bacterial issues, or cervical caps in place of birth control pills were offered at the Colorado Springs clinic, and the clinic workers advocated for women to make healthy lifestyle changes rather than join in on diet fads recommended by male doctors.³²²

Not all of Colorado's women's health and wellness businesses centered on reproductive care, some were designed for better relaxation, like Massage for Health, a woman-owned business that provided massages and "stress reduction."³²³ However, the 1980s were a time of growing concern over women's reproductive care. The Hyde amendment in 1976 sparked concern when it denied Medicaid coverage for abortions, the concern grew with the later election of Reagan and his anti-abortion politics worried feminists across the nation.³²⁴ In 1981, one employee at the Colorado Springs women's clinic put it this way, "Yesterday we did 30 abortions. Today we have to talk about how to keep abortions legal." Reproductive care was important for all women, not just heterosexual women. Lesbian mothers had been a growing population in the 1970s, and the birth technology of the 1980s only amplified issues and concerns of Colorado's lesbian feminist community.³²⁵ Women in the mid-1980s navigated in

³²² "Feminist Clinic: Working for Our Lives," *Big Mama Rag*, May 1981, 13.

³²³ *Double Standard*, November 1982, 9.

³²⁴ Jessica Glenza, "A 'Fundamental' Right: A Timeline of US Abortion Rights Since Roe V Wade," *The Guardian*, June 20, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/30/abortion-rulings-history-roe-v-wade>.

³²⁵ Patricia Johnston & Jane Hoback, *Double Standard*, June 1981, 4.

vitro fertilization (I.V.F.), artificial insemination (A.I.), and the other new developments emerging from “Pandora’s box” of reproductive technology.³²⁶

“Baby Factories, Glass Wombs, and Mother's Rebellion”³²⁷

During the 1980s many lesbian feminists were rejecting standard birthing technology and hospitals. Some lesbian feminists like Shirley and Cathy (fake names assigned by *Double Standard*) in Boulder, Colorado searched for a sperm donor through a more personal means than in a doctor’s office. The two women had placed ads on the bulletin board at Colorado’s Gay and Lesbian Community Center’s office as Cathy found it “emotionally degrading” to see a doctor for artificial insemination. Shirley agreed with her partner’s feeling and said “There is nothing complicated about putting sperm into a vagina. I don't need a man or a doctor to do it. I can do it myself or have a helper.” Shirley also made a comment on the high cost of technology like A.I. at the doctor’s office. She noted that A.I. “can cost from \$70 to \$200 a month. We would rather spend the money on the baby when it's here.” The DIY attitude of some lesbian feminists was often reflected in their commitment to control their own physical health, rather than allow male-dominated institutions to control them. However, other lesbian women in Colorado, like Sara and Jill, went through hoops from doctors for 16 months to become pregnant. First Sara had to visit a psychiatrist who attempted to deny Sara’s request for insemination, then once the doctor’s agreed, Sara had to go through months of A.I., and each “month the visit cost \$70, \$50 for the sperm” and “\$20 for the hour the doctor spent with her.”³²⁸ Not all Colorado women had the

³²⁶ Jane Lewis and Fenella Cannell. “The Politics of Motherhood in the 1980s: Warnock, Gillick and Feminists.” *Journal of Law and Society* 13, no. 3 (1986): 321–42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1410014>, p. 2.

³²⁷ Gena Corea, “Baby Factories, Glass Wombs, and Mother’s Rebellion: Childbirth in the Year 2000 A.D.: Man’s Conquering of Inner Space,” *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, 8-9.

³²⁸ “Cathy, Shirley and Jessica: Searching for a donor,” *Double Standard*, March 1982, 11.

money for these procedures, and many outright rejected the idea of medical and technologically advancing births.

Women across the U.S. were impacted by reproductive politics and nationwide mortality rates. A 1983 issue of *Double Standard* included a report on infant mortality rates, reading “US Infant Mortality Rate Rises,” and that Reagan’s federal budget cuts “have also forced 239 community health centers, or 28% of the total, to close or cut down.”³²⁹ Feminists struggled to see the medicalization of birth as progress for women. One article in *BMR*, reprinted from a different newspaper, called attention to the unsettling history of reproductive care and the future consequences. The article, “Baby Factories, Glass Wombs, and Mother's Rebellion: Childbirth in the Year 2000 A.D.: Man’s Conquering of Inner Space,” discussed the erasure of midwives and the masculinization of the medical field. In a similar vein to *Double Standard*’s report on infant mortality, this article warns, “Historians emphasize this point: Doctors did not replace midwives in America because their attendance at birth assured a safer outcome.” The author, investigative journalist Gena Corea, related obstetricians' technological management of birth to a “great power to control nature.” This power was a natural power inherent in women that was being restricted and limited by these medical advancements, which Corea argued were not actually subduing any dangers women faced during childbirth, instead many of these advancements were causing more dangers. Corea listed illness caused by doctor’s technological intervention and doctor’s “economic and emotional interest in suppressing midwives and in defining the needs of birthing women as highly complex.”³³⁰ The general feminist distrust in the medical field had women worried for the future of reproduction and women’s wellbeing.

³²⁹ “US Infant Mortality Rate Rises,” *Double Standard*, June 1983, 11.

³³⁰ Gena Corea, “Baby Factories, Glass Wombs, and Mother’s Rebellion: Childbirth in the Year 2000 A.D.: Man’s Conquering of Inner Space,” *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, 8-9.

Corea looked to the future at the end of her article, writing “By 2000, most pregnant women will probably not participate in childbearing. The physician will ‘give birth’ with his machines and knives. Thousands of renegade mothers, refusing to enter hospitals, will deliver their children at home, attended by midwives.”³³¹ Like Corea, many lesbian feminists were concerned with men’s domination of women’s connection to the environment through childbirth and motherhood. In her 1980 article in *BMR*, Jessica Lipnack discussed childbirth in the wake of Three Mile Island, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania where a nuclear power plant melted in 1979. Lipnack was born in Pennsylvania but lived in Colorado and wrote her article to connect the decline in natural births with nuclear power, and that “There is a Harrisburg in every delivery room in this country, and the superficial solutions offered to meet consumer demands have little substantive meaning.” The emerging technology involved in childbirth was turning the once natural process into a mechanical and scientific equation, one that many women would have “...to become an expert in medical technology...” to simply understand the bare minimum of what will be administered to her.³³²

Lipnack brought the point back to nuclear energy and man’s desire to play God, writing, “In both childbirth and nuclear energy, scientists are motivated by the philosophy that ‘man (which gender I use deliberately) can conquer nature’ — a thoroughly absurd contradiction in terms.”³³³ Many Colorado feminists saw control of their bodies as multiple moving parts that included the right to accessible abortions, birth control, and a safe environment. In a 1980 special issue of *BMR*, an article titled, “Points of Unity: Control of Our Bodies” examined the different factors limiting women’s bodily autonomy. The article read, “Included in the right to control our

³³¹ Gena Corea, “Baby Factories, Glass Wombs, and Mother’s Rebellion: Childbirth in the Year 2000 A.D.: Man’s Conquering of Inner Space,” *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, 8-9.

³³² Jessica Lipnack, “Childbirth Technology & Nuclear Power,” *Big Mama Rag*, January 1980, 8.

³³³ Jessica Lipnack, “Childbirth Technology & Nuclear Power,” *Big Mama Rag*, January 1980, 8.

bodies is the right to work in a safe place free from environmental pollutants and physical hazards,” and went on to explain that many women of childbearing age are limited in what jobs they can hold due to toxic workplaces. The article ended with a demand for clean and healthy workplaces “free from all dangerous pollutants.”³³⁴ Childbirth was not the only way women placed themselves within the discussion of nuclear power, radiation, and environmental destruction. Colorado lesbian feminists were protesting nuclear power, particularly through two methods of maternal rhetoric: one, protecting the environment as a mother’s duty for her children, and two, protecting the environment as daughters of Mother Nature and Earth Mother.³³⁵ Environmental protection took many forms, but Colorado feminists were consistently bringing the conversation back to women and motherhood.

“it's the health of my daughter and her daughters...”

In 1980 *BMR* reported on a Philadelphia protest against nuclear power where mother Bonnie McCormick and her daughter were arrested among 95 others. The blurb was titled, “Every Mother’s Duty,” referring to McCormick’s role in the protest sit-in with her daughter. McCormick had joined the sit-in after reading an article her teen daughter wrote for the school paper examining nuclear power hazards in the U.S. In a plea to the judge to understand her stance, McCormick said, “The judge told me I wasn't a good mother for doing what I've done, the fact I was condoning breaking the law, but this goes beyond the law. It's the health of my daughter and her daughters. As scared as I am of going to jail, that's nothing compared to how I feel about the hazards of nuclear power.”³³⁶ From sit-ins at Rocky Flats to fundraisers in Pueblo, Colorado feminists protested nuclear power all over the state.

³³⁴ “Points of Unity: Control of Our Bodies,” *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, 6-7.

³³⁵ Hearsay, “Every Mother’s Duty,” *Big Mama Rag*, March 1980, 5.

³³⁶ Hearsay, “Every Mother’s Duty,” *Big Mama Rag*, March 1980, 5.

The Rocky Flats Plant was a major producer of nuclear weapons near Denver, Colorado. Throughout the 1950s and 60s the plant created environmental hazards from leaking nuclear waste and various fires; in 1965 alone, there were over 20 fires at the plant. The Rocky Flats Plant seemed to be intrinsically connected with motherhood and maternalism; in 1969 there was a fire on Mother's Day that resulted in a two-year, \$45 million clean-up operation.³³⁷ Over the course of the 1980s, Rocky Flats would become a site for many peaceful protests against nuclear weapons and war. Some protests or fundraisers revolved around benefits or concerts while others brought politically aligned women together through outdoor recreation.³³⁸ As Carolyn Merchant argued in *Death of Nature*, women often became the sacrifices of technological progress post the Scientific Revolution. Low-income and/or minority women were more likely to be the victims of nuclear energy as they often worked or lived closer to nuclear facilities.³³⁹ Annelise Orleck combined Native women, welfare activists, and Mexican American farm workers under the category of poor mother's activism, where women are focused on their reproductive health and future of the children.³⁴⁰

Colorado women were often working nontraditional jobs that left them exposed to chemicals at work, lived in low-income neighborhoods near nuclear plants like Rocky Flatts, and typically forwent financial profit for the good of the feminist movement. Colorado women were aware of the impact capitalism, nuclear waste, and pollution had on marginalized communities.³⁴¹ Colorado-based lesbian feminist publications ran articles committed to exposing the truth of nuclear power, and many women's groups were formed dedicated to these issues.

³³⁷ "Rocky Flats Plant," Wikipedia, February 16, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rocky_Flats_Plant.

³³⁸ "Rocky Flats Encirclement Planned Oct. 15," *Double Standard*, October 1983, 1.

³³⁹ Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*.

³⁴⁰ Orleck, *Rethinking American Women's Activism*, 157.

³⁴¹ *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 16.; "Women for Survival," *Double Standard*, April 1980, 14.

In the early 1980s, T.E.R.R.A., a “women’s group focusing on reproductive rights, Native land rights, anti-nuke issues...” began meeting weekly at RIP bookstore in Denver. These three issues were connected by one important strand, the natural environment. Colorado feminists held protests at Rocky Flats, like the one advertised in a 1980 issue of *BMR*, or the “participatory drama” in Boulder by Becca Harber and Willow Carol Simmons on “The Nuclear Arms Race: Our Present and Our Future.”³⁴² Art, poetry, and music were still being used as political tools in the 1980s. Musicians and speakers came to events in Denver for peace demonstrations or anti-nuke gatherings. For example, a large concert was held on the State Capitol steps with Judy Collins, John Denver, and Jimmy Buffet “to commemorate the start of the U.N. special session on disarmament” in June of 1982.³⁴³ Protests about environmental issues were often outside, using the natural space around them. That same year in June both *Double Standard* and *BMR* advertised a “Freeze the Nuclear Arms Race-5 km Runathon. Meet at 9am in Washington Park. Sponsored by the Colorado Campaign for a Nuclear Weapons Freeze.”³⁴⁴ The three-mile run was an example of Colorado’s lesbian feminist community’s political connection with the outdoors.

Continuing into 1983 protests at Rocky Flats grew larger in size. In 1983 *Double Standard* posted an article about the “encirclement planned” on October 15th. The article claimed that “On that date thousands of people will form a 17-mile human chain around the Rocky Flats Plant.” The article also included numbers to call for information on carpooling to the event and a call for pregnant women and children to stay away and show support in other ways to “avoid exposure” at the site.³⁴⁵ This was a reminder of the major cost from nuclear power and

³⁴² *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 16.

³⁴³ *Double Standard*, June 1982, 5.

³⁴⁴ *Big Mama Rag*, June 1982, 18. ; *Double Standard*, June 1982, 5.

³⁴⁵ “Rocky Flats Encirclement Planned Oct. 15,” *Double Standard*, October 1983, 1.

radiation, and the fears of toxicity seeping into the Earth and into the bodies of women. In the next month's issue *Double Standard* reported that around "15,000 to 24,000 people gathered at Rocky Flats Nuclear Plant to support world-wide disarmament" and that the "event received local, national, and international coverage."³⁴⁶ Local media coverage of the event would have likely included "Feminist Frequencies" by the Women's Radio Collective that played in Boulder on Sundays. Their monthly topics included "Global Feminist Perspectives," "History and Female Friendship," and lastly, "Women's Resistance to Rocky Flats."³⁴⁷ Women's resistance to Rocky Flats and nuclear power in general often stemmed from a feminist alliance with Native American women and Native land rights, like the group T.E.R.R.A.³⁴⁸

In 1980 *BMR* published an article by Women for Survival, a New Mexican lesbian feminist group titled "Navajo Women are Fighting to Stay Alive." In their statement of purpose Women for Survival "stated their belief that the rape of earth is the same as the rape of women by men." The group associated the dominance of man over woman to man over nature, and any challenge to the nuclear industry was a protest to this social hierarchy. The article explained the location of a uranium mining center at Red Rock in New Mexico had led to radiation exposure that affected the nearby Native community and the miners. They declared that as feminists, women must support the end to these industries that are based in war and violence and instead feminists must protect the Earth. Women for Survival ended their article with "We call for respect for the earth, her resources and her inhabitants."³⁴⁹ Gendering Earth as a woman, often a mother, was common in forms of Native spirituality, and it would eventually become a form of feminist spirituality and a reclamation of nature.

³⁴⁶ "Rocky Flats Protestors," *Double Standard*, November 1983, 1.

³⁴⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, March 1984, 17.

³⁴⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 16.

³⁴⁹ "Women for Survival," *Double Standard*, April 1980, 14.

Many feminist groups took inspiration from Native women and fought to protect their Mother Earth. Colorado's lesbian feminist community began holding education courses and workshops on Native women. In 1980 Woman to Woman bookcenter held a talk called "Native American Women- Contemporary Issues."³⁵⁰ This interest in Native women and spirituality continued into 1984, with various events like "Native American Women and the Circle of Life," which took place at University of Colorado Boulder during International Women's Week. Often events put the two pieces together, having workshops on nuclear war and Native land one hour, then a workshop on women and spirituality the next.³⁵¹ A 1983 *BMR* article wrote that, "the woman is the foundation and carrier of life is central to Native American thought. Therefore, the integrity of our reproductive power, and that of all female life, including the Earth, our Mother, is the basis of our real health." Native American spirituality and theory often provided feminists with a foundation of how to explain women's connection to the earth. Mother Earth as the basis for health included physical, mental, and spiritual health.³⁵² Colorado women often saw nature and spirituality as solutions to the many problems caused by male-dominated institutions.

Goddess-based spirituality and ecofeminist-esque events would continue to take place throughout the 1980s, like the 1981 workshop at Woman to Woman on "The Goddess: A Transforming Image for Women," or the Lesbians Colorado Summer Solstice Celebration in June of 1980.³⁵³ Lesbian feminists in Colorado were enjoying the environment through a heightened focus on personal health, inner peace, and feminist spirituality. *BMR* collective member Lori Bradford worded women's connection with the environment as "naturally a women's issue because women are tied (the umbilical cord lives!!) to nature in a political vision

³⁵⁰ *Big Mama Rag*, June 1980, 27.

³⁵¹ *Big Mama Rag*, March 1984, 21.

³⁵² Lois Anne Addison, "Movement." *Big Mama Rag*, January 1983, 10-11.

³⁵³ *Big Mama Rag*, October 1981, 18.; *Big Mama Rag*, June 1980, 27.

of the women as earth-mother syndrome.”³⁵⁴ Earth-mother syndrome worked to tie Colorado women both to environmental hazards like nuclear weapons and waste, and to nature-based Goddess worship in the 1980s.

Throughout the 1980s *BMR* and *Double Standard* ran issues centered around motherhood and reproduction. Many of these articles featured artwork and images that depicted women as mothers, or their role as carriers of life through images focused on the female body. One image (labeled 9 on page 26) in *Double Standard* showed a pregnant woman among what appear to be flowers in bloom and different reproductive organs, like the ovaries and uterus.³⁵⁵ Other images, like Images 1, 3, and 4 are more political. Image 1 depicts a Native woman strangled by an umbilical cord engraved with the word “STERILIZATION.” The cord connects the woman to her unborn baby that she would never bore because of forced sterilization of Native women.³⁵⁶ The drawing of the vulva in image 3 with the words “a woman’s body is a woman’s business” and image 4, “DEFEAT THE FETUS FETISHISTS” point to the abortion movement and women’s right to choose.³⁵⁷ Throughout the twentieth century women were fighting for bodily autonomy and the right to control their own bodies, both through birth and abortion. FIG:6 shows the disturbing reality of modern birth; masculinized science had allowed men to become the birthers of babies while mothers lie passively on the table.³⁵⁸ The drawings of women holding babies or hugging children in images 2, 7, and 8 oppose the doctors in image 6. These are simple drawings, sometimes just a few lines, of women nurturing and holding their babies. Like the women in images 9 and 5, these mothers with their children depict women as carriers of

³⁵⁴ Lori Bradford, *Big Mama Rag*, June 1981, 11.

³⁵⁵ *Double Standard*, March 1982, 6.

³⁵⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, January 1983, 9.

³⁵⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, January 1980, 9.

