From No Go to No Logo: Lesbian Lives and Rights in Chatelaine

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Abstract: This study is a feminist cultural and critical analysis of articles about lesbians and their rights that appeared in Chatelaine magazine between 1966 and 2004. It explores the historical progression of their media representation, from an era when lesbians were pitied and barely tolerated, through a period when their struggles for their legal rights became paramount, to the turn of the present century when they were displaced by post-modern fashion statements about the “fluidity” of sexual orientation, and stripped of their identity politics. These shifts in media representation have had as much to do with marketing the magazine as with its liberal editors’ attempts to deal with lesbian lives and rights in ways that would appeal to readers. At the heart of this overview is a challenge to both the media and academia to reclaim lesbians in all their diversity in their real historical and contemporary contexts.

Keywords: History; Journalism; Magazines; Feminist/gender issues; Lesbian

Chatelaine magazine, a staple of the Canadian women’s service magazine market, has been a successful purveyor of all that is mainstream and comfortable about heterosexual women’s lives in this country. There have been times, however, when its more strong-minded editors have challenged their readers to think...
Beyond the everyday details of enhancing their personal, home, and work lives and grapple with the more challenging issue of women’s rights. Yet even those challenges have limits in what is essentially a consumer magazine market, especially when it comes to topics considered controversial or intriguing. Lesbianism, which for some women is a core element of their sexuality identity and cultural politics, has been one of those topics.

Using an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical media analysis with cultural and critical theory, this study focuses on the ways in which Chatelaine magazine represented lesbians’ lives and their rights from 1966 to 2004. It was a period that saw several interrelated shifts in lesbian identity politics and Chatelaine’s editorial and marketing strategies under three successive editors, Doris Anderson (1959-77); Mildred Istona (1977-95), and Rona Maynard (1995-2004). The magazine’s treatment shifted cautiously over almost four decades in accordance with both heterosexual social norms and the market values of the Canadian magazine business but often lagged behind the politics of feminism and gay and lesbian rights. From the late 1970s onward, the magazine’s journalists took a liberal feminist approach to lesbian equality issues, an approach that has since surrendered to an apolitical perspective that promotes “label-defying” fluidity in sexual orientation (Reichert, 2002) and eschews identity politics, but in ways that may be more constraining than liberating. In other words, lesbian rights, a “no go” zone in the 1960s, became a political equality issue for 20 years, and has since devolved to a “no logo” zone in the pages of Chatelaine.

At the core of this article is a feminist cultural and critical analysis of what the term “lesbian” has meant in Chatelaine over the years. Being free to be a lesbian, and having one’s rights respected, is an essentially feminist position in that it challenges heterosexual norms that assume most women’s lives do, or at least should, revolve around relationships with men. Whether or not a lesbian calls herself a feminist, or perceives her sexual identity to be unchanging or fluid, she still has to contend with legal and social injustice as a woman who dares to love other women. For that reason, this study is both an overview of the relevant Chatelaine articles within specific historical, cultural, and critical contexts and an attempt to reclaim some lesbian feminist history. It is a history that, Garber argues, is being ignored, misrepresented, and discredited in the current enthusiasm for the field of Queer Studies as it is currently constituted. She writes that its proponents do not adequately acknowledge the philosophical and activist contributions of the previous generation of lesbians of all classes and races to the field, which might help heal the rifts between lesbian feminism and queer theory (Garber, 2001; see also Miller, 1996; Rankin, 2000). Garber is particularly critical of the work of Judith Butler (1990, 2004; Salih & Butler, 2004), which has become pivotal to the postmodern debates that emphasize fluidity in sexuality and gender identity. Butler, whose work aims at destabilizing contemporary heterosexual hegemony (Salih & Butler, 2004), might argue that lesbians of every generation have performed their gender and sexual identities individually and collectively, according to circumstances outside themselves rather than in culturally determined ways (Butler, 1999). I argue that we have to see lesbians of any era as they saw themselves at the time and as the media and society regarded them, if we want to understand the
Lesbians on and off the media record
In the academic literature on journalism history and gender, there have been few published studies on media depictions of lesbians and their fight for equality rights, separate from gay men, despite the fact that they have made substantial contributions to social justice for women and sexual minorities in Canada and the United States over the past few decades (Stone, 1990; Valk, 2002). With rare exceptions, lesbians are usually treated tangentially if considered at all in historical or contemporary studies of gender issues and journalism (Duggan, 2000; Maynard, 2004; Streitmatter, 1995). Most scholarship has focused on women’s equality rights, and the feminist movement and its relationship with the media from the 1960s to the present (Bradley, 2003; Bronstein, 2005; Byerly & Ross, 2006; Freeman, 2001a, 2001b; Goddu, 1999).