³⁵⁸ Gena Corea, “Baby Factories, Glass Wombs, and Mother’s Rebellion: Childbirth in the Year 2000 A.D.: Man’s Conquering of Inner Space,” *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, 8-9.

life. These two images that connect women, biology, and earth through reproduction serve as examples of the ecofeminist culture and spirituality sprouting across Colorado. Lesbian feminists in Colorado used maternalism to enter political discussions and connect themselves to the Earth.³⁵⁹

Women's connection to the Earth and nature fostered the feminist Goddess spirituality. Colorado lesbian feminists became more concerned with unlocking their own inner Goddess or finding the divine inside themselves. These Goddess-based workshops and events often emphasized nature and Mother Earth. Goddess spirituality and ecofeminism were solutions to male-dominated industries like religion, medicine, and science. Colorado lesbian feminists formed a community around this ecofeminist solution and encouraged other women to join them. Nature, and the rejection of masculinized science, pushed women into more inclusive communities that welcomed women of color, mothers, and lesbian feminists of all ages.³⁶⁰ Throughout the 1980s, Colorado women began reclaiming the Earth, and their perceived as rightful place in nature.

³⁵⁹ Rose, "Emerging Energies, Honest Self-Expression," *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 13

³⁶⁰ Evelyn Green, "Letting Go: Invest No More in the Patriarchy," *Big Mama Rag*, August 1981, 23.

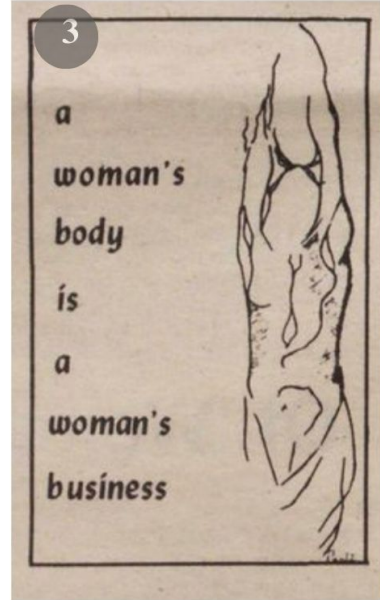
FIG: 3. Illustrations depicting motherhood, reproductive labor, and the female body in BMR and Double Standard 1980-1984.



Big Mama Rag, January 1983, p.9,



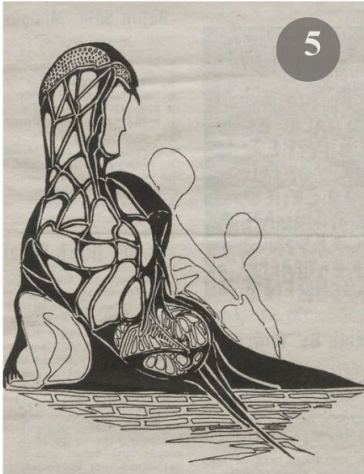
Big Mama Rag, August 1982, p.3.



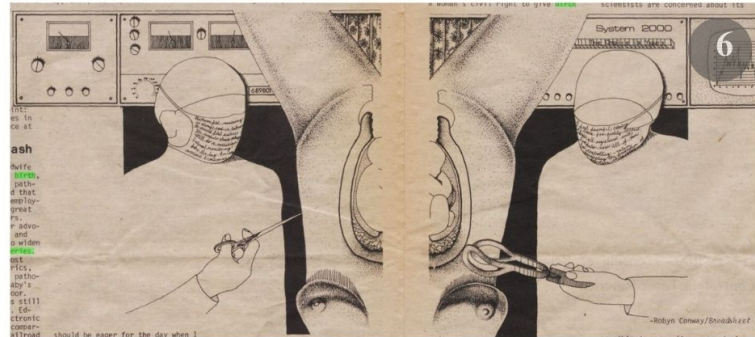
Big Mama Rag, June 1980, p.27.



Big Mama Rag, January 1980, p. 9.



Big Mama Rag, November 1982, p.3.



Big Mama Rag, September 1980, p. 8.



Double Standard, June 1981, p.4.



Big Mama Rag, June 1980, p. 4.



Double Standard, March 1982, p. 6.

“Goddess worship alive.”³⁶¹

November 1981— “CELEBRATION OF THE HARVEST SABBAT from 2 to 6 p.m. A get-together of pagan leaning dykes, fairies, witches and assorted queers to celebrate a high holiday together.”³⁶² Celebrations dedicated to pagan holidays were happening around Colorado in the early 1980s. Summer and winter solstice events and festivals, full-moon parties, and spirituality-centered workshops were popular in the lesbian feminist community. Outdoor events were celebrated by many Colorado lesbian feminists, but some utilized artistic endeavors like music, poetry, and meditation or movement workshops to connect with their inner Goddess.³⁶³ A 1984 article *Double Standard* explained, “Lesbians have often found the welcome mat to patriarchal religions (Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, etc.) pulled out from under them.”³⁶⁴ These religions were considered to be male-dominated and built upon the subordination of women, whereas Mother Earth and Goddess worship aligned women with a matriarchal, and often maternal, form of spirituality.³⁶⁵ These forms of feminist spirituality were regularly nature-based, with an idea of an Earth Goddess or deity that women were connected to through the environment.

Goddess spirituality and Mother Earth were often seen as the solution to the many problems that male-dominated institutions had caused. By “Goddess,” feminists meant a general female deity, not inherently attached to a specific religion. In 1982, Rose wrote a piece in *BMR* that urged Colorado women to join in on a Goddess-based religion. Rose herself had turned to the Goddess after her stint in a psychiatric facility and wrote that the Goddess was “healing.”

³⁶¹ *Double Standard*, October 1984, 3.

³⁶² “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, November 1981, 10.

³⁶³ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, November 1981, 10.

³⁶⁴ *Double Standard*, October 1984, 7.

³⁶⁵ Rose, “Emerging Energies, Honest Self-Expression,” *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 13.

Rose believed all women were forms of the Goddess and that all women “have that healing power, just as we were born of our mother's womb, so are we all born of Mother Earth.”³⁶⁶ Not only was Goddess spirituality healing of male-dominated medical science, but Mother Earth symbolism also served to connect Black, Jewish, and multi-cultural women together within the feminist movement. Evelyn Green, a Black radical feminist, wrote in *BMR* in 1981 with Mother Earth and the Goddess as solutions to racism and the genocide going against women worldwide, writing that in “an environment in which the power and fertility of the Mother Goddess Earth is recognized, then also her many diverse and splendid creations are respected and revered.”³⁶⁷

In her article, “Letting Go: Invest No More in the Patriarchy,” Evelyn Green referenced Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* as evidence that racism within the movement deflected feminist energy into a “mass of misogyny; i.e., governments, KKK, political parties, ‘right to lifers’, the church etc., which seeks to destroy her.” Green offered a list of ways that feminists could escape from the “grip of men.” She wrote that women needed to stop excusing the behaviors of men of color, like female genital mutilation (FGM) which she explained took place in 26 out of 36 African countries. Although African women are often mobilizers who continue cultural practices like FGM, many women like Green see these cultures as being built on the subordination of women. FGM can be carried out by both male and female elders, but the medicalization of FGM that began in the 1980s led to an increase in young girls being mutilated by health officials, who are commonly male.³⁶⁸ No matter who the procedure is done by, FGM exists for the purpose of controlling and shaping women’s sexuality. FGM was practiced in Western cultures by doctors, such as London-based Isaac Baker Brown in 1860, who supported FGM as a method to cure

³⁶⁶ Rose, “Emerging Energies, Honest Self-Expression,” *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 13.

³⁶⁷ Evelyn Green, “Letting Go: Invest No More in the Patriarchy,” *Big Mama Rag*, August 1981, 23-26.

³⁶⁸ “Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Frequently Asked Questions,” United Nations Population Fund, n.d., https://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions#who_performs.

“female weakness” in epileptic female patients.³⁶⁹ A 1983 article in *Double Standard* examined the practice of FGM, in which Feminist Alliance leader Ann Wolman referred to FGM as a “political move to render women powerless and helpless due to physical impairment and isolation.” She had reported on the Women’s International Network News workshop and lecture series on the “horrors of genital mutilation” in the issue.³⁷⁰

Rather than perpetuate these cultural norms that risk the safety of women, Green encouraged women to fight against values instilled by the patriarchy. A major way to fight against the system of oppression was to lean into nature. Green wrote that feminists needed to “Start seeing your female being as primal.”³⁷¹ Women becoming primal may have meant Colorado women should begin accepting their natural, animal bodies away from the medical science industry that sterilized, mutilated, and drugged women. Primal could also refer to women and the outdoors, and that women should begin exploring the outdoors through a lens of anti-racism and feminist spirituality. Women in Colorado should then build a community based around love, acceptance, and the reclamation of the natural world. Like Green, women could use this community to crawl out of men’s grip and began structuring their own forms of religion and spirituality that encouraged a woman-identified women’s culture.³⁷²

Lesbian feminists in Colorado became committed to telling “Womyn’s lore” and building a culture centered around women, loving women, educating women, and worshiping women in the form of the Goddess.³⁷³ Moonlit dances, rituals, and potlucks were advertised in both *Double Standard* and *BMR*. In 1981, One full moon potluck in Boulder was advertised by the *Double*

³⁶⁹ Jewel Llamas, “Female Circumcision: The History, the Current Prevalence and the Approach to a Patient,” April 2017, <https://med.virginia.edu/family-medicine/wp-content/uploads/sites/285/2017/01/Llamas-Paper.pdf>, 3.

³⁷⁰ Ann Wolman, “Genital Mutilation in Third World Countries Still Common,” *Double Standard*, April 1982, 7.

³⁷¹ Evelyn Green, “Letting Go: Invest No More in the Patriarchy,” *Big Mama Rag*, August 1981, 26.

³⁷² Evelyn Green, “Letting Go: Invest No More in the Patriarchy,” *Big Mama Rag*, August 1981, 23.

³⁷³ *Double Standard*, October 1984, 7.

Standard with “a spiritual ritual and celebration” followed by the potluck.³⁷⁴ Full moon potlucks and dances were consistently advertised throughout the 1980s. One full moon dance in 1984 at St. Paul’s church in Denver was advertised for “women only.”³⁷⁵ Some forms of outdoor recreation and lesbian leisure were longer than one-day events like potlucks or dances. Summer solstice celebrations were normally larger scale, like the Rocky Mountain Women’s Summer Solstice in June of 1982. This Denver-based event was advertised in *BMR* as “a weekend of fun in the sun with your Rocky Mountain sisters.” This same issue of *BMR* also included a “Summer (RE) Treat in the City” for lesbian couples, planned by former *BMR* collective members Jackie St. Joan and Suzanne Keating.³⁷⁶ Full moon and solstice celebrations were not only summer activities. Winter full moon potlucks took place throughout Boulder and winter solstice events were frequently advertised in *Double Standard*. The outdoor celebrations often inspired other groups to head outside and make use of public spaces like parks and walking trails.

Many Denver-based clubs and groups began moving to Cheesman or Washington park to enjoy the outdoors while supporting the women's community. In 1981 the Slightly Older Lesbians (S.O.L.) group had a picnic at Cheesman park, and through June of the same year there were regularly programmed “Women’s Night in the Park” events that often included sports like volleyball or softball.³⁷⁷ One June night at Washington Park included “games, sports and impromptu music,” for lesbians and their children, as long as the boys were under the age of 10.³⁷⁸ Still, many of these groups and clubs revolved around some sort of celebration of women or feminist spirituality through music and poetry. The Anywoman’s Coffeehouse had moved out

³⁷⁴ “Boulder News,” *Double Standard*, December 1981, 11.

³⁷⁵ *Double Standard*, July 1981, 6-7.

³⁷⁶ *Big Mama Rag*, June 1982, 8.

³⁷⁷ *Double Standard*, June 1981, 7.

³⁷⁸ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, June 1981, 8.

of the First Unitarian Church Basement and into the space behind the Pavilion at Cheesman Park in Denver. In December of 1981 the coffeehouse had said their goals were to “provide a place for ALL women to meet; to provide a place to perform, for any woman who wishes to do so; to provide a drug and alcohol free atmosphere” and to “be a place for sharing women's culture...” Anywoman's Coffeehouse had become increasingly popular in the 1980s compared to the 1970s, and many of these outdoor events called for women to bring their own poetry and music.³⁷⁹

Poetry and art were common ways to both support Goddess philosophy and spirituality, while also acting as a form of political protest. Similar to Linda Fowler's poem “SOLSTICE” in 1974, Coloradoan lesbian feminists in the 1980s connected women to nature and the Goddess through poetry.³⁸⁰ A 1984 poem in *BMR* by Rose titled, “Breathing, Walking Late At Night,” combined ideas of the Goddess, pollution, and outdoor recreation in one single piece. The poem began with a woman taking a late-night walk, upset and angry with the level of exhaust fumes blocking her ability to breathe in clean air.

“Walking the hills late at night, Looking in front, looking behind, listening for steps,
Alert to anyone's presence, Thinking, Goddess, one day we will reclaim our home.
One day, fresh air will be my birthright.
One day, the circle will turn back to Life.
But not now, Not now, as someone drives by, putting that wretched smell into my
lungs.”³⁸¹

Rose's promise to the Goddess to “reclaim our home” and her feeling of being “alert” to any potential dangers around her brought up an issue to women's ventures outdoors: fear.

³⁷⁹ “Something for Everyone at Anywoman's Coffeehouse,” *Double Standard*, December 1981, 2.

³⁸⁰ Linda Fowler, “SOLSTICE,” *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, 17.

³⁸¹ Rose, “Breathing, Walking Late at Night,” *Big Mama Rag*, April 1984, 16.

“Number one, I’m afraid of getting raped, mugged, stabbed, or murdered.”³⁸²

Toward the end of Rose’s poem in *BMR*, she mentioned her fear of being outside, writing “Number one, I’m afraid of getting raped, mugged, stabbed, or murdered. Number two, I’m afraid of catching heat with the cops, an unsavory looking character like me in my black leather jacket, one of the only people for blocks and blocks in rich people neighborhood.”³⁸³ Fear tends to control women’s experience with the outdoors, whether the outdoors consists of a badly lit street or a seemingly safe hiking trail, women’s spatiality is often more restricted than men’s. In “Gender, Spatiality and Fear: Young women’s experiences of outdoor physical activity,” scholar Lindsay Kilgour examined women’s likeliness to go outside, and the different perceptions of outdoor leisure held by women. In this article Kilgour concluded that women were likely to associate safety with well-lit, public places and saw more isolated areas as dangerous. Kilgour also found that women involved in sports were more likely to be confident and self-assured in their outdoor leisure, “whether during the day or night.”³⁸⁴ Women in Colorado had these same fears and were often worried about rape, assault, and mainly in the case of lesbians, violent arrests.

Urban areas like Denver and Boulder still often had violent bar raids or arrests near parks. A 1980 article in *BMR* highlighted women’s fear of police and examined “the most humiliating experience” of a Thornton, Colorado woman’s life. The woman had been arrested for a traffic violation and upon her arrest had been forcefully slammed around by a male cop then aggressively strip searched by a policewoman once behind bars.³⁸⁵ Fear of violence often limited

³⁸² Rose, “Breathing, Walking Late at Night,” *Big Mama Rag*, April 1984, 16.

³⁸³ Rose, “Breathing, Walking Late at Night,” *Big Mama Rag*, April 1984, 16.

³⁸⁴ Lindsey Kilgour, “Gender, Spatiality and Fear: Young Women’s Experiences of Outdoor Physical Activity,” *Annals of Leisure Research* 10, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 215–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2007.9686762>.

³⁸⁵ Vicki Piotter, “Strip Search by Thornton Police,” *Big Mama Rag*, March 1980, 2.

women's use of public space and lesbian feminists in Colorado did not always find the outdoors to be safe and accessible. Throughout the 1980s the DIY culture of lesbian feminism was thriving, particularly in terms of self-defense, survival workshops, and outdoor education to better prepare women for independent leisure in the Colorado outdoors. This concern for self-defense was not new to the 1980s, but instead had grown from the 1970s. In "Letters Home to Mama" in a 1975 issue of *BMR*, Gillian Mound, a Denver woman, wrote, "How about some more emphasis on health and strength for women? If we're going to survive the wretched fuckup men have made of our mother the earth, we're gonna have to get ourselves together physically."³⁸⁶ Mound was an early voice advocating for women's self-defense and strength training. In the 1980s, Colorado lesbian feminists were dedicated to nurturing women's independence and creating a strong community of women who centered around natural living and outdoor recreation.

Women's right to self-defense was a controversial issue in the women's movement.³⁸⁷ Some feminists rejected ideas of violence and believed that the revolution would be a pacifist one, while others like Pat Galligan defended women's right to self-defense. Although originally written in 1970, Galligan's *The Female State* was published in a 1980 *BMR* issue in September. The excerpt from Galligan's article highlighted women's need to fight back against their oppressors, urging women to take up Tae Kwon Do, or other martial arts training. Galligan ended with a call to action for women, writing:

"Men's power over women is based on violence or the threat of violence because of superior physical strength. It is utterly unrealistic to think that violent attacks against women can be countered effectively in any "nice" way. A woman who refuses to risk

³⁸⁶ Gillian Mound, "Letters Home to Mama," *Big Mama Rag*, August 1975, 3.

³⁸⁷ Pat Galligan, "woman's work is never done," *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, 4.

hurting or killing an attacker is risking her life. Women have to be convinced of their absolute right as human beings to defend themselves by whatever means necessary.”³⁸⁸

Self-defense had been advertised in *BMR* throughout the 1970s, and events continued to be advertised in the 1980s by *BMR* and *Double Standard*. Women on trial for murder created major feminist press; Inez Garcia, JoAnne Little, and other women who committed murder in self-defense of rape became prominent feminist figures of the 70s and 80s.

BMR first reported on Inez Garcia in 1974 after she was arrested for the murder of her rapist in California. Garcia became a frequently reported figure in *BMR* throughout the 1970s with many women writing into the paper in support. In one 1975 article titled “Women Kill Rapists,” *BMR* compared the trial of Garcia to JoAnne Little, a North Carolina prisoner who killed a male guard in self-defense while locked up in a county jail.³⁸⁹ Inez Garcia even wrote in to *BMR* and her letter was published in the column “Letters Home to Mama,” a monthly column that included letters from subscribers across the country.³⁹⁰ Women who killed rapists were popular figures in Colorado newspapers. Throughout the early 1980s other women like Alice Keyes, Paula Three Stars, Vickie Stowers Burnette, whose case was described by a Survival Network Information Center in “Letters Home to Mama” in 1983.³⁹¹ Although these women were not from Colorado, Colorado feminists were interested in self-defense. One woman, Holly Hurst, wrote in *BMR* from Boulder, “Dear Big Mama; hello! Finding your publication at King Soopers in Boulder was like finding a shady oasis in the desert...WHEW! Thanks. Very

³⁸⁸ Pat Galligan, “woman’s work is never done,” *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, 4.

³⁸⁹ “Women Kill Rapists,” *Big Mama Rag*, December 1975, 12.

³⁹⁰ Inez Garcia, *Big Mama Rag*, October 1976, 3.

³⁹¹ “Self-Defense Is a Right,” *Big Mama Rag*, February 1983, 7.; *Big Mama Rag*, July 1983, 3.; “Paula Three Stars,” *Big Mama Rag*, April 1984, 5.

impressed with your March issue, especially the article "The Politics of Self-Defense" and now I want a subscription. Enclosed is my check for \$6. Keep up the good werk!!!"³⁹²

The 1980 article, "The Politics of Self-Defense: A Gun of One's Own" encouraged women to go the cheaper and simpler route of self-defense, and to forgo the material arts training and instead purchase a gun. The article was an attempt to start "Gun' Consciousness Raising among women."³⁹³ Colorado women struggled to find the right defense against male attackers; *Double Standard* reported that mace and tear gas marketed toward women were ineffective weapons to fend off attackers. Scientific studies had been done that showed the average man was still able to move around and regain his sight after a brief shock from the spray.³⁹⁴ This meant that maces and pepper spray would give women a couple of seconds to get away, whereas weapons provided women with a more serious defense. A Boulder woman, Dora Lee Larson, wrote an article called "Women and Weapons" in a 1982 issue of *Double Standard*. Larson, a member of the Boulder Socialist Feminist Collective, echoed the words from "The Politics of Self-Defense: A Gun of One's Own."³⁹⁵ In this article Larson urged women to "begin the process of demystifying weapons and reducing possible intimidation through information and knowledge." Larson had conducted various workshops for Colorado women on weapons and self-defense, and though she encouraged karate and martial arts to train bodies as a weapon, she still viewed a gun as a more accessible option for disabled or older women than strenuous physical training. In response to issues of morality on guns, Larson wrote, "I will not risk trading my life for some metaphysical argument as to whether my Karma will suffer, or whether

³⁹² Holly Hurst, "Big Mama Oasis," *Big Mama Rag*, June 1980, 3.

³⁹³ Pat Hadley, "Politics of Self-Defense: A Gun of One's Own," *Big Mama Rag*, March 1980, 17.

³⁹⁴ "News from across the Country," *Double Standard*, September 1981, 12.

³⁹⁵ Dora Lee Larson, "Women and Weapons," *Double Standard*, April 1982, 15.

womyn's spirituality is at stake.”³⁹⁶ Colorado lesbian feminists publications advertised self-defense courses, workshops, survival schools, and gun safety lessons throughout the 1980s to strengthen women’s resistance against violence.³⁹⁷

In April of 1980 a school of self-defense was open to women in Lakewood, Colorado, sponsored by the Women’s Self-Defense Council.³⁹⁸ Later that year, a woman’s karate class was offered by Debbie Squires with a \$12 fee.³⁹⁹ Colorado women were not just allowing fear to control their lives, instead they were educating themselves on weapons, self-defense, and forms of martial arts training to be stronger and more independent. In October of 1982 the Feminist Alliance and Lesbian Caucus sponsored the annual Take Back the Night March in Boulder, and a “self-defense workshop will precede the march.” The two groups wrote of the march in *Double Standard* that they were “organizing womyn to make a statement, a demand for freedom to live our lives without fear, without the constant threat of violence against womyn.”⁴⁰⁰ The usage of the term “womyn” symbolized women’s separation from men. The 1982 march pulled together a group of 300 women and spurred major controversy across Boulder. Some people, mostly men, were angered over their exclusion from the march, as women wanted to reclaim the night “without a male escort service.”⁴⁰¹ Fliers (FIG:1) were put up around the University of Colorado Boulder that mocked the event, calling it “Take Back the Dykes.” The Feminist Alliance responded to these posters, which depicted a woman holding a dismembered penis, with a quote from prominent anti-pornography feminist Andrea Dworkin:

³⁹⁶ Dora Lee Larson, “Women and Weapons,” *Double Standard*, April 1982, 15.

³⁹⁷ *Double Standard*, June 1982, 5.

³⁹⁸ *Big Mama Rag*, May 1980, 15.

³⁹⁹ *Big Mama Rag*, June 1980, 27.

⁴⁰⁰ *Double Standard*, June 1982, 5.

⁴⁰¹ “Take Back the Night' March Sponsors Harassed,” *Double Standard*, November 1982, 1

“The boys are betting that we cannot face the, horror of their sexual system and survive. The boys are betting their depictions of us as whores will beat us down and stop our hearts. The boys are betting that their penises and fists and knives and fucks and rapes will turn us into what they say we are— the compliant women of sex, the voracious cunts of pornography, the masochistic sluts who resist because we really want more. The boys are betting. The boys are wrong.”⁴⁰²

This backlash had made the feminists more eager to support the movement and show up to protests, self-defense courses, and more. The men who created the “Take Back the Dykes” poster had been wrong. Colorado lesbian feminists were not letting the threat of violence or fear hold them back from taking over male-dominated areas. Anti-nuclear protests, reclamation of natural living, and feminist focus on self-defense had given women more confidence in their abilities to protect themselves. In the 1980s travel guides, workshops, and team sports would help Colorado women to grow more independent, allowing them to make their way safely into the mountains.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² “Take Back the Night' March Sponsors Harassed,” *Double Standard*, November 1982, 1

⁴⁰³ “Reports from A-Bar,” *Double Standard*, January 1982, 7.

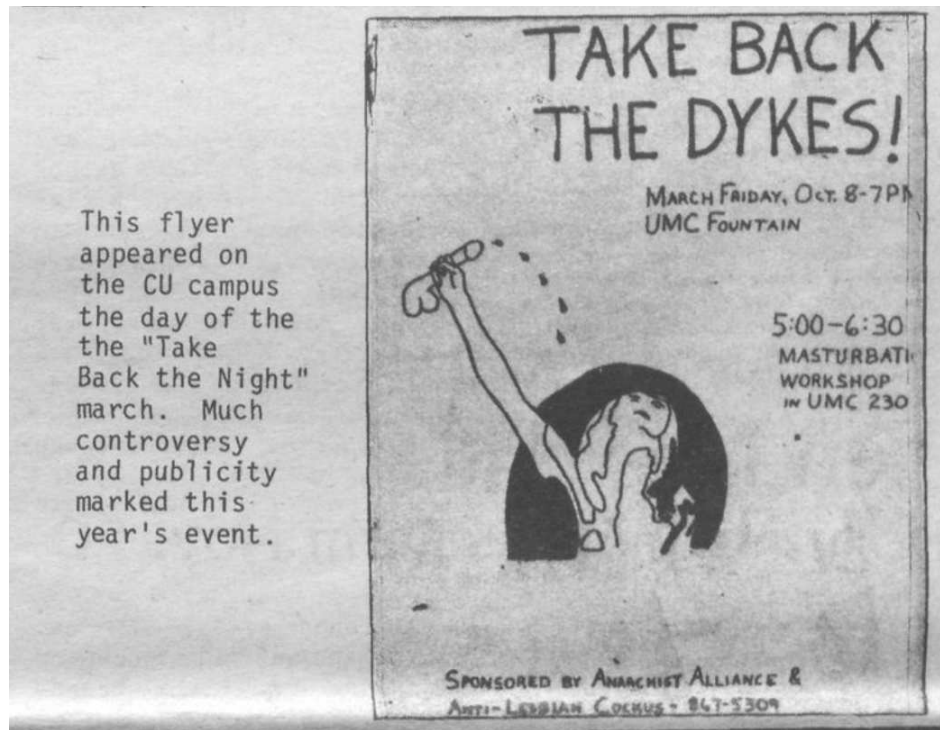


FIG:3.2 “Take Back the Night’ March Sponsors Harassed,” *Double Standard*, November 1982, p. 1.

Conclusion

The earlier focuses of Colorado’s lesbian feminists in the 1970s had carried over into the 1980s. Lesbian feminists continued to be concerned with pregnancy, motherhood, and the rapidly growing technology that influenced childbirth.⁴⁰⁴ The DIY culture of Colorado’s lesbian feminists thrived in the 1980s through an interest in natural living and rejection of masculinized ideas of science and health. Earlier groups formed in the late 1970s, like women against nukes, LUNA, and other women’s organizations flourished in the ecofeminist culture of 1980s Colorado. In 1978 the Colorado Springs group of women against nukes wrote, “We want health and safety for our bodies and our earth” and “Our lives are affected by the system of male dominance enforced by threat of violence to us, to our children.”⁴⁰⁵ Anti-nuke protests and

⁴⁰⁴ Gena Corea, “Baby Factories, Glass Wombs, and Mother’s Rebellion: Childbirth in the Year 2000 A.D.: Man’s Conquering of Inner Space,” *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, 8-9.

⁴⁰⁵ “Anti-nuke Statement,” *Big Mama Rag*, December 1978, 2.

groups had increased in size during the 1980s, particularly the protest at Rocky Flats with over 15,000 participants.⁴⁰⁶ In the 1980s Colorado lesbian feminist community had fought for their place within male-dominated institutions and worked to place themselves in conversations surrounding environmental protection through maternalist rhetoric. Throughout the 1980s, women's emergence in male-dominated institutions had led to a growing interest in activities that were previously deemed masculine, like outdoor recreation and sports.⁴⁰⁷

Throughout the 1980s Colorado lesbian feminists had centered around natural living and environmentalism, which often forced them outside during protests, celebrations, and even coffeehouses at Cheesman or Washington park.⁴⁰⁸ This had helped lesbian feminists dip their toe in the waters of outdoor recreation and sports through walkathons or self-defense and martial arts courses. Women in Colorado were doing more than just protesting or mobilizing through ties to the outdoors, they actively joined clubs, teams, and even jobs that allowed them to be outside and enjoy leisure in the Rockies. Mother Earth and the Goddess had united women of different races within Colorado's lesbian feminist community and formed a larger movement that expanded across the state.⁴⁰⁹ Clubs advertised in both *BMR* and *Double Standard* would provide opportunity for Colorado women who wanted to get outside through any means; from traveling guides to softball leagues, lesbian feminists were provided with ample opportunity to explore and recreate with other women all over Colorado.

⁴⁰⁶ "Rocky Flats Protestors," *Double Standard*, November 1983, 1.

⁴⁰⁷ Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism," 28-31.

⁴⁰⁸ *Double Standard*, June 1981, 7.

⁴⁰⁹ Evelyn Green, "Letting Go: Invest No More in the Patriarchy," *Big Mama Rag*, August 1981, 23-26.

Chapter 4- *Amazon nation out here in the mountains*

Chocolate Waters and Pat Sexton wrote a piece about the 1974 summer solstice held in New Mexico with “sisters from Albuquerque, Tucson, Denver, Minnesota, Missouri, New York and various locations in between.” Pictures from the event showed gatherings of women playing the flute and guitar, young children bathing in the streams, and half-nude women lounging on rocks or sunbathing in meadows. Not only did the pictures display women in nature, but the description also included from the BMR members conjured up images of an outdoor women’s community. The camping weekend included fishing, hiking, swimming, and a chorus of “Amazon voices, singing the songs that tell the story of woman.” The two women continued, noting that there was “Talk of the matriarchy and of its return, of parthenogenesis, of Amazon culture. Feminist astrology, learning about herbs for our own health.” Ideas of Amazons and wild, nature-based women continually sprung up in the article. The article ended with a message that “women together without men can do anything. Amazon nation here in the mountains. If only for a short while.” The 1974 Amazon nation during the summer weekend was mentioned as a “precursor of what is to come!”⁴¹⁰

Colorado lesbian feminists had been prepared for a female utopia out in the Western wilderness since the early 1970s. Summer solstice events like the one in 1974 were early examples of the community’s ecofeminist turn that happened in the 1980s. Throughout the 1980s, ecofeminist literature from *BMR* and *Double Standard* had influenced Colorado women to become more engaged with their environment.⁴¹¹ Women’s groups and businesses like the

⁴¹⁰ “Summersolstice,” *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*, <https://link.gale.com>, 12-13, (Accessed by February 21st).

⁴¹¹ Rose, “Emerging Energies, Honest Self-Expression,” *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 13.

Women's Outdoor Club and Womanventure ranch created space for women in the outdoors. Organizations like these helped to form a women's community that centered around health, recreation, and outdoor leisure.⁴¹² As Colorado's landscape changed due to increasing urban infrastructure and tourism, lesbian feminists forged a place for themselves in the state's outdoor culture through travel, recreation, and women's sporting leagues. In this chapter I will explore the ways in which Colorado lesbian feminists fostered community through outdoor recreation and leisure activities.

Introduction

Colorado was undergoing a cultural shift in the later twentieth century. The state had been focused on tourism and worked to advertise a specific image of Colorado as a scenic place to visit. Since the early 1900s, Coloradans had an interest in outdoor recreation. In 1915 Rocky Mountain National Park was established, and people around the nation flocked to Colorado to see and hike in the picturesque mountains.⁴¹³ This Colorado culture was not just created through advertisements and tourist ventures, state residents also perpetuated these ideas. Colorado people often built identities around the perceived Colorado culture of outdoor recreation and relativity to nature. In his 2013 book *Vacationland: Tourism and Environment in the Colorado High Country*, historian William Philpott examines the rising tourism industry in Colorado throughout the twentieth century. Philpott focuses on the Colorado "high country," a term he argues is often used as an advertising tactic. High country is widely used to refer to the higher, more mountainous areas of a state; Philpott frames high country as "between the Front Range Foothills and the Colorado Plateau." Like the tourists and Denverites that Philpott examines, Colorado

⁴¹² Jane Hoback, "Women's Outdoor Club faces uncertain future," *Double Standard*, October 1981.

⁴¹³ William Philpott, *Vacationland: Tourism and Environment in the Colorado High Country* (University of Washington Press, 2013), 18.

lesbian feminists explored the foothills and mountains. Colorado's rural areas were becoming more accessible due to the construction of Interstate 70 (I-70) west of Denver. The interstate created the I-70 corridor and allowed more and more people to visit Colorado's vacation spots.⁴¹⁴

Marketing and advertising were a form of making things, like sports or recreation more accessible to bigger groups. Prior to the 1900s, outdoor recreation and leisure activities like hunting, fishing, or climbing were primarily accessible to affluent people. This was true for Colorado. World War II had brought an economic boom, and mass consumerism was evident in large shopping malls and the increased ability to travel.⁴¹⁵ Ski resorts, mechanized mountains, and the rapid growth of Rocky Mountain National Park were a product of consumerism and Colorado's outdoor recreation-based culture. However, most tourists, visitors, and outdoor athletes tended to be white men.

Although the roles of women are limited and much less frequent than men's, there are extraordinary examples of women forming communities through outdoor recreation. Historian, writer, and activist, Dr. Kayann Short wrote about the Blue Birds, a group of women who traveled regularly from Chicago, Illinois to Boulder, Colorado for leisure in the early 1900s. These women were financially independent, white "New Women" of the progressive era. Short wrote that the Blue Birds formed a women's community as "a space for single, self-supporting women to experience the freedom of nature—away from the city, and away from the supervision of male employers, fathers, and brothers."⁴¹⁶ This rare example represents Colorado's outdoor-focused culture and nature as a backdrop for women's community away from men. Women throughout the twentieth century formed organizations to foster friendships with other women.

⁴¹⁴ Philpott, *Vacationland*, 12.

⁴¹⁵ Philpott, *Vacationland*, 19.

⁴¹⁶ Kayann Short, "In The Land of Sky Blue Weather | History Colorado," November 3, 2021, <https://www.historycolorado.org/story/womens-history/2021/11/03/land-sky-blue-weather>.

These women's groups serve to form a women's community, as political scientist Davina Cooper argues in her 2013 book *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces*. Everyday utopias as defined by Cooper must be welcoming environments that focuses on redefining terms or rebuilding institutions in a women-centric way.⁴¹⁷ Similar to the male-dominated institutions of religion, science, and the environment discussed in Chapter three, nature and outdoor-recreation were often seen as masculine fields that excluded women.⁴¹⁸

Women have been historically viewed as closer to nature through gendering of the Earth as female, and women's reproductive connection to the earth. In the 1980s feminism helped to foster these connections between women and the environment, but prior to this, women were largely disconnected from outdoor recreation. In an examination of a women-only canoeing trip, Lisa McDermott argues that the "masculinization of the outdoors" has limited women's pursuits in the field of outdoor recreation.⁴¹⁹ As explored earlier in chapter three, women's fear limited their participation in outdoor recreation and often accounted for their lack of tourism or traveling.⁴²⁰ Social norms also kept women out of sports. Outdoor activities like skiing, hiking, mountain climbing was seen as traditionally masculine. Even less-extreme sports like softball, soccer, and cross country were often deemed as too masculine for women.⁴²¹

The 1970s and 80s generated more independence and confidence for women financially, politically, and socially. Women had been historically excluded from sports, and often domestic duties prevented women from having leisure time to explore hobbies like sports and outdoor

⁴¹⁷ Davina Cooper, *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces* (Duke University Press, 2013).

⁴¹⁸ Lisa McDermott, "Exploring Intersections of Physicality and Female-only Canoeing Experiences," *Leisure Studies* 23, no. 3 (July 1, 2004): 283–301, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0261436042000253039>, 284.

⁴¹⁹ McDermott, "Exploring Intersections of Physicality and Female-only Canoeing Experiences," 285.

⁴²⁰ Lindsey Kilgour, "Gender, Spatiality and Fear: Young Women's Experiences of Outdoor Physical Activity," *Annals of Leisure Research* 10, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 215–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2007.9686762>.

⁴²¹ McDermott, 285.; Cora Burnett, "Whose Game Is It Anyway? Power, Play and Sport," *Agenda*, no. 49 (January 1, 2001): 71-78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4066495>.

recreation.⁴²² However, throughout the second wave of feminism, social and cultural norms were rapidly changing. In 1967, Katherine Switzer was the first woman to run in the Boston Marathon, and over the course of the decade more women would become interested in sports.⁴²³ Prior to Title IX policies signed by former President Richard Nixon in 1972, women had been restricted from many forms of competitive sports and recreational activities. A 2004 article in *Off Our Backs* by Sena Christian discussed the “Radical Potential of Women in Sports.” The article pointed to Title IX as what made sports more accessible to women; from 1972 to 2001 the percentage of female college athletes had increased from 2% to 43%. Female athletes were a significant part of the feminist movement in general. Sena Christian, a former athlete, wrote that female athletes represented a sort of resistance to patriarchal culture that enforced femininity. Christian argued that by “building their strength in sports, women challenge a root cause of male domination and women's political, economic and social subordination—men's physical dominance over women.”⁴²⁴ Female athletes stood in direct opposition to stereotypes of women’s physical weakness and fragility. Sports were a common way for women to build relationships, personal strength, and have fun. Colorado lesbian feminists often turned to sports like softball, football, and other outdoor activities to foster community.