Part of the challenge of formulating a historical overview of lesbians in the news is the lack of coverage on which to base primary research. During the 1950s to mid-1960s, before the women’s and gay liberation movements strengthened, there was barely any mention of lesbians in the news media at all, unless in relation to mental health, crime or obscenity, a reflection of discriminatory attitudes of the time (Adams, 1997; Korinek, 1998). During the second wave of the women’s movement of the late 1960s to the 1980s, and the parallel rise of the gay rights movement, lesbians appeared in the mainstream news coverage mainly as a threat to heterosexual women or their rights (Freeman, 2001b; Korinek, 1998), while their presence was overlooked or minimized in the case of gay rights (Alwood, 1996).

Starting in the 1990s, academics began studying contemporary lesbian characters and celebrities in American and British books and films, in magazines, and on television, framing them as chic symbols of a sexual trend rather than a collective political force for equality (Clark, 1995; Humberstone, 1996; Moritz, 1992). More recently, however, they have been exploring the lives and work of prominent individuals, such as comedian and talk show host Ellen Degeneres, as barometers of lesbian identity politics (Dow, 2001; McCarthy, 2001; Reed, 2005).

Historian Valerie J. Korinek rightly observes that Canadian researchers have not paid much attention to the study of lesbian themes in Chatelaine, a women’s service magazine whose readership and focus has been predominantly female since its inception in 1928. As part of her major study of the magazine and its readers during the 1950s and 1960s (Korinek, 2000), she published one article about its lesbian content. She examined not only the very few overt articles but also material with ostensibly heterosexual themes, such as friendship between women and girls, that lesbians might have interpreted with their own meanings in their quest for self-recognition (Korinek, 1998).

This article picks up where Korinek left off and tracks features in Chatelaine that clearly identified lesbians, differentiated them from other women in Canadian society, or, alternatively, erased their differences, through editorial engagement or disengagement with feminism and identity politics. I have framed this investigation within two central modes of media analysis, cultural and criti-
cal, using the historical primary sources available. I found that the essential rules of magazine writing have changed little over the years, even though the industry has become much more competitive, shifting from general interest to niche marketing. In the 1960s, Chatelaine ran features about lesbians that were focused on issues rather than events: descriptive, detailed, personalized, and often overtly subjective, designed to appeal to a cross-section of “average” Canadian women (Freeman, 2001a; Korinek, 2000). Forty years later, the features are still all of those things, but have become progressively much shorter, less politically analytical than they used to be, and aimed at a narrower constituency of mostly career-oriented, urban readers.

Feminist communication scholars engaged with media history have emphasized the importance of making gender central to understanding our past (Jansen, 1993). Combined with cultural analysis, it provides the all-important context of the media discourse—myths, symbols, stereotypes, and language (van Zoonen, 1994)—used over time to position women and their rights in society. Our understanding of gender varies according to these specific cultural and historical contexts, a process in which media play an important role (van Zoonen, 1996). So, too, does our understanding of sexual orientation and other important aspects of identity.

With Chatelaine, the impression one gets is that almost all the lesbians interviewed over four decades were middle-class and White, regardless of their backgrounds or whether they were speaking as anonymous sources or were openly gay. Their class backgrounds were implied mainly in their occupations, but not highlighted as such, while “race” was not generally considered an essential element of their lesbian identities, or even of the prejudice they had to fight. Christian lesbians were featured in some of the articles because they directly or indirectly challenged the mainstream churches that discriminated against them, but otherwise religious beliefs and other aspects of lesbians’ identities remained hidden. They were women who loved women, which apparently made them different enough.