Many scholars have explored softball and its connection to women, community, and lesbian feminists. Softball had become so ingrained in lesbian culture that it was mentioned regularly in both *BMR* and *Double Standard*. Picnics and potlucks often included casual softball games and women frequently listed classified advertisements searching for teams to join, and

⁴²² Padma Prakash, “Women and Sports: Extending Limits to Physical Expression,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 17 (1990): WS19–29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4396222>.

⁴²³ Prakash, “Women and Sports: Extending Limits to Physical Expression,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20.

⁴²⁴ Sena Christian, “The Radical Potential Of Women In Sports,” *Off Our Backs*, (2004): 26–29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20838128>, 27.

teams searched for “serious” coaches.⁴²⁵ Sociologist Mary Louise Adams examined the role of recreation and sports culture in her 2021 article “Feminist Softball as Everyday Utopia: Sport as a Site of Political Transformation.” Adams argued that feminist softball served as an everyday utopia away from men if women created “women-centered sporting practices.” Adams used a variety of feminist theorists and sociologists’ perspectives on sports to show softball could be used to establish new cultural values away from male-dominated definitions.⁴²⁶ Sports and gender scholar Carol Burnett argues that competition and athleticism were hegemonic performances of masculinity across many cultures in her 2001 article “Whose Game Is It Anyway? Power, Play and Sport.” This argument is like that of Jennifer Wesley and Emily Gaarder who positioned the idea that young girls have been socially conditioned differently from boys, and that boys’ social development encourages play and bodily movement. The two sociologists suggest that institutions often enforce gendered expectations that limit women’s abilities. These gendered norms work to heighten women’s fear and hesitation to participate in sports and outdoor recreation.⁴²⁷ However, rather than give up, many Colorado lesbian feminists worked to alter outdoor recreation and sports, making them more accessible for all women.

To create places of sporting recreation that fostered women’s community, female athletes needed to change the structure of the entire institution.⁴²⁸ Feminists saw the hierarchical structure of sports in opposition to feminist ideas of equality. Sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and sizeism pervaded the industry and excluded women.⁴²⁹ Colorado publications like *BMR* and

⁴²⁵ *Big Mama Rag*, February 1976, 14.

⁴²⁶ Mary Louise Adams, “Feminist Softball as Everyday Utopia: Sport as a Site of Political Transformation,” *Journal of Sport History* 48, no. 2 (2021): 102–17. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48679550>, 103.

⁴²⁷ Jennifer K. Wesley and Emily Gaarder, “The Gendered ‘Nature’ of the Urban Outdoors,” *Gender & Society* 18, no. 5 (October 1, 2004): 645–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243204268127>, 647.

⁴²⁸ Burnett, 72.

⁴²⁹ Burnett, 73.; Adams, “Feminist Softball as Everyday Utopia: Sport as a Site of Political Transformation,” 104.

Double Standard advertised opportunities for all women to participate in recreation through inclusive clubs like the Women's Outdoor Club or the Dykes of Estes. Like the marketing of Colorado that William Philpott examined in *Vacationland*, *BMR* and *Double Standard* often worked in the same way to romanticize outdoor recreation. Throughout the late 1970s and into the 1980s, pictures of mountains, women hiking, and even a small cartoon drawing of women athletes were frequently spread through the publications' monthly issues. Women reading either newspaper were likely to see depictions of mountains and outdoor scenes.⁴³⁰ The DIY culture and ecofeminist focus of the papers in the 1980s had worked to push women outdoors. Colorado lesbian feminists eliminated many of the limitations placed on women through self-defense, Goddess worship, and outdoor leisure with coffeehouses and festivals.⁴³¹ Dykes of Estes (DOE), a group of lesbian women living in Estes Park, Colorado, used words and images to invoke Mother Earth or moon Goddesses of nature in their monthly "Mountain Musings" in *Double Standard*. Women's groups like DOE provided women with safe, all-women spaces to recreate and strengthen their skills.

The Women's Outdoor Club (WOC) and the Amazon Adventures Hiking Club from Colorado Springs put a major focus on outdoor recreation as a central to lesbian feminist community building. In the 1980s lesbian leisure often revolved around sports like softball and mountain climbing, or more casual forms of leisure like walks and accessible trails in the Rockies.⁴³² Women in Colorado had plenty of opportunity for both outdoor education and women-only groups that sponsored outdoor events and sports. WOC had been created by Denver-based lesbian feminist women who sought a place to have fun outside of the bars.

⁴³⁰Philpott, *Vacationland: Tourism and Environment in the Colorado High Country*, p. 12.; "Colorado Calendar," *Double Standard*, November 1981, 10.

⁴³¹"Colorado Calendar," *Double Standard*, November 1981, p.10.; *Big Mama Rag*, March 1984, 21.

⁴³²Joan & Ginny, "Mountain Musings," *Double Standard*, July 1981, 10.

Shortly after, the Amazon Adventures Hiking Club of Colorado Springs formed and both groups began advertising various outdoor excursions within *Double Standard* and *BMR*.⁴³³ In 1981 WOC held a ski workshop, then the next year there was another workshop for women who wanted to learn basic camping skills. In the same 1981 issue WOC offered a photography course for women interested in learning the skill at Womanventure ranch, a lesbian-owned piece of land near Pike's Peak in Colorado.⁴³⁴ Because of these women's groups Colorado women could participate in outdoor recreation at a variety of skill-levels. During the 1980s Colorado lesbian feminists had more opportunity than ever for outdoor recreation, and many of them readily joined in on these opportunities.

Women on *Double Standard's* staff like Dee Farrell, Sylvia Aldena, and the women of DOE wrote about sports news frequently in the monthly issues. From travel guides to bicycling trips, these women wrote and advertised the many different events, teams, and activities happening around Colorado. Nature had been the solution to the many issues that plagued Colorado women's community. Men's medical technology, patriarchal religions, and nuclear weaponry all could be solved with a turn to the natural world and a great appreciation for environmental protection, which included women's health as it was tied to the earth through reproduction and women's bodies. Physical health and wellness were prominent concerns in the lesbian community through the 1980s.⁴³⁵ Although Colorado's lesbian community were active mobilizers in the women's movement, the 1980s AIDS crisis often pulled women back into the larger gay and lesbian movement. By the late 1980s many lesbians considered themselves

⁴³³Kate Burns, "Resistance and Resilience: Feminist and Lesbian Activity in Colorado, 1970s-1980s," June 23, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWmQsKQLip4>

⁴³⁴"Colorado Calendar," *Double Standard*, October 1982, 9.

⁴³⁵Gena Corea, "Baby Factories, Glass Wombs, and Mother's Rebellion: Childbirth in the Year 2000 A.D.: Man's Conquering of Inner Space," *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, 8-9.

feminists, but still some distanced themselves from feminism in favor of gay liberation.⁴³⁶ Events advertised in *BMR* remained strictly women-centric, but *Double Standard* began to lean away from the women's community and advertised many gay and lesbian events through Colorado's Gay and Lesbian Community Center or the Lesbian Gay Alliance group.⁴³⁷ However, this shift would not happen until the later 1980s as the early to mid-1980s remained focused on forming a women's community in Colorado based around leisure, sports, and recreation.

“Nearby getaways just the ticket for travel bug.”⁴³⁸

In 1983 *Double Standard* writer and Women's Outdoor Club member Dee Farrell wrote an article with her trip suggestions for the month. In her article “Nearby getaways just the ticket for travel bug,” Farrell wrote that she would recommend trips to lesbians “from women's outdoor and wilderness trips to places of interest you can drive to this weekend for a romantic runaway.” Farrell recommended one hotel in Colorado Springs and the gay-owned Redcliff Lodge. Of the lodge, Farrell wrote, “It's not easy to find, nestled in the cliffs near the Garden of the Gods, but oh so worth it for its unparalleled view of Pikes Peak, easy access to hiking or skiing, and other tourist attractions.”⁴³⁹

In the next month's issue, Farrell had two more recommendations for women: “one for the weekday or weekend traveler who wants to venture no farther than 32 minutes from, downtown Denver, and one for the out-of-state vacationer who wants a tasteful balance of resort comfort and outdoor activity in a natural setting of forest, field and stream.” The Colorado option was Hanson's Lodge, near Steamboat Springs, which was apparently “the ideal spot for Apres

⁴³⁶Annelise Orleck, *Rethinking American Women's Activism* (Taylor & Francis, 2022), p. 185.; Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (Simon and Schuster, 2015), 226.

⁴³⁷“Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, March 1984, 4.

⁴³⁸Dee Farrell, “Nearby getaways just the ticket for travel bug,” *Double Standard*, January 1983, 3.

⁴³⁹Farrell, *Double Standard*, January 1983, 3.

ski.” The second option was The North Crow Ranch in Montana where a guest could sleep in a teepee or a tent. Farrell added a call for women to “Mark your calendar: womyn only-June 20-26, Summer Solstice, or August 22-28, Full Moon; Indian Pow-Wow- July 4th weekend, Children's Camp-Aug 8-15.”⁴⁴⁰ Camping and weekend retreats were popular activities for Colorado’s lesbian community, and luckily, they did not lack options in the early 1980s. The Women’s Outdoor Club and Colorado’s Gay and Lesbian Community Center would sponsor weekends away or overnight hikes around the state.

One 1982 hike with the Women’s Outdoor Club was advertised in *Double Standard* as a “13,000-foot Mt. Audubon. Moderate hike with 3,000-foot elevation gain. Pot- luck lunch on the mountain. Optional overnight Saturday at nearby cabin with WOC.” Even one of the Women’s Outdoor Club motorcycle rides came with an offer of “Optional overnight in a rustic cabin.” Some events were centered around leisure activities in the mountains, like outdoor parties and moonlit swims advertised in the monthly calendars. One event labeled the “2ND ANNUAL END-OF-SUMMER COLORADO LESBIAN DANCE AND MOONLIGHT SWIMMING CELEBRATION” was held in Eldorado Springs, Colorado. This celebration was set to include live music, camping sites, childcare, along with picnic tables, swimming, and dancing.⁴⁴¹ Events like this were often held by lesbian groups and were frequently advertised in *Double Standard*. Women could enjoy the outdoors in the comfort and support of friends and family, like an event offered by the Lesbian Mothers Group that welcomed “all women—kids welcome too—to their summer picnic, swimming and barbeque at Cherry Creek Reservoir. Come one, come all.”⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Farrell, “Travel Womanwise,” *Double Standard*, April 1983, 6.

⁴⁴¹ *Double Standard*, July 1982, 8-10.

⁴⁴² “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, July 1982, 8-9.

Colorado lesbian feminists had ample opportunity for outdoor recreation, and many openly expressed their desires for more events like these.

In *Double Standard*'s "Reports from A-Bar," the newspaper's members would ask women at Colorado lesbian feminist events questions about their interests, wants, or even New Year's resolutions. These questions ranged from "How did your Girl Scout experience prepare you for life as a dyke?" to "What kinds of things do you feel are needed, or what would you like to see happening, in the Colorado lesbian community?"⁴⁴³ The first question, although it may have seemed silly, connected early "women-filled summers" with a lesbian lifestyle later in life. One woman, Susan Pipefitter, from Denver said, "Girl Scouts was the first place where I ever saw strong women who felt good about being strong." "Savage," a lawyer in Denver who used her camp nickname to answer the report, said "I remember learning at camp that I could be strong...and push myself." Savage also continued to say that she remembered the relief of seeing other strong women as counselors and having crushes on other dykes. Lesbian feminists were focused on being strong, healthy, and independent. Outdoor recreation has been proved to help women gain confidence in themselves and their abilities, even those that stem outside the realm of nature.⁴⁴⁴ Women felt the positive benefits from these outdoor events and often acknowledged the community need in "Reports from A-Bar."⁴⁴⁵

In October of 1982 K.R Beatty of *Double Standard* asked women who attended the First Annual End-of-Summer Colorado Lesbian Dance and Moonlight Swim Celebration in Eldorado Springs, what they felt Colorado's lesbian feminist community needed. Two of the women, Elyse Bowman and Suellen, had similar thoughts on what Colorado's community needed. Elyse,

⁴⁴³ "Reports from A-Bar," *Double Standard*, October 1981, 11.

⁴⁴⁴ "Reports from A-Bar," *Double Standard*, August 1981, 12.

⁴⁴⁵ "Reports from A-Bar," *Double Standard*, October 1981, 11.

who lived in Denver, had told Beatty that she “would like the community to be stronger—fewer factions, and closer together. More community things to do, like concerts, political activities, places to go where there is no alcohol.” Littleton, Colorado-based Suellen echoed this point with, “Someplace else besides the bars! More big gatherings like this.”⁴⁴⁶ Women saw outdoor recreation as a place to go in opposition to the bars and the many hassles or dangers that came with them.

“Amazon Adventures Hiking Club in Colorado”⁴⁴⁷

In a 2022 panel sponsored by History Colorado, a Women’s Outdoor Club (WOC) member, Diane Buettner said that the club was formed as a “strong alternative” to the bars.⁴⁴⁸ The club was first advertised in BMR and *Double Standard* in 1980, and from then on events sponsored by the WOC filled the two papers' monthly calendars. *Double Standard* had a full section of their calendar dedicated to outdoor events, which were bolstered by the WOC. In 1981 *Double Standard* reported that the “Women’s Outdoor Club faces an uncertain future,” and included an interview with one of WOC’s founders, Dee Farrell. Farrell called for women, particularly the 150 members of the WOC, to step up and take over executive positions to help plan and put on workshops, hikes, and retreats. The article added that the WOC “members say they hope to be able to continue that service to the lesbian community.”⁴⁴⁹ Fortunately, the meetings and pleas for help worked, and the WOC continued to service the lesbian feminist community throughout the 1980s.

⁴⁴⁶ “Reports from A-Bar,” *Double Standard*, January 1982, 7.

⁴⁴⁷ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, November 1981, 11.

⁴⁴⁸ Kate Burns, “Resistance and Resilience: Feminist and Lesbian Activity in Colorado, 1970s-1980s,” June 23, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWmQsKQLip4>.

⁴⁴⁹ Jane Hoback, “Women’s Outdoor Club faces uncertain future,” *Double Standard*, October 1981.

The WOC was important for women across Colorado. The club had members in Longmont, Boulder, Denver, and Estes Park.⁴⁵⁰ In a 1981 advertisement in *Double Standard*, the women wrote that they “felt that an important result of outdoor activities with women is the support and validation for lesbian lifestyles.”⁴⁵¹ WOC was a fixture in Colorado’s lesbian feminist community; Cheetah, a *Double Standard* writer, recommended WOC in her article “A newcomer’s guide to Denver.” A woman wrote into *Double Standard* that she had just moved from Wyoming to Denver and wrote, “I want to be in a singing group with all lesbians, a hiking group with all lesbians and I have been dying to sell ads for a lesbian newspaper.” Like some sort of genie, Cheetah answered, “The Lesbian Chorus rehearses each Monday evening, and Denver also has a Women's Outdoors Club. The Double Standard is looking for an advertising manager, and what a great way to get involved, make friends, and serve your community.”⁴⁵² The WOC was a major way for Colorado lesbian feminists to enjoy outdoor leisure. The club hosted various events, hikes, and regularly scheduled potlucks to better strengthen the community aspect of the club. Women who wanted to enjoy the outdoors but might not have had skills for hiking, camping, or climbing could still participate in the WOC community through these potlucks, picnics, and even educational courses offered at feminist business centers.

The WOC advertised a variety of outdoor events, from birdwatching at 5 a.m. in Denver to a bicycle trip “to Cherry Creek Reservoir sponsored by Women's Outdoor Club from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Bring repair kit, beverage and toys. Swimming and fishing.” The club had motorcycle overnight trips, weekend long hikes with camping, and even a hiking and backpacking trip in the San Juan Mountain Range, that advertised “Participants should have climbed one or two

⁴⁵⁰ Hoback, *Double Standard*, October 1981.

⁴⁵¹ *Double Standard*, June 1982, 5.

⁴⁵² Cheetah, “A newcomer’s guide to Denver,” *Double Standard*, November 1983, 3.

fourteen-ers before the trip. Carpool to and from Durango.”⁴⁵³ A 1982 “Report from A-Bar” in *Double Standard* reported on Colorado women’s New Year Resolutions. One woman, Kris, replied “Climb the rest of the Fourteeners! 28 to go!”⁴⁵⁴ To put this into perspective, Colorado has 53 “fourteeners,” or peaks that are at least 14,000 feet. The WOC offered opportunities at multiple different skill levels, which gave both beginner women a safe way to start their new hobby, and advanced hikers a space to join other women in more challenging hikes or activities. The WOC planned events in all seasons. There were moonlight hikes in December, ski trips in January, and walks like the “leisurely 10-mile round trip to Willow Creek” with a “Beautiful photo area—wild flowers should be at their peak.”⁴⁵⁵ Clubs like the WOC gave Colorado women support to spend time outside, but other clubs centered around outdoor recreation popped up in the 1980s.

The Amazon Adventures Hiking Club of Colorado Springs also hosted and planned numerous hikes, trips, and outdoor events in the 1980s.⁴⁵⁶ In 1981 *Double Standard* advertised the Amazons’ hike to Horse Thief Park with “All women welcome.”⁴⁵⁷ This was a common occurrence in the Amazons’ advertisements. Another hike later that year included the typical call for all women and referred to it as a “gentle 4 miles.”⁴⁵⁸ These advertisements encouraged Colorado lesbians to come and join them in the mountains, while also appealing to lesbian herstory. Amazon was a commonly used word in the lesbian feminist community; newspapers

⁴⁵³ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, November 1981, 10.

⁴⁵⁴ “Reports from A-Bar,” *Double Standard*, January 1982, 7.

⁴⁵⁵ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, November 1981, 10.

⁴⁵⁶ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, August 1982, 14.

⁴⁵⁷ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, December 1981, 11.

⁴⁵⁸ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, June 1981, 8.

and periodicals had names like *Amazon Quarterly*, and lesbian women often used this term to provoke an image of powerful women-identified women forming a community together.⁴⁵⁹

A 1984 article, “Amazon Nation” by Sarah Smith in *Double Standard* asked “Who were the Amazons? Who were those ancient women warriors continually warring with the Greek city-states?,” which she then answered with “I think they must have been a bunch of dykes who could not stand to live in the sexist societies of their time.”⁴⁶⁰ In February 1982 “Reports from A-Bar,” the *Double Standard* asked lesbians, “In other words, with what object or experience do you become a “big, strong dyke?” Sherry, a Colorado lesbian, responded that she felt strongest when she wore her labrys, the double-edged sword symbol of the Amazons.⁴⁶¹ This symbol represented more than an ancient group of warrior women from Greek mythology. The labrys was a symbol associated with female goddesses like Artemis, then later the Amazons, however in the 1970s the labrys became a symbol of lesbian identity. Although it was not until 1999 that the labrys lesbian flag was created, women throughout the 1980s utilized this female power symbol to recognize each other.⁴⁶² Sherry and Smith’s words combined Amazon imagery with Mother Earth and feminist Goddess spirituality. Smith’s article discussed the significance of women’s space, and she wrote, “I believe that Mother Nature saved the land of the Amazon so that when the time was right, those of her daughters who loved each other and yearned to be free would have a place to call home. Men cannot conquer the Amazon because the land belongs to women.”⁴⁶³ Conquering and dominating were commonly used words for Colorado’s lesbian feminist community. Like arguments from ecofeminists like Carolyn Merchant, Colorado

⁴⁵⁹ Sarah Smith, “Amazon Nation,” *Double Standard*, December 1984, 11.

⁴⁶⁰ Smith, *Double Standard*, December 1984, 11.

⁴⁶¹ “Reports from A-Bar,” *Double Standard*, February 1982, 10.

⁴⁶² “Beyond-the-binary/Labrys,” Pitt Rivers Museum, n.d., <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/beyond-the-binary/labrys>.

⁴⁶³ Smith, *Double Standard*, December 1984, 11.

women believed that men had dominated nature, the outdoors, and formed social institutions to dominate women as well.⁴⁶⁴ In order to fight against this domination, lesbian feminists in Colorado sought each other out through clubs and feminists' groups. The Amazons and Mother Nature served as a connecting cultural point for women to place themselves in the outdoors.

Nature, Mother Earth, and outdoor recreation often seemed like the one thing women, especially lesbian women, had more connection to than men. The "Reports from A-Bar" give an inside look into what was happening in Colorado's lesbian community in the 1980s, and outdoor recreation made appearances again and again in these reports. In these reports women discussed sports, hiking, and how these things helped shape their identity. In the 1982 New Year's Resolution interview, one woman, Paula, said that she had one goal for the upcoming year. Paula said she wanted to "Find all the lesbians in Estes Park and get together."⁴⁶⁵ Luckily for Paula, there was already a group of lesbians in Estes Park committed to getting women together in the Rockies.

"One of us traveled to Estes Park to visit the Dykes of Estes."

In January of 1982 one *Double Standard* article read "One of us traveled to Estes Park to visit the Dykes of Estes. It was a delightful time to be with old friends and meet new women, good to share experiences of mountain women and the scenes of Rocky Mountain National Park."⁴⁶⁶ The Dykes of Estes, or DOE, were a group of lesbian women living in Estes Park in the Rocky Mountains. These women, typically two named Joan and Ginny, often wrote in *Double Standard* with a column they called "Mountain Musings."⁴⁶⁷ In one September issue, DOE wrote

⁴⁶⁴ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

⁴⁶⁵ "Reports from A-Bar," *Double Standard*, January 1982, 7.

⁴⁶⁶ "News from the Summit," *Double Standard*, January 1982, 9.

⁴⁶⁷ Joan & Ginny, "Mountain Musings," *Double Standard*, June 1981, 7.

that they had pulled together the entire “known” dyke population for a summer picnic. Each of these “Mountain Musings” ended with a call for women “visiting or living in the area who would like to be included in these spontaneous get-togethers can call (evenings) Kristina 586-5963 or Joan 586-2906.”⁴⁶⁸ The group tried to encourage women from around Colorado, and even out of state, to come visit to enjoy the Rockies with DOE.

DOE reported their first “Mountain Musing” in June of 1981. The article was full of DOE events, ranging from a moonlight picnic where the “Woman In The Moon was obscured by clouds, her energy could still be felt on this special night,” to a history museum visit in town with a group of Boulder women and children.⁴⁶⁹ DOE had connections all over the state, in this article they reported on a “reunion with mutual friends from Ft. Collins resulting in an old fashioned slumber party with not much slumber, but lots of laughing and sharing.” The group welcomed women from all over and tried to make outdoor recreation accessible for all women. Whether this be allowing children or a trail “designed for handicapped visitors and is wheelchair accessible.” This group of women made the Rocky Mountains a safe space for women over the course of the early 1980s. Women knew they could be invited into the DOE community through a simple phone call or visit to the park. The group would grow to include visits from women all over the West throughout the 1980s.⁴⁷⁰

In November of 1981, DOE wrote “the Dykes of Estes are never too busy to share ‘our mountains’ with visitors, from the ‘flatlands from as close as’ Dykes Boulder/ Denver and as far away as Minneapolis arrived by the carload to experience autumn in the Rockies with us.” DOE helped introduce Colorado’s lesbian feminist culture to women from other states. Outdoor

⁴⁶⁸ Dykes of Estes, “Mountain Musings,” *Double Standard*, September 1981, 12.

⁴⁶⁹ Joan & Ginny, “Mountain Musings,” *Double Standard*, June 1981, 7.

⁴⁷⁰ Joan & Ginny, “Mountain Musings,” *Double Standard*, July 1981, 10.

recreation was becoming a major part of Colorado lesbians' identity. DOE often leaned into the feminist and Goddess spirituality in their "Mountain Musings." One article by Ginny and Joan started with "The Earth Mother has at last brought spring to the mountains and awakened Dykes of Estes (DOE) from the long winter of hibernation." Earth Mother, Mother Earth, Goddess, and full moon celebrations were words scattered across DOE reports. Also included in this November article was a note from DOE that said, "Mountain women have been working together to help each other winterize homes, make necessary repairs, and stockpile firewood before the snow flies in the lower elevations." DOE's reports often included women working, playing, and exploring together. DOE women were a community who aided one another, even taking on tasks that have been associated with men like gathering firewood or home and auto repairs, and often used the term "mountain women."⁴⁷¹ In September of 1981 "Mt. Chapin and Mt. Chiquita were conquered by our mountain women on a three- day expedition," and earlier in July DOE speculated that old rock formations may be evidence of moon worship from previous generations of mountain women.⁴⁷² DOE even used this idea to try and form connections with other women's communities like the women living in Meeker Park, which was in AllensPark, Colorado near Estes, whom DOE contacted with "hopes that these two mountain women's communities can get together to share some adventures in the coming months."⁴⁷³ This women's community would continue to encourage more women to visit the Rockies and in 1982, the group would increase their population of dykes in Estes.

In a 1982 report, DOE discussed their growing numbers and surge in visitors, explaining their exciting need for a bus to fit more women, and to allow them greater mobility within the

⁴⁷¹ Dykes of Estes, "Mountain Musings," *Double Standard*, November 1981, 15.

⁴⁷² Dykes of Estes, "Mountain Musings," *Double Standard*, September 1981, 12.

⁴⁷³ Joan & Ginny, "Mountain Musings," *Double Standard*, July 1981, 10.

women's community. A bus would give all of DOE a way to go to Denver for protests, concerts, and "organize meaningful Women's Tours of the Rockies for our visitors." Ginny and Joan went on to acknowledge that a bus may not seem probable, but they have "faith that the Goddess will provide!" To raise money for the bus, DOE had been selling shirts with their logo, a doe with a cap and neckerchief. This was akin to the Girl Scouts uniform, a community of young girls who learn outdoor education and skills and have frequent troop camping trips.⁴⁷⁴ Like female athletes, Girl Scouts were a popular example of women's community and personal strength. As women like Susan and "Savage" had said in *Double Standard*, Girl Scouts was often an early memory of forming relationships with other women in an outdoor environment.⁴⁷⁵ Similar to the Girl Scouts and their opportunities for young girls, DOE provided a women-only group centered around the outdoors. These T-shirts were like a uniform and allowed DOE members to be spotted by visitors at the park and served as a form of connection for the members themselves. When a woman saw that doe symbol in the park, it meant she was seeing another lesbian in her women's community. The influx of visitors wasn't only good for DOE profits and membership numbers, visitors kept women's communities around the nation in touch with each other.⁴⁷⁶

In September of 1981 DOE reported that, "Shared experiences with women from California, Texas, Michigan, and Iowa City helps to reduce our sense of isolation in this mountain community." DOE helped to introduce Colorado lesbian feminist culture to women from around the nation. No matter where a woman was coming from, a visit with DOE would mean outdoor recreation, site-seeing, and exploring the wilderness with other women. Although DOE didn't own land where they might offer a women's separatist community, it offered women

⁴⁷⁴ "What Girl Scouts Do | About Girl Scouts," Girl Scouts of the USA, n.d., <https://www.girlscouts.org/en/discover/about-us/what-girl-scouts-do.html>.

⁴⁷⁵ "Reports from A-Bar," *Double Standard*, August 1981, 12.

⁴⁷⁶ Dykes of Estes, "Mountain Musings," *Double Standard*, January 1982, 9.

a way to join a tight-knit group of lesbian feminists with whom they could enjoy outdoor recreation and feminist spirituality.⁴⁷⁷ But, DOE was not the only women's organization or group that aimed to provide a women-only space in Colorado. Some Colorado women made dreams of a women's utopia a reality and bought pieces of land with the intent to host outdoor women's gatherings.

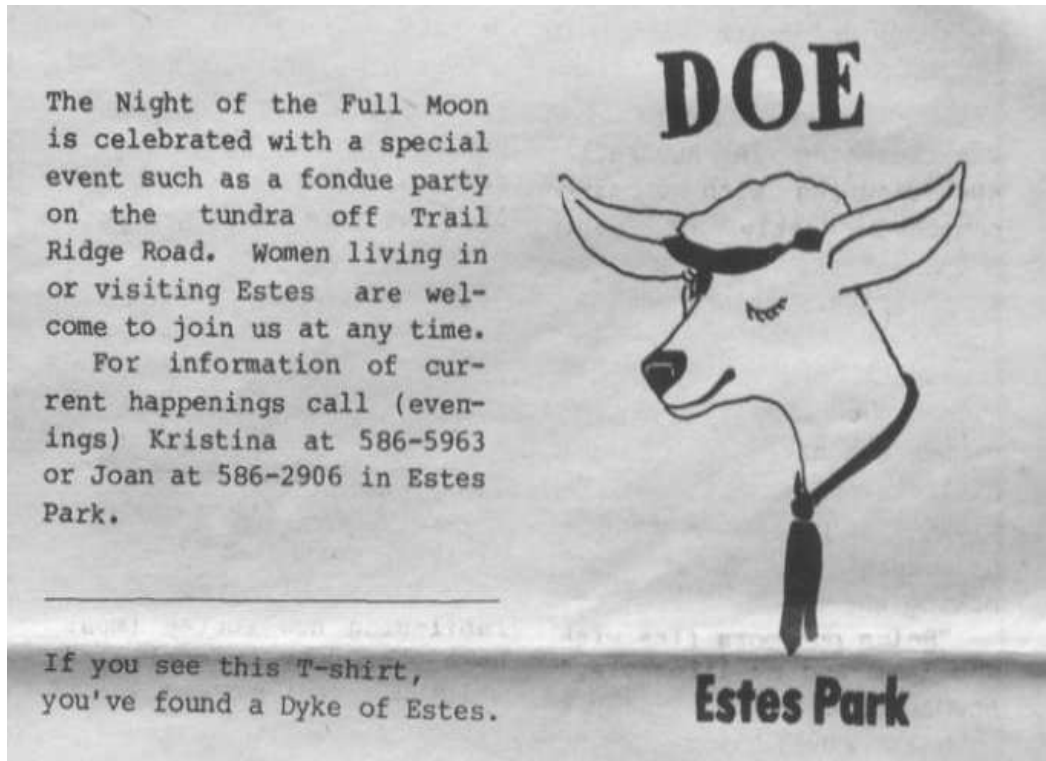


FIG:4.1 Dykes of Estes t-shirt design and logo. (Dyke of Estes, *Double Standard*, June 1981, p. 14.)

⁴⁷⁷ Dykes of Estes, "Mountain Musings," *Double Standard*, September 1981, 12.

“It’s not exactly Lesbos but it's close.”

In March of 1982 *Double Standard* editor Jane Hoback wrote an article on Womanventure Ranch. The ranch was “67 acres of mountain land nestled at the edge of the Pike National Forest and sprinkled liberally with trails, ravines, ponds, streams and even a toboggan run.” The ranch was owned and operated by lesbian couple Betty Danko and Ann Morrow, along with business partners Carolyn Nordblum and Susan Spilman. The two founders, Danko and Morrow, were therapists in Denver and worked with the Feminist Counseling Collective three days a week in the city. Hoback referred to Womanventure as “not exactly Lesbos but it’s close,” alluding to Sappho and the Isle of Lesbos.⁴⁷⁸ Similar to the ancient Amazons, Sappho and the Isle of Lesbos was a common way for lesbians in the modern era to show historical relevance of lesbianism. Lesbos became, and remains, a site of tourism and pilgrimage for many lesbian women. The island is seen as a lesbian utopia with festivals dedicated to lesbians taking place there each year.⁴⁷⁹ Luckily, Colorado women did not have to travel across the sea for a female utopia. Womanventure ranch was created as a place for women to enjoy nature in other women’s company; women could reserve stays or perform an “exchange.” A group of women from the WOC chopped wood for the ranch to get a free overnight stay.⁴⁸⁰ The women advised against women using the ranch for drugs or alcohol, and instead urged women to make use of the “abundant nature, outdoor recreational opportunities” offered through Womanventure’s location.⁴⁸¹

Betty Danko and Ann Morrow wanted Womanventure to provide both natural beauty and educational opportunities. Morrow had an idea for an exchange and learning opportunity, “They

⁴⁷⁸ *Double Standard*, March 1982, 1.

⁴⁷⁹ “Beyond-the-Binary/Labrys,” n.d.

⁴⁸⁰ *Double Standard*, March 1982, 1.

⁴⁸¹ *Double Standard*, June 1982, 11.

could come up here and stay six weeks to work on a greenhouse. They stay up here, get paid and we get the greenhouse.”⁴⁸² One of the places a woman might stay on Womanventure ranch include the “Honeymoon Cabin,” alongside two other cabins and a treehouse. The women wanted the ranch to be a place where women could come and escape from work and their daily routine. The ranch aimed to promote creativity and give women space to practice hobbies or hold large gatherings with friends. The ranch may have been on a smaller scale than a full separatist community, but moving into 1982, the ranch kept growing as a place for women to relax in the tranquil outdoors near Pikes Peak Forest.

In a help wanted advertisement for Womanventure ran in the June of 1982 issue of *Double Standard*, the ranch was searching for a caretaker in exchange for room and board.⁴⁸³ Later that year in October the ranch hosted the Women’s Outdoor Club for a nature photography course. The entry fee was \$35, which included the course and overnight accommodations at Womanventure. Then, in September of 1983 Womanventure hosted the Lesbian Mothers Support Group for a “special camping weekend.”⁴⁸⁴ There is no evidence that Womanventure was a booming business that generated massive profit, but the evidence that it existed shows that it served its function as a place for lesbian feminist community building. Throughout the 1980s other women’s businesses would pop up with the intention to educate and provide a space of healthy fun for Colorado women. Lesbian feminists were often the mobilizers or pioneers of these outdoor recreation efforts, like Womanventure or the WOC. Like these organizations, Coral Bowman founded her climbing school as a space for women to enjoy a hobby amongst other women.

⁴⁸² *Double Standard*, March 1982, 1.

⁴⁸³ *Double Standard*, June 1982, 11.

⁴⁸⁴ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, October 1982, 9.

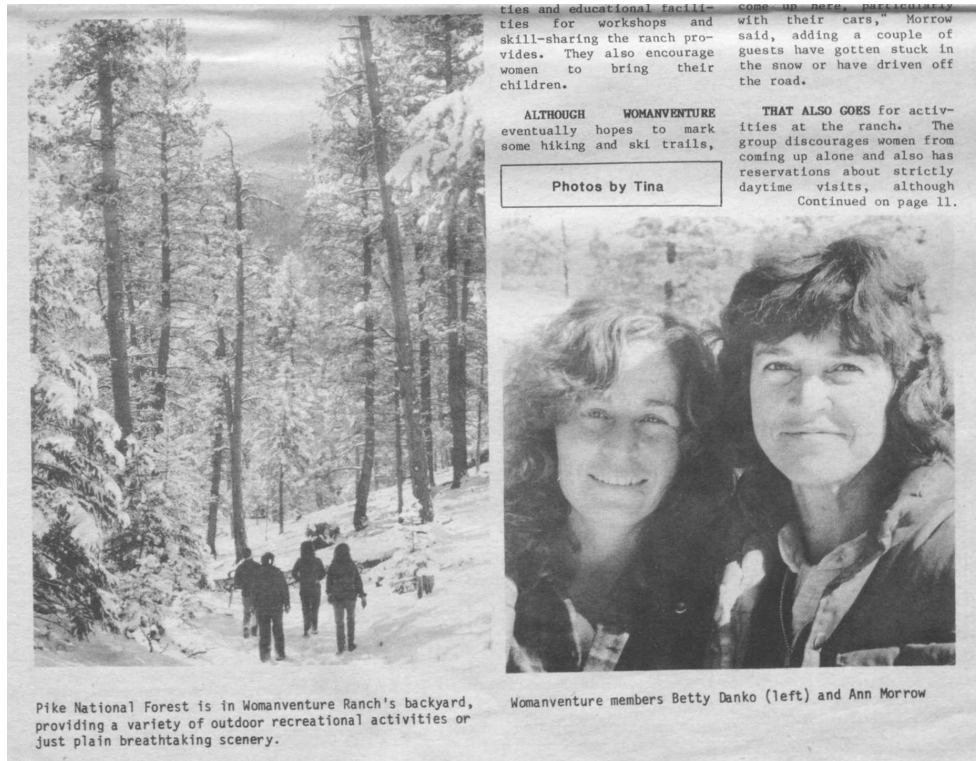


FIG:4.2 Photos of Womanventure ranch and the wonders, Betty Danko and Ann Morrow. (*Double Standard*, March 1982)

In 1981 Coral Bowman started her school Great Herizons, a rock-climbing school for women, in Boulder, Colorado. Bowman was dedicated to bringing more women into the world of rock climbing for many reasons, one being that she wanted more women to climb with as climbing was still often a male-dominated sport. Bowman explained her philosophies as a teacher, saying she wanted to help women be attuned to themselves, but that she also believed “Taking the lead in rock climbing is like taking responsibility in your life.”⁴⁸⁵ Women needed to tie their own knots and make their own routes to strengthen their own skills and gain confidence. Bowman often partnered with the WOC to lead rock-climbing trips and lessons for members and used *Double Standard* to advertise different climbs and events.⁴⁸⁶ Organizations like Great

⁴⁸⁵ Dee Farrell, “Scaling the Heights with Great Herizons,” *Double Standard*, June 1981, 6.