In reaching these findings, I surveyed 40 years of Chatelaine and qualitatively analyzed 65 articles directly or indirectly about lesbians, noting the language of headlines, captions, and texts. I also noted the visual representations of lesbians that illustrated these articles, as pictorial symbols provide another form of discourse for the reader, one that can support or subvert the messages in the text, including stereotypes (Barthes, 2001). Advertising was also examined for overt or implied lesbian images, especially in conjunction with the specific articles discussed here.

In exploring Chatelaine’s contents, I found it important to look at hard copies in the library rather than rely on online databases that do not replicate illustrations and page layouts. Because key phrases, such as “homosexual,” “lesbian,” “gay,” “queer,” “bisexual,” “same-sex,” or even “partner” were not always used in the most recent articles that feature lesbians or lesbian sexuality, they can easily be missed when using online search engines. In other words, the absence of a visible lesbian identity politics in the media can mislead researchers as well as everyday readers.

The articles themselves were examined in the theoretical context of journalism as a form of culture; that is, with reference to the ways in which the journal-
ists “framed” their stories and constructed their lesbian subjects, using techniques of the craft common to all news media (Bronstein, 2005). Some of these techniques are borrowed from literary traditions, the better to personalize an issue. Rona Maynard, for example, believes that journalists write their best stories when they have found the right “characters” to interview and can empathize with them (Maynard interview, 2004). Several of the Chatelaine articles considered here framed stories about otherwise ordinary individuals in conflict with authority or society at large as symbols or stand-ins for all lesbians, their families or friends. This device is designed to foster readers’ interest, empathy, or antagonism, depending on the context. Another standard practice is to seek expert evidence, an acknowledgment of the social responsibility of the reporter to interview people holding as many points of view as possible, the better to present an “objective” or at least a “fair and balanced” picture, which is no guarantee it won’t be distorted (Hackett & Zhao, 1998). The experts can include the main subjects of the story as well as the authorities who pronounce on their predicaments.

For the publisher, the object of all this effort is not just to tell stories, but also to sell the magazine to audiences, even if some of its content is considered contentious. Given that legal, economic, and social discrimination are inherently political issues, critical analysis of media content that considers the marketing forces involved is also an important tool in understanding equality issues in the past and the present (Marshall, 1995). This approach helps us understand why articles about lesbians follow not just social trends and the philosophies of individual magazine editors, but how those stories are sold to audiences. Further, Canadian and American media, while similar in many respects, have differed from each other in important ways (Robinson, 2005), and this was true of Chatelaine, whose primary target has always been Canadian women, their issues and their interests, partly as a way to compete with American imports (Freeman, 2001a; Korinek, 2000; Linden, 1990).

The publisher’s archival records can provide important context to a magazine’s content and the efforts to sell it, even when there are gaps in these files. I examined the available material from Chatelaine’s parent company, Maclean-Hunter, now owned by Rogers Publishing, in the Archives of Ontario and files that are still in Chatelaine’s office. The company’s records from 1975 to the present reveal to some extent how the magazine sold itself to advertisers and to readers. They do not, however, record any unease from advertisers, or debates among the editors about the issue of lesbianism, possibly because the staff was instructed to shred the contents of their file drawers annually (Maclean-Hunter Papers [hereafter M-H Papers], Box 18, various memos).

The publishing company’s own long-standing editorial guidelines were actually fluid enough, however, to allow the editors concerned to decide for themselves how to handle controversial topics. The guidelines stated that while editorials on contentious issues were to be cleared with the publisher, much was left to the discretion of individual editors as long as the journalistic content was “accurate, fair, authoritative, balanced and constructive.” The guidelines further stated, “We will treat morally sensitive material with care, in a manner consistent with the values of the times,” which left the magazine open to shifts in social attitudes over the
decades, whether held by editors, readers, or advertisers. In addition, the company would not knowingly accept ads that were “vulgar, suggestive, repulsive or offensive,” or allow advertisers to influence editorial policy, but their feedback would be given the “same respect” as comments from readers (M-H Papers, Box 17, Employee Handbook 1987, “Editorial Guidelines,” pp. 26-27, 34).