⁴⁸⁶ Dee Farrell, “Scaling the Heights with Great Herizons,” *Double Standard*, June 1981, 6.

Herizons and Womanventure, and clubs like WOC and Amazon Adventures helped women overcome their fear and enjoy outdoor leisure in the Rockies and male-dominated forms of recreation. These groups increased women's confidence in themselves and solidified Colorado's lesbian community's identity that encompassed a love of women and nature. Alongside the increased focus on outdoor recreation in the mountains, lesbian feminists throughout Colorado used sports like softball, volleyball, and running to form communities in cities like Denver and Boulder.

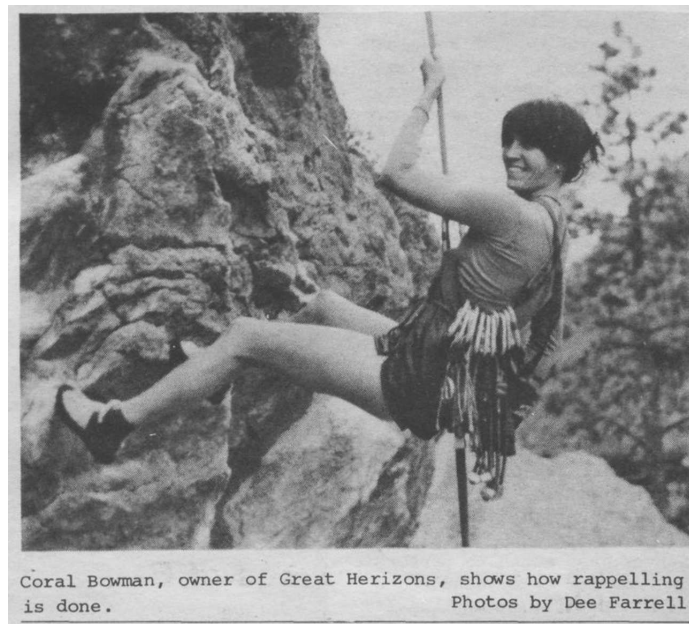


FIG:4.3 Coral Bowman of Great Herizons on a climb in Boulder, Colorado. Bowman was photographed by *Double Standard* writer and WOC member Dee Farrell.⁴⁸⁷ (June 1981)

⁴⁸⁷ Dee Farrell, "Scaling the Heights with Great Herizons," *Double Standard*, June 1981, 6.

“Women still running together, even at different pace”⁴⁸⁸

Throughout the 1980s *Double Standard* advertised softball leagues, 5k races, volleyball in the park, and even casual games of football hosted by the Lesbian Caucus in Denver.⁴⁸⁹ The importance of sports in Colorado’s lesbian feminist community was seen through these many events advertised in publications like BMR and *Double Standard*, but also seen through the words of Colorado lesbians themselves. In a 1982 article, “Reports from Around Town” in *Double Standard*, Sylvia (S.) Aldena asked Colorado lesbian women “What is your favorite sport and why?”⁴⁹⁰ Aldena was the sports journalist of *Double Standard*. Almost every sports column had been written by her and “Reports from Around Town” often came from the “ever curious questioner.” Aldena was a 35-year-old Colorado lesbian who had recently quit her teaching job and taken up lawn mowing, then joined *Double Standard* to remain visible and active in the movement.⁴⁹¹ The inquisitive reporter had made a name for herself in *Double Standard* and understood the value in women’s sports and recreation. Aldena’s “Reports from Around Town,” or “Reports from A-Bar” gave women a place to speak freely about community events, childhood, and of course, their favorite sports. In women’s replies to Aldena’s sports question, they shared nostalgic memories of sports, other women, and outdoor recreation.

M.P., a Boulder lesbian and teacher, said of her passion for softball, “When I was coming out I played on a Boulder all-dyke team. I got involved with sports to meet lesbians. It worked!” Many women included in the report spoke of the joy they got from playing softball, basketball, soccer, and more with other women, and the stress relief sports provide. One computer engineer from Boulder could not pick her favorite sport, she mentioned both basketball and soccer, but

⁴⁸⁸ S. Aldena, "Sports," *Double Standard*, February 1984, 5.

⁴⁸⁹ "Colorado Calendar." *Double Standard*, January 1983, 6-7.

⁴⁹⁰ S. Aldena, "Reports from around Town." *Double Standard*, March 1982, 11.

⁴⁹¹ K. Thomas, "Staff Spotlight," *Double Standard*, August 1983, 4.

she clearly outlined, “I am able to keep mentally balanced as I burn off stress and frustration built up during the day. It's a social event. I love playing with women.”⁴⁹² Similarly to the pool tables at the Velvet Hammer discussed in Chapter Two, sports gave women both a sense of nostalgia to when they first came out and provided a space for women to go to meet one another. Many lesbian feminists suffered from severe burnout due to their often-unpaid work in the movement. Sports gave these women a way to shake off any residual anger, stress, or worry from their day and simply have a ball with other lesbians in Colorado. There were several sporting teams and events across the state that allowed women to play together.

Women in the city of Aurora could enjoy football through the Parks and Recreational All Women's Football League.⁴⁹³ The league consisted of two teams, including the two mentioned in the article, The Outlaws and Bojangles. The women on The Outlaws were a loyal team who played together in many different sports like softball, soccer, and football. The team was sponsored by a different business each year, but the members always stayed together. One team member, Millie, said of The Outlaws, “They are absolutely the best group of ladies. We are all friends and we will always be friends.”⁴⁹⁴ Sports and recreation helped women to make these long lasting friendships, and in some cases, reunited childhood friends through their love of the sport.

In 1983 two women, Nancy Parent and Peggy Morin, both originally from Michigan, rekindled their friendship through softball. The two women had played together back in Iron Mountain, Michigan growing up, and after college had both moved to Boulder and began playing on the Ace-Discount team as third base and pitcher.⁴⁹⁵ Similarly, two women, Mig and Margo,

⁴⁹² S. Aldena, "Reports from around Town." *Double Standard*, March 1982, 11.

⁴⁹³ S. Aldena, "Sports," *Double Standard*, June 1984, 11.

⁴⁹⁴ S. Aldena, "Sports," *Double Standard*, June 1984, 11.

⁴⁹⁵ S. Aledna, "Softball Team Reunites Old Pals from Michigan," *Double Standard*, July 1983, 9.

sustained their friendship through traveling to races around the West. The two women had different mile times and running paces but still made sure they jogged together at their events. In 1980 the two women decided to move into a van together and start traveling more seriously around the United States to compete in races. Colorado was home to their favorite races and some of the best marathon training for Mig and Margo. The two women had both ran in Denver's anti-nuke race, and their most "special" race, the Silverfox run in Boulder which was only for women 40 and up.⁴⁹⁶ Having a community was an important part of recreation. Whether it be softball or white water rafting and kayaking, women attempted to teach and play with other women.

Softball was a beloved sport for many Colorado lesbians. There was the Denver recreational league full of highly competitive teams, like the Lil' Hummers, and various smaller leagues throughout the state. A 1983 issue of *Double Standard* included a listing of the Lil' Hummers games for the month of June, with four different dates women could pick from to go watch the slow-pitch softball team.⁴⁹⁷ Terri, a Boulder lesbian, went from softball player to softball coach for her team, the Ale-gators in 1983. The beer-related pun on the word "ale" represents Colorado's women's focus on having a good time with their friends; some teams may have been competitive, but at the end of the day, the sport was for the purpose of leisure as community building. After a game-related injury, Terri had to sit out games while she waited to heal. Rather than be stuck on the bench, Terri made the difficult decision to stop playing and start coaching as she knew she could not leave the game behind entirely.⁴⁹⁸ One lesbian horticulturist from Denver said softball helped her "come out of hibernation and the winter

⁴⁹⁶ S. Aldena, "Sports." *Double Standard*, February 1984, 5.

⁴⁹⁷ "Colorado Calendar." *Double Standard*, June 1983, 8-9.

⁴⁹⁸ S. Aldena, "Sports." *Double Standard*, August 1983, 10.

doledrums.”⁴⁹⁹ Many women were longtime players and had developed a strong passion for the game over time. However, not all women had to be highly skilled like the Lil’ Hummers or even lifelong players like Terri. In one issue of *Double Standard* in 1982, a woman asked, “Can women that are unskilled in softball become a member of a recreational team or isn’t there room for them?”⁵⁰⁰

Over the course of the 1980s, Colorado lesbian feminists worked to make sports and recreation more accessible. In May of 1982 a new softball team emerged in Colorado, the Well Over 40 group formed as “strictly recreational and is not joining a league. We’re interested in the social contact and in meeting old friends we haven’t seen in a while.” The women described themselves as being both overweight and over 40, and invited any women who related to these statements to come play with them Saturday mornings at 41st and Irving in Denver.⁵⁰¹ Other groups aimed to make sports more inclusive, like the Lesbian Caucus in Denver who planned sports for every weekend during the summer, or the Lesbian Co-op who advertise an event in *Double Standard* with “Bring some food to share, your own dish and utensils, your friends, softball stuff, frisbees.”⁵⁰²

Many lesbian sporting events were advertised in *Double Standard* for casual recreation like football and softball in the park. One event was a “Lesbian Independence Day Celebration” with “Barbecue, softball, volleyball, frisbee, lesbians, children, fun, games.”⁵⁰³ These forms of sports and recreation advertised by *BMR* and *Double Standard* act as everyday utopias for Colorado women. Like sociologist Mary Louise Adams’ argument in “Feminist Softball as

⁴⁹⁹ S. Aldena, "Reports from around Town." *Double Standard*, March 1982, 11.

⁵⁰⁰ Barb K, Kathy B, Sheri P, "Up out & Aware." *Double Standard*, May 1982, 13.

⁵⁰¹ Judy Powell, "New Softball Team Well over 40." *Double Standard*, May 1982, 2.

⁵⁰² "Colorado Calendar," *Double Standard*, July 1984, 6.

⁵⁰³ "Colorado Calendar," *Double Standard*, July 1984, 6.

Everyday Utopia: Sport as a Site of Political Transformation,” Colorado women often rejected hierarchies and changed rules of the game, which allowed for more women to be included. The Well Over 40 team included women who may not normally be welcomed to participate in sports, like middle-aged, overweight women. Although many of these were Denver-based events, women in Colorado had other opportunities for more other sports and more different forms of outdoor recreation.

A dyke softball-turned-volleyball team called The Rubyfruits played one game a week in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. The Rubyfruits were a welcoming group, like the Well Over 40 softball team in that they were open to all with no cuts. The name, Rubyfruits, most likely came from Rita Mae Brown’s 1973 novel *Rubyfruit Jungle*. The novel was a foundational work of lesbian literature and served as a sapphic awakening for many women.⁵⁰⁴ Rita Mae Brown was a lesbian icon during the second wave movement (and remains one today). Brown was a part of the Radicalesbians who had stormed into the Congress to Unite Women in 1970. *BMR* and *Double Standard* often advertised events with Brown in attendance, works by her, or even made jokes referring to her. In the monthly column “Scraps from Mama’s Table,” Chocolate Waters wrote “How to be a Radical Right-On [lesbian] in Denver, CO.” In the 1978 article, Waters jokingly told readers to “form a cheerleading section for Rita Mae Brown or buy a pair of her underwear for \$1,000.”⁵⁰⁵ Like the Ale-gators softball team, the Rubyfruits comedic name is an example of the team’s true nature.

The team had 12 players whereas most volleyball teams had 8, to which teammate Patricia said, “philosophy of having fun and playing all the team members equally.” The women

⁵⁰⁴ Trish Bendix and Scott Heller, “My First Trip to ‘Rubyfruit Jungle,’” *The New York Times*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/20/books/rubyfruit-jungle-rita-mae-brown-fiftieth-anniversary.html>.

⁵⁰⁵ Chocolate Waters, “Scraps from Mama’s Table,” *Big Mama Rag*, 10.

switched players so 6 women played the first game and then the second group of 6 played the next game. Although the team placed last in the Wheat Ridge league, the women were focused on having a good time with their teammates.⁵⁰⁶ In July of 1982, *Double Standard* advertised for any Boulder “soccer fanatics” looking for a team. The women were interested in joining a league where the “teams are open to including any women who are interested in playing. Skill levels may vary from expert to just beginning.” These Colorado teams were dedicated to having fun and participating in leisure with other women. Across the state, more and more lesbian feminists were gaining interest in sports and recreation.

This same 1982 article included a call for “All interested ruggers, read on!” Then explained the emerging rugby league in Denver searching for new players.⁵⁰⁷ Colorado women were growing interested in sports that had been previously unavailable or inaccessible to them. Among the various sports gaining popularity across Colorado, biking had become a major part of the lesbian feminist culture. A bike-a-thon fundraiser was a common sight to be advertised in *Double Standard*, like the one in February of 1982. One Georgia-based woman wrote to *BMR* in 1980 in “Letters Home to Mama,” enclosing her \$6 for a year-long subscription and was “requesting from you any information on bicycling trips for women in the Colorado area for late August or early September.”⁵⁰⁸

In 1981 *Double Standard* published an article spreading the news that “Pirate Mary crew will hit the rapids.” Pirate Mary was an all-women rafting experience, typically along the Colorado or Roaring Fork rivers. The experience was run by Susan Frasier, a Denver-based rafting instructor who had overseen the voyage since 1976. Frasier encouraged all women to

⁵⁰⁶ *Double Standard*, October 1982, 4.

⁵⁰⁷ *Double Standard*, October 1982, 4.

⁵⁰⁸ Emily Wughalter, “Summer Cycling?,” *Big Mama Rag*, July 1980, 3.

attend, saying, “This is a real good first trip for inexperienced women to take. It's really fun, especially since it's all women. The name Pirate Mary came from an alleged female explorer, Mary Reed, who was captured by the pirate Ann Bonny. *Double Standard* added that the two women “sailed off into the sunset” in a hint to some suspected lesbianism between the two pirates.⁵⁰⁹ Water rafting was just one of the typically masculine activities Colorado lesbians were overtaking. One Colorado lesbian, Tina, was interviewed by *Double Standard* on her hobby of fencing which they add was “not just clashing and banging of swords.” Tina admitted that she was struggling to find other women interested in fencing and joked that she was “looking to find two other women to form a women's Three Musketeers.”⁵¹⁰ Although meant to be humorous, Tina’s yearning for two more female fencers indicated the importance of community and friendship to Colorado lesbian feminists. Sports and recreation stood as important parts of lesbian leisure in Colorado. Women could strengthen their skills, gain a great self-confidence, and meet other lesbian feminists around the state.

August 25th, 1984, *Double Standard* held a rafting excursion down the Colorado River. The event, called the Double Standard First Ever Raft Trip was about 16 women, with ages ranging from 21 to 56. The article, titled “Raft trip means good times, new friends,” summed up most of Colorado lesbian’s ventures into the outdoors. Women formed relationships and fostered intimate friendships with each other through outdoor recreation. The article featured prose about the rapids and women fighting to maintain their composure on the raft, and mentioned “time of leisure, floating between the majestic red sandstone walls of canyons, lunching by the river and sharing brief portions of individual herstories.”⁵¹¹ Lesbian leisure was essential to the wellbeing

⁵⁰⁹ “Pirate Mary Crew Will Hit the Rapids.” *Double Standard*, July 1981, 2.

⁵¹⁰ S. Aldena, "Sports." *Double Standard*, Sept. 1983, 8.

⁵¹¹ “Raft trip means good times, new friends,” *Double Standard*, September 1984, 9.

of the community. Fun with friends gave women time away from work, organizing, and often unpaid feminist labor within the movement. The specific comment on individual herstories reflected the 1970s community building efforts and the efforts women made to create new words and phrases that were women centric.⁵¹² Throughout the 1980s, outdoor recreation helped to provide community, individual strength, and personal confidence. Outdoor recreation provided more opportunities for events and led to Colorado women exploring a great number of locations, rather than just hanging out on Colfax Avenue in Denver.



FIG: 4.4 Raft trip pictures by Double Standard staffer, K. Lea. (*Double Standard*, September 1984, p. 9.)

⁵¹² "Herstory of International Women's Day." *Big Mama Rag*, March 1976, 5.

“lesbians are active, community is growing”⁵¹³

The lesbian feminist community was extremely active during the 1980s. Events advertised in *BMR* and *Double Standard* steadily increased. From 1974 to 1979, I transcribed 175 events in *BMR*, ranging from support groups held at Woman to Woman bookcenter to the Colorado Women’s Festivals throughout the early 1970s.⁵¹⁴ From 1980 to 1984 I transcribed over 300, roughly 309, events advertised in *BMR* and *Double Standard*, founded in 1981. Of these 309 events I categorized 65 under the title bookstore, meaning it was an event, workshop, or seminar at a bookstore, 35 as women’s groups that took place outside of bookstores, 30 as coffeehouses which were hosted at various locations, 17 as festival/benefit/party, 10 as education, 7 as the arts, and 2 as workshops. If an event was not categorized under “bookstore,” this meant it took place at a different location like a women’s center, church basement, university, or a public park. The other 161 events were categorized as outdoor recreation, which included both outdoor activities and workshops or educational courses, often sponsored by the WOC.⁵¹⁵ The increase in outdoor recreation was not solely because of *Double Standard*’s heavy focus on nature, sports, and women’s clubs like WOC and Amazon Adventures.⁵¹⁶ *BMR*’s outdoor recreation events had doubled; *BMR* advertised 12 outdoor rec events from 1974 to 1979, then increased to 24 events from 1980 to 1984.⁵¹⁷ Outdoor recreation pushed women further into Colorado through hikes, motorcycle rides, and more.

⁵¹³ T. Barie Moser, "Greeley Lesbians Are Active, Community Is Growing." *Double Standard*, June 1981, 7.

⁵¹⁴ Dona Calacone, "Women’s Festival Celebrates Fifth Year," *Big Mama Rag*, October 1978, 1.

⁵¹⁵ Data pulled from the author’s own datasets.

⁵¹⁶ Jane Hoback, "Women’s Outdoor Club faces uncertain future," *Double Standard*, October 1981.

⁵¹⁷ Data pulled from the author’s own datasets.

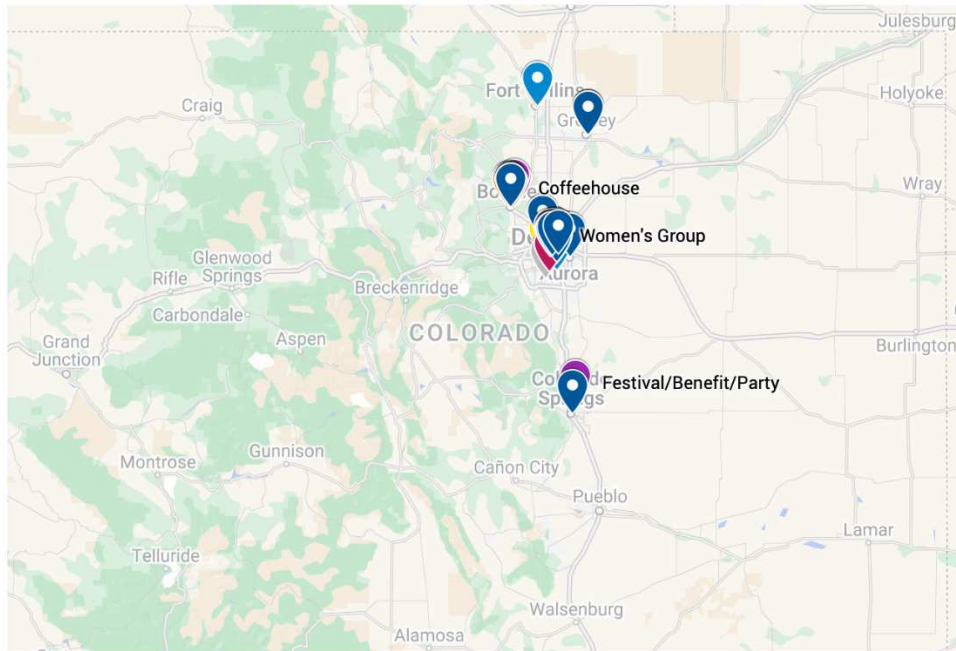


FIG: 4.5 Events, excluding outdoor recreation, advertised in BMR and Double Standard from 1980 to 1984.

(Google My Maps)

Pictured above are events that happened across Colorado from 1980 to 1984, excluding outdoor recreation. These are the same categorized events from the 1970 maps including coffeehouses, bookstores, festival/benefit/party, women's group, education, the arts, and workshops. With the addition of the 161 outdoor recreation events, Colorado women began traveling farther West, and explored parts of the state that had been previously ignored by the lesbian community.

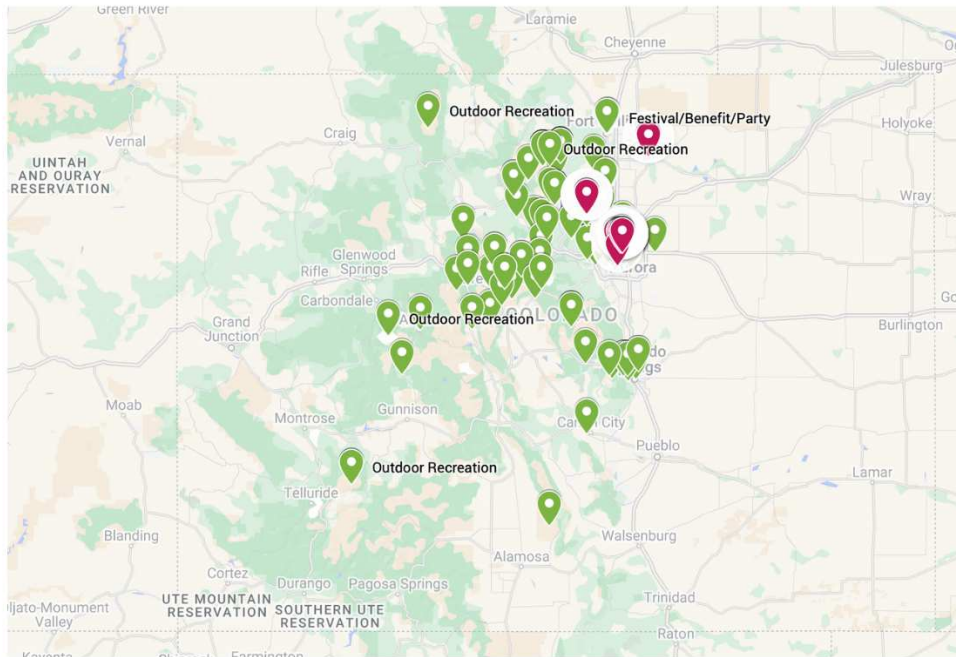


FIG: 4.6 Events, including outdoor recreation, advertised in *BMR* and *Double Standard* from 1980 to 1984.

(Google My Maps)

As seen in FIG:1 and FIG:2, the addition of outdoor recreation to the usual lineup of events like coffeehouses, education, and festivals/benefits/parties, spread the lesbian feminist community outward across the state. A lot of this growth in recreation and tourism was due to the building of interstate 70 (I-70) throughout the 1960s and 70s. By the 1980s I-70 had been built and provided easy access to foothills and mountains near Denver. Alongside these smaller areas of outdoor recreation, I-70 also made other places like Rocky Mountain National Park, Aspen, and Vail more accessible for Denverites and Coloradans.⁵¹⁸ Outdoor recreation took women to Colorado locations from the Great Sand Dunes National Park near Alamosa for camping and hiking with the WOC to a 2 ½ hour hike with the Amazon Adventures Hiking Club at Horse Thief Park in Gillette, Colorado.⁵¹⁹ Events like the “lesbians & llamas” hike at the Lost

⁵¹⁸ Philpott, *Vacationland: Tourism and Environment in the Colorado High Country*, 19.

⁵¹⁹ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, November 1981, 11.

Creek trail or the Palmer Red Rock Trail near Colorado Springs encouraged women to get out of Denver and Boulder and out into nature.⁵²⁰ However, lesbian feminists who preferred outdoor recreation in the form of full moon parties, picnics, and sports leagues had plenty of opportunity to get outside within the confines of the city.

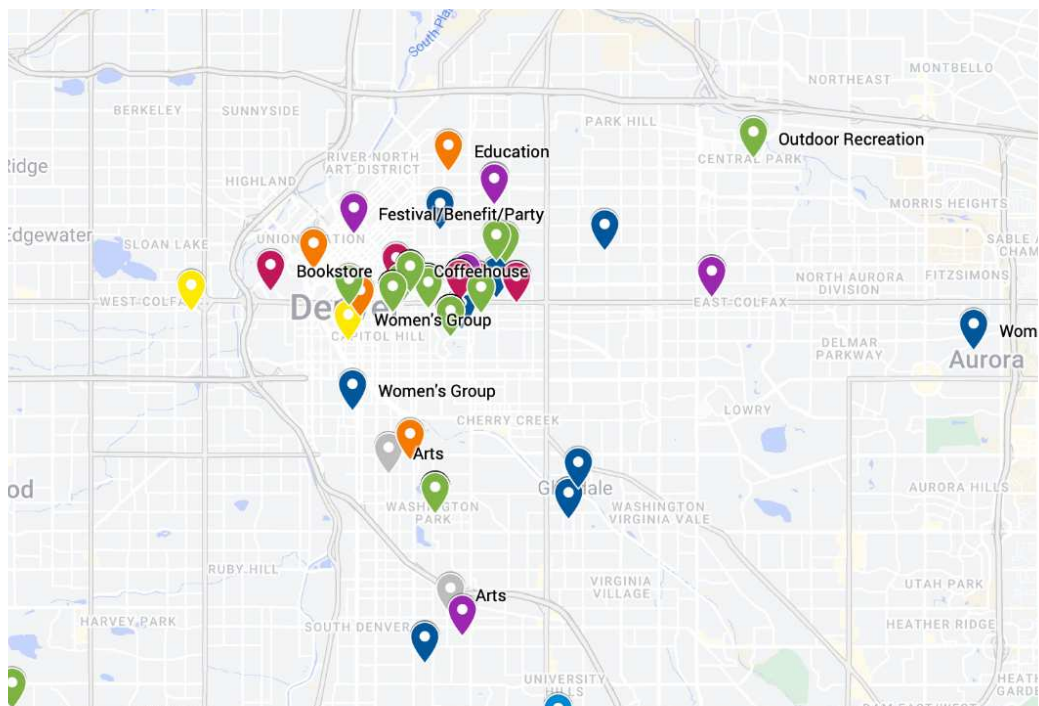


FIG:4.7 Events advertised in BMR and *Double Standard* from 1980 to 1984 around the Denver area.

(Google My Maps)

Women in Denver enjoyed the variety offered by the very large and active community. Denver was home to many support groups, clubs, and organizations, which included being the homebase for both *BMR* and *Double Standard*. Denver’s lesbian feminists could look forward to a Survival Workshop hosted by Woman to Woman bookcenter at 2023 E. Colfax, then head across the street to Cheesman park for “soccer: fun, informal, pick-up, no-guilt, drop-in lesbian

⁵²⁰ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, October 1984, 8.

soccer.”⁵²¹ Similar to in the 1970s, a lot of lesbian leisure took place in local parks like Denver’s Cheesman or Washington parks. Both BMR and Double Standard frequently advertised events at Cheesman park, like the “friendly flag football game” in October of 1980 or a WOC potluck and field day in June of 1984.⁵²² Women’s communities that previously had focused on events dedicated to arts and education like in 1970s Denver and Boulder were hosting much more events centered around outdoor recreation in the 1980s.

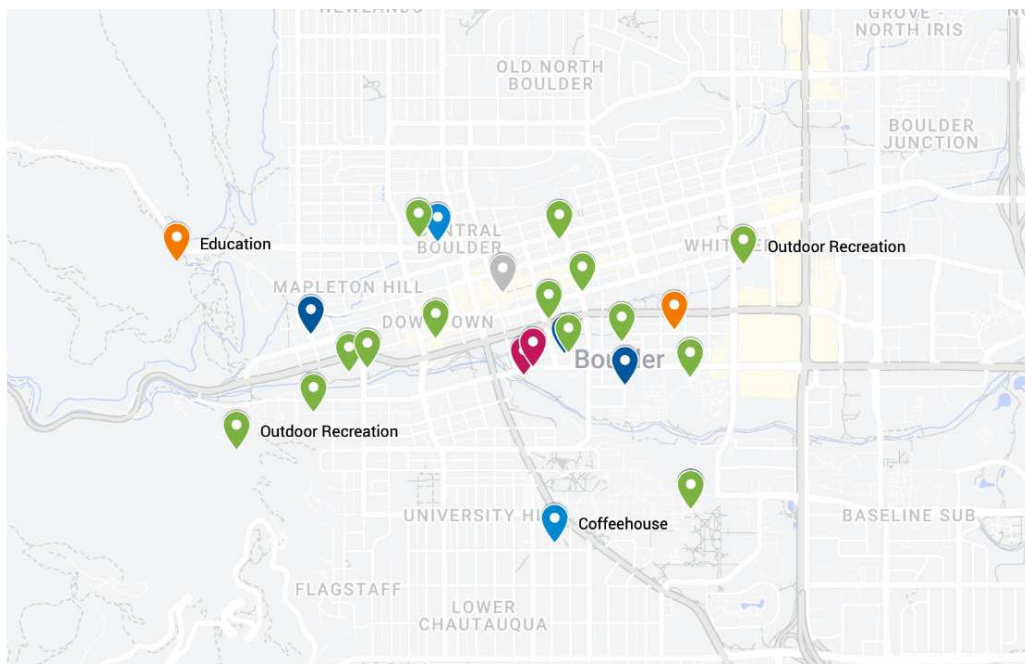


FIG:4.8 Events advertised in BMR and Double Standard from 1980 to 1994 around the Boulder area.

(Google My Maps)

Although Boulder’s lesbian feminist community was smaller than Denver’s, it was no less active and interested in outdoor recreation. Women in Boulder could join Boulder’s all women’s soccer league that played throughout the summer or the monthly full moon potluck parties sponsored by Boulder’s lesbian center in an attempt to “unite the entire lesbian

⁵²¹ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, October 1984, 8.

⁵²² *Double Standard*, October 1980, p. 9.; “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, June 1984, 10.

community in Boulder.”⁵²³ Compared to Denver and Colorado Springs which had WOC, Amazon Adventures, Woman to Woman/ Rocky Mountain Womyn’s Center, and the Colorado Springs Women’s Health Service clinic, Boulder lacked as many varied options as some other Colorado lesbian feminists. However, Boulder had a thriving arts community of women who participated in traveling theatre groups, poetry readings, and University of Colorado Boulder for the growing student feminist groups.⁵²⁴ Still, even with the community’s culture that centered the arts, outdoor recreation advertised in Boulder increased in the 1980s. From 1974 to 1979 roughly 12 outdoor recreation events were advertised by *BMR* on behalf of the lesbian feminist community, compared to the 24 events that were advertised from 1980 to 1984.⁵²⁵ Over the course of the decade, Colorado’s lesbian feminist community had a major shift in both spatial location and community needs. More and more women were participating in outdoor recreation-based activities and had ventured into other parts of the state through skiing, hiking, and white-water rafting.⁵²⁶

⁵²³ *Double Standard*, November 1983, 9.

⁵²⁴ *Double Standard*, June 1982, 5.

⁵²⁵ Pulled from the author’s datasets.

⁵²⁶ “Raft trip means good times, new friends,” *Double Standard*, September 1984, 9.

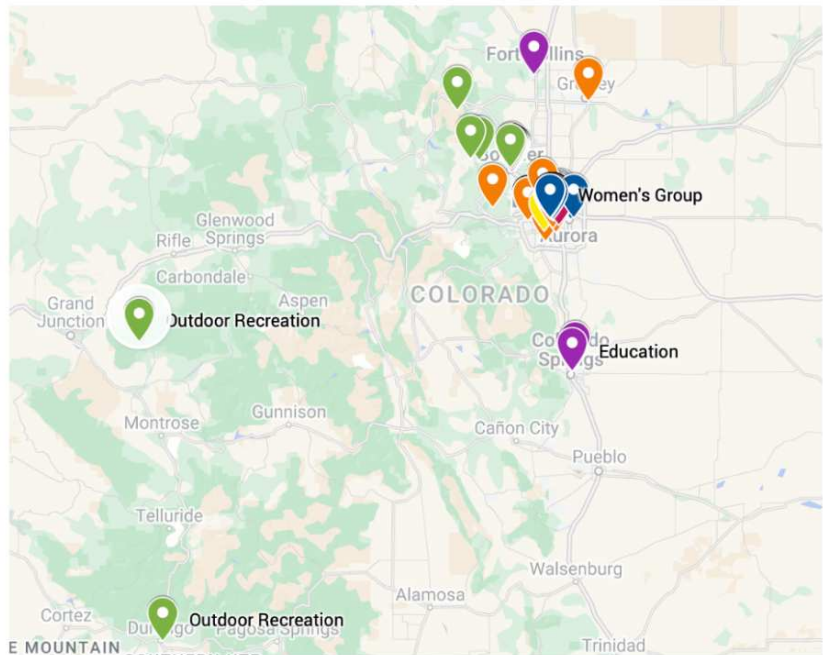


FIG:4.9 Events advertised in *BMR* from 1974 to 1979. (Google My Maps)

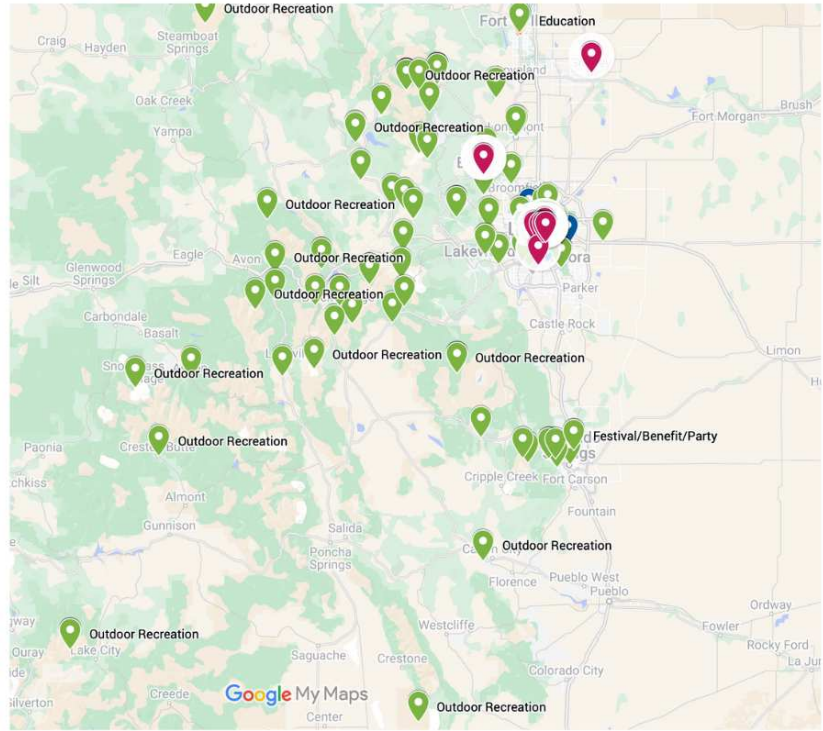


FIG:4.10 Events advertised in *BMR* and *Double Standard* from 1980 to 1984. (Google My Maps)

Colorado's lesbian feminist community underwent numerous changes throughout the course of the decade from 1974 to 1984. Colorado lesbian feminists were continually fostering DIY culture and becoming more engaged with their women's communities. The community had gone from infographics on how to throw a punch in 1974 *BMR* to gun-safety training courses advertised in *Double Standard* across the 1980s.⁵²⁷ Lesbian feminists used these women-only organizations like Woman to Woman, WOC, Amazon Adventures, and DOE to gain increased outdoor knowledge and skills that allowed them to make their way in male-dominated culture. Throughout the 1980s women in Colorado were encouraged to take up nontraditional, blue-collar jobs and make their way in male-dominated institutions through a deeper connection to their own health and the health of the environment. Mother Nature and nature-based Goddess worship had provided lesbian feminists with the philosophy to get Colorado women interested in the outdoors.⁵²⁸ Colorado's lesbian feminist community was growing more ecofeminist in nature throughout the 1980s, while other political causes, like the AIDS crisis, called their attention back to the gay and lesbian liberation movement.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁷ *Big Mama Rag*, August 1974, p. 5.; Pat Galligan, "woman's work is never done," *Big Mama Rag*, September 1980, p.4.; *Double Standard*, June 1982, 5.