Because there was no direct connection apparent between corporate memos, consumer surveys, and the published and unpublished letters to the editor that gauged readers’ quite varied reactions to articles and ads over the years, it is difficult to determine the extent of audience influence on the magazine’s editorial and business decisions for this study, as Korinek did for the 1950s and 1960s (Korinek, 2000). Nevertheless, the editors’ personal or template responses to the letters, their editorials, and my own interviews suggest the editors took most of their readers’ comments seriously (Anderson interview, 1992; Istona, 1978, 1988; Maynard interview, 2004; M-H Papers, Boxes 1-6 & Chatelaine office files).

The 1960s: “What Turns Women to Lesbianism?”

For years, Chatelaine offered its readers a mix of fiction and non-fiction, service and advice columns, advertising, an editor’s column, and a page of readers’ letters. In the 1960s, it aimed for general appeal, mainly a quintessential Canadian female readership, not a niche market, given that its major competitors were American magazines and television (Vipond, 2000). With regard to lesbian content, Chatelaine was North America’s historical trend-setter when, under editor Doris Anderson, it published the first, cautious but informative article that focused on lesbians (Wilson, 1966). At the time, it was Canada’s only general circulation women’s magazine, but Canadian women were also reading its American competitors, such as Ladies’ Home Journal, which did not include any articles about lesbians. Only the revamped and relatively avant-garde Cosmopolitan dared to do so, two years later than Chatelaine (Korinek, 1998).

As Korinek and others have pointed out, most of the mainstream magazine articles about homosexuality published in North America during the 1950s and 1960s had focused on the male as deviant or even criminal. Lesbians were not seen as necessarily dangerous, but certainly as maladjusted and immature, especially during the Cold War era, known for its anti-homosexual witch hunts (Adams, 1997; Korinek, 1998; Ross, 1998). Canadian laws against gross indecency had, since 1953, also specifically applied to sexual acts between women as well as between men, although women were rarely prosecuted (Easton, 1990; Kinsman, 1987). Maclean-Hunter documents from 1962 reveal that Chatelaine’s staff dismissed the idea of publishing a story about lesbians, but by 1966 male homosexuality in particular was being dissected in mainstream news magazines, including another Maclean-Hunter periodical, Maclean’s, and there was some talk of decriminalizing it in Britain and in Canada (Korinek, 1998; Wilson, 1966). Clearly, it was time for Chatelaine to publish an article on lesbians.

Renate Wilson’s article “What Turns Women to Lesbianism?” (Wilson, 1966) focused primarily on an anonymous Vancouver couple, “Jane,” a saleswoman, and “Teresa,” a delivery truck driver. They and their friends espoused middle-class normalcy and tended to eschew butch-femme roles as working class. This was partly
because they wanted to pass as straight, thereby protecting themselves against conflicts with family members and loss of their jobs, but their attitudes also reflected a suburban-urban division. Although we know little of the lives of middle-class lesbians in Vancouver in the 1950s to mid-1960s, Wilson’s interviews revealed that they apparently saw themselves as more “respectable” than the predominantly “rough,” working-class butches and femmes who frequented bars in a few local hotels (Wilson, 1966; see also Duder, 2001). Wilson’s Vancouver subjects resembled the anglophone and francophone women Duder, Ross, and Chamberland have described as lower-middle- to middle-class White lesbians, who held down good office, nursing, or teaching jobs. They scorned or were afraid of the working-class, openly butch and femme women, and, because of the violence and crime associated with some of the bars, socialized at house parties instead (Chamberland, 1993; Duder, 2001; Ross, 1993). Nevertheless, there was some class mixing and interracial affairs as well as outright discrimination against racial minority women (Chamberland, 1993; Chenier, 2004; Ross, 1993), but none of this was mentioned in Chatelaine. The article was illustrated by a manicured “feminine” hand barely holding, or perhaps releasing, a more blunt-nailed, “masculine” one—an ambivalent image, which could be read as representing either a tentative new butch-femme couple or a disintegrating heterosexual one. Wilson’s profile on the lesbians she met in Vancouver was essentially a plea for sympathy more than a challenge to the prevailing medical, moral, and legal standards that allowed lesbians no rights, standards clarified by the psychiatrists, religious leaders, and other experts interviewed (Korinek, 1998; Wilson, 1966).