⁵²⁸ Rose, "Emerging Energies, Honest Self-Expression," *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 13.

⁵²⁹ Jennifer Brier, "Locating Lesbian and Feminist Responses to Aids, 1982-1984," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35 (April 1, 2007): 234, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27649663>, 246.

Conclusion

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, Colorado lesbian feminists had been growing interested in physical health. Whether this be through women's clinics, environmental protection, or a nature-based style of living, lesbians in Colorado were concerned with health and wellness. Not just in Colorado but across the nation ecofeminism had grown to occupy more space in the women's movement. There was an increased awareness of health as a political issue and lesbian feminists often urged gay men and women to see their physical wellbeing as a political discussion and not a medical one.⁵³⁰ Many historians and scholars of sexuality have studied the lesbian feminist response to the AIDS crisis, and the consensus is that lesbians often took on caretaking roles for gay men. Groups like the San Diego Blood Sisters or the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, which published articles throughout the 1980s and 90s to remind lesbians that "low risk isn't no risk," worked to unite lesbians and gays through a mutual focus on AIDS.⁵³¹ Lesbian feminists used their newfound health focus and stepped into caretaking roles by organizing blood drives, candlelight vigils, and realigned themselves in the gay and lesbian liberation movement.

Although the term lesbian feminist matched the description of these women, the AIDS crisis caused a schism in the feminist community as many feminists did not see AIDS as a women's issue.⁵³² Many lesbians became less involved in the feminist movement during their realignment with gay liberation. Historian Annelise Orleck framed the founding of Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) in New York as a major part of lesbian activism in the 1980s. Lesbian feminist mistrust of masculinized medical science helped to further their work in the AIDS crisis. The women of the group held protests across New York City to dispel the myth

⁵³⁰ Brier, 245.

⁵³¹ "Lesbian AIDS Activism · Yale University Library Online Exhibitions," n.d., <https://onlineexhibits.library.yale.edu/s/we-are-everywhere/page/lesbian-aids-activism>.

⁵³² Orleck, 180.; Brier, 245.

that women are not impacted by AIDS; they passed out pamphlets, distributed condoms, and promoted sex education. The women's previous roles as mobilizers and political leaders in the feminist movement made lesbians powerful allies for gay men.⁵³³ Most research on lesbians' involvement in the AIDS crisis has focused on major cities, like New York and San Francisco. However, there is evidence of lesbians shift to gay liberation during the AIDS crisis in Colorado through local publications. Denver lesbians were quick to offer support and activism to the gay community in the 1980s.⁵³⁴

Colorado-based publications *BMR* and *Double Standard* went two different directions during the mid-1980s. *BMR* continued to support feminism and reported activities for the women's community, often with a more intersectional focus to include women of color and women abroad. However, *Double Standard's* focus became much more heavily centered on Colorado's gay and lesbian community, often advertising events for both men and women during the mid-1980s compared to its women-centric focus in the early 1980s. In October of 1983 *Double Standard* advertised a Denver-based candlelight vigil for AIDS awareness. The vigil was organized by the Colorado AIDS Project, which *Double Standard* partnered up with several times over the course of the 1980s. Earlier that year in August *Double Standard*, the Colorado AIDS Project, and the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Colorado organized an auction to raise money for the center. This was the second auction, the first had made over \$5,000, and now the community hoped for more funding to "hire a part-time employee to enlist volunteers to provide in- service training for local hospitals, to coordinate various support groups, and to provide media education."⁵³⁵ An AIDS beer bust benefit was thrown during Gay and Lesbian

⁵³³ Orleck, 189.

⁵³⁴ "Colorado Calendar," *Double Standard*, March 1984, p. 4.; "Gay Pride Week Events," *Double Standard*, June 1984, 8.

⁵³⁵ *Double Standard*, August 1983, 2.

Freedom Week and the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Colorado (GLCCC) sponsored an AIDS forum during the week. GLCCC was frequently advertised and mentioned in *Double Standard*. Like the bookstores like Woman to Woman or Lilith in the 1970s, GLCCC became a hotspot for support groups, workshops, and community meetings.⁵³⁶

Double Standard advertised the GLCCC all throughout 1984. Sponsored by the Colorado AIDS Project, GLCCC hosted Worried Well, a “support group for men and women who feel the AIDS crisis has affected their lives.” The GLCCC also hosted support groups that were women-only, such as Vintage or CHOICES. Vintage was a support group for older lesbians to meet and talk; CHOICES was an alternative to AA for women who struggled with alcohol abuse.⁵³⁷

Lesbian feminists were prominent leaders in the GLCCC as board members, staffers on their newsletter, or simply as community mobilizers. Events advertised by *Double Standard* continued to center around outdoor recreation, but the lesbian community had begun welcoming gay men to these events.⁵³⁸ From 1982 to 1984, there were about 30 events of outdoor recreation advertised in Colorado-based publications for both gay men and women. *Colorado’s Gay & Lesbian Newsletter (CG&LN)* and *Gaynin’* advertised bike trips, photo excursions at Denver’s botanical gardens, and “a ski tour to Saints Johns - an historic mining camp.”⁵³⁹ *BMR* and *Double Standard* continued to advertise and sponsor women-only, feminist events, but more and more events were centered around the gay and lesbian community. During Gay Pride Week in 1984, which had been named Gay and Lesbian Freedom week in the 1970s, GLCCC had several events advertised in *Double Standard’s* monthly calendar. One event, called “Picnic in the Park,”

⁵³⁶ “Freedom Week Events,” *Double Standard*, June 1983, 5.; *Double Standard*, August 1984, 5.

⁵³⁷ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, March 1984, 4.; “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, July 1984, 6.

⁵³⁸ “Colorado Calendar,” *Double Standard*, March 1984, 4.; “Gay Pride Week Events,” *Double Standard*, June 1984, 8.

⁵³⁹ “Ski trip,” *Colorado’s Gay & Lesbian Community Newsletter*, November 1982, 7.

was advertised to be held at Cheesman Park in Denver. The advertisement called for attendees to “bring a dish.”⁵⁴⁰ This 1984 community picnic shows Colorado lesbian feminists' gradual move from feminism to gay liberation. Colorado lesbians began joining and endorsing gay organizations, while feminist businesses and centers continued to face financial struggles throughout the 1980s. Colorado lesbian feminist community member Sharon Miles said that “There was a reluctance for lesbians and gay men to work together until well into the AIDS crisis years.”⁵⁴¹ Lesbians shifted their mobilization efforts from feminism to gay liberation, and their support for the second wave of feminism waned throughout the late 1980s. By the end of the decade the third wave was emerging, and these feminists would begin to focus on the perceived shortcomings of the second wave.⁵⁴²

1992 was called “The Year of the Woman.” In the 1992 election, women increased their numbers in the Senate by four, and an additional nineteen in the House, and Carol Moseley Braun became the first Black woman elected to the U.S. Senate. Third wave women aimed to make the feminist movement more intersectional and widened their political scope to include women across the globe.⁵⁴³ Online zines became the third waves’ print media. Each wave has had a form of media that served as a community-building tool. Second wavers used newspapers and magazines, third wavers used online zines and blogs, and fourth wavers use Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.⁵⁴⁴ Since the rise of the digital age, feminism has almost completely

⁵⁴⁰ “Gay Pride Week Events,” *Double Standard*, June 1984, 8.

⁵⁴¹ Information gathered from author’s email exchange with Sharon Miles, former Women’s Outdoor Club member and lesbian feminist activist.

⁵⁴² “Feminism: The Third Wave,” National Women’s History Museum, June 23, 2020, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-third-wave>.; Amber E. Kinser. “Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism,” *NWSA Journal* 16, no. 3 (2004): 124–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4317084>

⁵⁴³ Addison Price, “Politics, Pop-culture, and Patriarchy: What does feminism mean in Generation Z?” *The Macksey Journal*: (2023) Volume 4, Article X, <https://mackseyjournal.scholasticahq.com>, 8.

⁵⁴⁴ Kitsy Dixon, “Feminist Online Identity: Analyzing the Presence of Hashtag Feminism,” *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3, no. 7 (August 3, 2014): 34–40, <https://doi.org/10.18533/journal.v3i7.509>.

moved off the streets and online. Many terms have been coined for this fourth wave: Facebook Feminism, hashtag feminism, and even the term post-feminism has been used to describe the current feminist climate.⁵⁴⁵ Protests and political action often take the form of online movements like #MeToo or #EverydayFeminism.⁵⁴⁶ Histories and studies of communities like Colorado's lesbian feminist community serve to educate women on the women's herstory that came before them. The community-building efforts of the Colorado lesbian feminists should not go unnoticed. These women dedicated time and energy to form a women's community that welcomed a variety of women. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, women's spaces like bookstores, support groups, and women-only clubs served to foster a tight-knit community. As feminist spaces have moved online, women's places have become more obsolete.

Colorado lesbian feminists can serve as inspiration for how to build a woman-identified women's community. These women fought for space in male-dominated institutions, and formed long-lasting, intimate friendships as they did. A year after her article in *BMR* where she urged women to stop sleeping with men and conquer them instead, Maureen Mrizek wrote the poem "I Am A Worldwind" in *BMR*. The 1974 poem told the story of a woman's fight against the "absurd male." In the poem Mrizek wrote:

"DANCE WOAMN! We dance to celebrate our declaration of War, our separation from the fatherland, from the father almighty, from your father/brother/husband. Our determination to destroy through creation their stupidity. DANCE because we are building our own fortress to forestall their attempts at colonization, their imperial demands for our

⁵⁴⁵ Dixon, "Feminist Online Identity: Analyzing the Presence of Hashtag Feminism," p. 35.; Alison Dahl Crossley, "Facebook Feminism: Social Media, Blogs, and New Technologies of Contemporary U.S. Feminism," *Mobilization an International Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (June 1, 2015): 253–68, <https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671x-20-2-253>, p. 254.

⁵⁴⁶ #MeToo and #EverydayFeminism were two large movements of the 2010s that encouraged women to share stories under the coined hashtag. The aim was to create community through similar experiences of womanhood.

minds, our bodies, our being. Seize your body and feel the strength coursing through your veins, let your laughter ring out into the hills bouncing off and coming back to you sevenfold. Seize your mind and point it in the direction that benefits you and the Woman you love.”⁵⁴⁷

“Woman” was a word coined to be woman without man, and it was pronounced “wome.”⁵⁴⁸ The poem stood as a symbol of women’s community. Women should separate from men and live together as the ultimate political tactic. Even if this idea of a full separatist community wasn’t feasible, Colorado lesbian feminists like Mrizek worked to create their own version of a feminist utopia. Colorado-based publications like *BMR* and *Double Standard* provided women with lesbian feminist ideology, literature, and politics. Community mobilizers like Kathy Riley, Chocolate Waters, Tea Schook, Rose, Linda Fowler, Dee Farrell, Jane Hoback, and Cheetah all came into the movement with unique perspectives that allowed them to create a dynamic sisterhood in Colorado. Lesbian feminists contributed to Colorado culture and spread an ecofeminist, woman-centric philosophy around the state.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁷Maureen Mrizek, “I Am A Worldwind,” *Big Mama Rag*, July 1974, 9.

⁵⁴⁸*Big Mama Rag*, July 1974, 9.

⁵⁴⁹*Big Mama Rag*, Jan 1973, 1; “Yes, You Have the Right Paper.” *Double Standard*, June 1981, 1.; Rose, “Emerging Energies, Honest Self-Expression,” *Big Mama Rag*, March 1982, 13.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion: “*We were earnest, we were idealistic, we were committed.*”

As I sat across from *Big Mama Rag* (BMR) collective member, Kathy Riley, I tried to shake off my nerves. After spending so many months examining years’ worth of BMR issues, the women on the collective had begun to feel like celebrities to me. However, the longer I sat in Kathy’s Denver apartment, sipping green tea from her mug, the more comfortable I felt. When I asked her about her time in BMR she said of her 1976 collective, “We were earnest, we were idealistic, we were committed.”⁵⁵⁰ Earnest, idealistic, and committed were the perfect three words to describe this community of women. These women were earnest in their work, providing feminist mobilization at the personal cost of burnout and low wages. They were idealistic in their early demands and views of women, like the 1973 issue of BMR where they dedicated themselves to all women.⁵⁵¹ And finally, lesbian feminists were committed to growing a woman-identified women’s community in Colorado.

In February of 2025, I sat down with Kathy to conduct an oral interview for my thesis. What I had thought would be a formal meeting had quickly turned into a gab session. We discussed BMR, current politics, and even listened to some popular feminist music from the 1970s. I vented to Kathy about my struggles finding other former collective members online, and she instantly pulled up emails and phone numbers of women to contact. Kathy had been easier to track online, mainly because of her blog on blogspot.com, called Kathy in transition. In 2016 she had written about her times at BMR. The post, “Forty years ago: The Big Mama Rag newspaper

⁵⁵⁰ Author's personal interview with Kathy Riley.

⁵⁵¹ "The Big Mama Rag." *Big Mama Rag*, January 1973, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* (accessed March 7, 2025), <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SBIJWB991682316/AHSI?u=coloradosu&sid=bookmark-AHSI&xid=7464cc65>, 2.

collective,” included reflections on *BMR* experiences and a brief report with pictures of a reunion the women had in 2016. Alongside Kathy Riley at the reunion was Chocolate Waters, Tea Schook, Jackie St. Joan, and Deb Taylor, all former *BMR* members.⁵⁵² The friendships made in Colorado’s lesbian feminist community withstood time. These women had stayed in contact since 1970, and many were still actively involved in feminism, or other political movements.

Through my conversation with Kathy (and afterward when she packed me a to-go jar of tofu salad), I learned of her continued commitment to health, wellness, and environmental protection. I reached out to other women who had been lesbian feminist activists in the 1970s-80s, and many had similar feelings. Although Kathy is now an active member of Third Act, the senior-based environmental group, she wrote that her early environmental consciousness focused on “enjoying the outdoors and ‘leaving no footprints.’” The other women, *BMR* member Susanna Smith and Women’s Outdoor Club (WOC) member Sharon Miles both mentioned their work in the environmental movement. Susanna Smith noted some of her favorite experiences were protests and marches like Take Back the Night, and she had later worked with the organization Got Green in Seattle. Sharon Miles pointed to women’s health as a more prominent political focus, but explained outdoor recreation was important in her personal life as a National Park Service employee and WOC member.⁵⁵³

Colorado women had built community through outdoor recreation, and many of these community members continued to foster these friendships even after the feminist second wave had died down. Lesbian feminists had an intense focus on community building, which as I discussed in the last chapter has largely moved online in the digital age. Both Susanna and

⁵⁵² Kathy Riley, “Forty Years Ago: The Big Mama Rag Newspaper Collective,” n.d., <https://kathyintransition.blogspot.com/2016/08/forty-years-ago-big-mama-rag-newspaper.html?m=1>.

⁵⁵³ Information gathered from questionnaires the author sent to Kathy Riley, Sharon Miles, and Susanna Smith.

Sharon provided answers that reflected the lack of community-building in the modern feminist fourth wave. Susana noted that “young women, it seems, are focused more on queer politics, than strictly feminist politics,” and Sharon echoed these feelings and shared that today’s feminist is less rooted in women-specific issues and more centered on broader social politics. Sharon also shared that “We need gathering places for older lesbians.” She discussed wanting to socialize while having no interest in bars.⁵⁵⁴ Women’s spaces like feminist business, bookstores, and clubs were the most popular forms of community-building by lesbian feminists. Without these businesses can feminists still make the same connections? Are community-building efforts in the digital space the same as physical place-making? These are questions I do not have the answers to, but still, I urge young feminists to form personal connections.

Throughout my research, I feel like I have formed a cross-generational connection with Kathy Riley and the many other lesbian feminists interviewed for the project. I shared tips on how to conduct oral histories to Kathy, who plans to interview the members of Montview manor, her senior living community. And in return, Kathy shared her feminist wisdom with me (not to mention the stack of *BMR* copies and poetry books she sent me home with). I feel as though we have a great deal to learn from the earnest, idealistic, and committed women who came before us. To foster a women's community, we must focus on the prioritization and centering of women socially and politically. Lesbian feminists focus on ecofeminism often contributed to their women’s community and included an increased concern on physical health. The Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 and states have continued to alter reproductive policies.⁵⁵⁵ This paired with the current state of climate change disasters and women facing higher risks from

⁵⁵⁴ Information gathered from questionnaires the author sent to Sharon Miles and Susanna Smith.

⁵⁵⁵ Center for Reproductive Rights, “Abortion Laws by State - Center for Reproductive Rights,” February 28, 2025, <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/abortion-laws-by-state/>.

environmental crises point to ecofeminism as a potential movement for modern feminists.⁵⁵⁶

Like the 1978 *BMR* article where Colorado women wrote, “we have come to see the earth as mother and sister; we see the land being violated as women's bodies are violated,” women should see each other as sisters and the earth as a mother.⁵⁵⁷ In this ecofeminist sisterhood, women may form communities and build a women’s culture that can transcend age and race to focus on womanhood.

Women’s community and women-centric spaces are incredibly significant to the feminist community. These spaces gave Colorado women opportunity to form friendships, have intellectual conversations, receive informal, community education, and have fun. My research has made me realize the importance of fun. Lesbian leisure was often integral to the feminist community because lesbian women were such active mobilizers. Lesbian leisure helped the women escape burnout or better manage their stress. Burnout, low wages, and the mental toll of sexism and misogyny could force women out of the movement. Outdoor recreation and sports provided places for leisure that still prioritized women’s community. Much of feminist historiography focuses women’s roles as activists, however not many examine the ways in which feminists had fun together. Like protests and feminist takeovers, I have found lesbian leisure to be its own form of women’s resistance. Rather than be forced to join male-dominated institutions, Colorado lesbian feminist built their own, and were often committed to providing space for lesbian leisure and recreation among their women’s community.

⁵⁵⁶“Gender and the Environment,” n.d., <https://www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/resources/updates/gender-and-the-environment/>.

⁵⁵⁷ “Anti-nuke Statement,” *Big Mama Rag*, December 1978, 2.

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