Given the paucity of sources on the lesbian community at the time, it is difficult to assess how its members constructed their own individual and group identities. But it appears that it was not primarily through stories about gay women in pulp novels, tabloid newspapers, mainstream publications, or even the bare handful of “homophile,” pro-gay North American publications circulating at the time, although they all helped lesbians find each other (Ross, 1993). Identity politics then had more to do with the underground friendship networks of school, work, bars, sports teams, the military, house parties, and other social gatherings, especially in larger cities such as Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal, a reality reflected in Wilson’s article and confirmed by historians and sociologists (Chamberland, 1993; Duder, 2001, citing Higgins & Chamberland, 1992; Korinek, 1998; Wilson, 1966).


Chatelaine adopted an increasingly liberal feminist perspective over the next decade, carving a liberation niche for itself among the growing Canadian and American competition (Anderson, 1996; Freeman, 2001a; Korinek, 2000). Still, coverage of lesbian rights moved slowly under Anderson’s editorship and that of her successors in comparison with the realities of lesbians’ lives and their efforts to claim equality within and outside of the women’s and gay liberation movements. Part of the reason for Chatelaine’s delayed reaction might have been the conservatism of many of the magazine’s readers, who tended to react quite strongly to articles on sexuality in general, and abortion and lesbianism in particular (Anderson interview, 1992; Maynard interview, 2004; M-H Papers, Boxes 1-6 and
Chatelaine office files, readers’ letters). Anderson recalls that when there was a strong backlash against a Chatelaine article, she would assume the magazine had gone too far and drop the subject for a time (Anderson interview, 1992).

Using some of their community contacts formed in the preceding decade, gays and lesbians had been openly challenging the oppressive legal and social inequalities in Canadian society and, taking their cue from other liberation movements of the era, established their own organizations to fight for their rights. Political scientist Miriam Smith explains that the Canadian gay liberation movement of the 1970s, predominantly White and male, focused on court challenges to mobilize the community and bring the issue of discrimination to the public’s attention. Gays and lesbians were demanding that federal and provincial human rights codes give them legal protection from being harassed by a co-worker, fired by a boss, or left homeless by a landlord well before the legal entrenchment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms under the Canadian Constitution in 1985, and the courts’ subsequent “reading in” or inclusion of their rights (Smith, 1999).

Politically active lesbians were primarily involved in the emerging women’s movement more than the gay liberation movement, which they saw as male-dominated and sexist. Partly in reaction to the oppressive gender correctness of the Cold War culture in which they had been raised, the lesbian feminists of the 1970s generation challenged the biological determinism that they felt relegated men and women (and butch and femme lesbians) to static and limiting sex roles. Whether they were liberal, socialist, or radical feminists, they wanted women liberated from these conventions and treated equally under the law and in society. By extension, and within the same political frameworks, they wanted lesbian equality—politically, economically, and socially as a collective right as well as an individual one—within the predominantly heterosexual feminist movement and Canadian society at large. There were other lesbians who rejected involvement with gay men or heterosexual feminists altogether, preferring to lead a separatist existence as “radicalesbians” (Adamson, 1995; Rebick, 2005; Ross, 1995; Stone, 1990).

These women were both critical and accepting of the gay liberation political strategy. They saw legal human rights legislation as important, but not a cure for the discrimination against lesbians in Canadian society, which many saw as systemically patriarchal (Ross, 1995; Smith, 1999). Their energy was focused on building strong lesbian organizations or a solid social support system for all women; providing rape crisis and battered women’s shelters; and creating feminist newspapers, magazines, and films to publicize their causes (Adamson, 1995; Godard, 2002; Marshall, 1995; Masters, 1993). In retrospect, it may be difficult to ascertain how much lesbians dominated these feminist efforts, but there is some evidence to suggest that they formed what journalist and activist Susan G. Cole has called the “invisible backbone” of the Canadian feminist movement of that era (Cole cited in Rebick, 2005, p. 118; Freeman, 2005). These efforts continued despite the reluctance of the mainstream women’s movement to deal with the lesbian issue then (Ross, 1995; Smith, 1999).

It wasn’t until July 1977 that Chatelaine, still under Anderson’s editorship, printed another major article on lesbians. Entitled “Gay Women: A Minority Report,” the text under the title signalled right away that the prevailing discourse
was going to be about gaining equality. It read: “A new generation of lesbian couples wants what their ‘straight’ sisters have—public acceptance, good jobs, the blessing of the church, even kids” (Sangster, 1977, p. 24). The article was written by Dorothy Sangster, a self-described wife and mother, who clearly approached her topic from the perspective of a liberal member of the heterosexual majority, tentatively if sympathetically, examining the lives and concerns of the lesbian minority. Despite the impact of feminism, and the slow changes in professional and public attitudes toward lesbians in the intervening decade, Sangster’s 1977 article resembled the earlier one written by Renate Wilson in that she presented the lesbians she met as similar to mainstream heterosexual women in appearance and behaviour. Moreover, it was clearly still dangerous for a woman to come out as a lesbian in the media. Like Wilson (1966), Sangster gave all the lesbians in her article fictional names to protect them, mainly because most of them were closeted in one way or the other. As Sangster explained, the decriminalizing of homosexual acts, barely raised in 1966, had come to pass by 1977, but discrimination against gays and lesbians was still legal in most jurisdictions, shored up by widespread prejudice.

Sangster challenged those notions by exploring their effects. Her article, she wrote, was not going to be about “the ugly stereotypes” still found in the media and pop psychology—“the foul-mouthed, leather-jacketed ‘stomping butch’ and her dim blond femme... the hostile man-hater ironically garbed in masculine attire... the ruthless career woman... the predator, out to seduce little girls... the depraved drug addict... the jail rapist... the sodden alcoholic... the prostitute.” These, she wrote, were a small, unrepresentative minority (Sangster, 1977, p. 24). In taking this approach, she also dismissed the complex butch-femme social relations common up to the late 1960s, even among middle-class lesbians (Chamberland, 1993; Chenier, 2004; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Nestle, 1987; Ross, 1993) in favour of a more respectable image. The closeted lesbians she interviewed for this article explained that butch-femme role-playing was accepted only among some older lesbians, especially in bars. In real life, pantsuits or jeans had become more acceptable attire for all women since the 1960s (Sangster, 1977), while lesbian feminist trend-setters were anti-style for political reasons. They adopted plaid or denim shirts, jeans and work boots to signal their sympathy with the working class, disdain for culturally enforced femininity, and desire for a recognizable culture of their own (Ross, 1995).

But Sangster was more interested in the “conventional,” middle-class lesbians between the ages of 30 and 55, who were closer to the magazine’s heterosexual demographics. She told her readers: “A feminist lesbian activist whom I approached for some notion of radicalesbian attitudes told me flatly, ‘My lover and I see no reason to talk to a straight lady who’s writing a nothing piece about lesbians for an establishment magazine like Chatelaine.’” (Sangster, 1977, p. 24). Reciprocal rejection between mainstream journalists and feminist radicals was not unusual at the time (Barker-Plummer, 1995; Valk, 2002). Many Canadian and American activists felt that the news media marginalized and demonized feminists and lesbians and so developed their own publications, as a counter-public and alternative voice (Godard, 2002; Marshall, 1995; Masters, 1993; Streitmatter,
1995). But Sangster, in allowing her investigation to be thwarted by one potential source, severed the link between lesbianism and feminism in this article while constructing a simplistic conflict between political and apolitical lesbians that obliterated the complex differences among them (Ross, 1995).

Sangster also made it clear that her article was not going to be about sex, as this was a “private” matter. Yet in one primly written paragraph, she certainly went further than *Chatelaine* had ever gone in describing what goes on in bed between two women, the language she used suggesting that her information likely came from a lesbian feminist source. “It should be enough to suggest that women have lips and hands, and can please other women without having to imitate men. Dildos are kicky for a few sophisticates, but most women apparently don’t use or need them” (Sangster, 1977, pp. 24, 79). Such basic information was standard for the time (Califia, 1980; Ross, 1995) and something that a reader teetering uncertainly on the brink of coming out might have been grateful to know.

Stylistically, the *Chatelaine* article followed the usual journalism conventions of finding conflict, personalizing its subjects, and conferring with experts to find some kind of resolution. As she was dealing with several equality issues, Sangster focused on an anonymous lesbian couple, “Adele” and “Alice,” who were factory workers, and moved her readers from their modest Toronto apartment to a night out with friends at a local bar to a “holy union” ceremony for another couple. By this time, relatively safe, lesbian-only bars, or female-only evenings in gay bars, had opened up to accommodate women from all backgrounds. There, butches and femmes of the old school, apolitical lesbians of all classes, and the lesbian feminists encountered each other, but most scorned each other’s politics and rarely mixed along class or racial lines (Chamberland, 1993; Chenier, 2004; Ross, 1993).

Sangster did not discuss these conflicts to any degree, or dwell on the tangibly sexual atmosphere in lesbian bars (Ross, 1995), beyond mentioning kissing couples. She shifted to her next scene, a sedate “holy union” ceremony for another lesbian couple, “Mary and June,” in a Metropolitan Community Church. The MCC was a recent import from the United States that offered gay Christians spiritual solace at a time when few mainstream churches made them welcome, or ordained openly gay or lesbian ministers (Warner, 2002). At the ceremony, “Alison,” a guest, explained to Sangster that she had first rejected holy union as an inappropriately “straight” model of commitment for lesbians. But she had since decided that such ceremonies could have a stabilizing effect on partners, who would be less inclined to get up and leave when the going got tough in their relationships. Here we see lesbian partnerships described for *Chatelaine*’s readers in the light of heterosexual standards with a Christian subtext, an outlook that was not accepted by all lesbians, certainly not the more radical ones or those who held different spiritual beliefs (Ross, 1995).

Despite the fact that the psychiatric profession had become more accepting of homosexuality by the late 1970s (Schlesinger, 1977), Sangster still tried to define lesbianism, how common it was, and why some women were that way. She quoted several lesbians, noting that a rejection of standard feminine roles, especially through tomboy behaviour, was a pattern for many but not all of them during their
childhoods. She was more willing to accept their expertise than the varied opinions of the psychiatrists and psychologists she quoted about the nature of true lesbianism and the possible negative effects on children of having gay parents. Sangster really wanted to know how lesbians survived the anxiety, the depression, and especially the guilt that is the legacy of prejudice. “How can a lesbian escape guilt in a society that considers physical love between two members of the same sex as dirty, disgusting, unnatural or comical?” she asked, rhetorically (Sangster, 1977, p. 82).

There was no simple answer; just survival stories from the lesbians themselves.

This soul-searching was happening with new debates in the public domain, such as whether or not gays and lesbians could be good parents or were a danger to children. That particular issue, especially the equating of homosexuality with paedophilia, was being inflamed at the time by the highly publicized “Save the Children” campaign of an American singer, Anita Bryant, a Christian fundamentalist, who brought her crusade to Canada (Ross, 1995). As Sangster explained, “[N]othing in Canadian law declares that lesbianism, per se, is grounds for declaring an unfit mother. But a woman who is living as a lesbian usually has a stiff fight on her hands to keep her children.” One Canadian mother had recently been allowed visiting rights only, and another, in Alberta, retained custody, as did an American woman in Maine, but these were the exceptions, not the rule (Sangster, 1977). Most lesbian mothers of young children were closeted so as not to lose custody. Some of Sangster’s interviewees were quietly bringing up children themselves or with their female partners, a shift from the 1960s and earlier, when lesbian mothers tended to come out after the children were grown and their marriages had dissolved. While there were informal groups of lesbian mothers in Canada, there was no legal defence fund for them, as there was in the United States, until 1978 (Arnup, 1995; Nelson, 1996; Sangster, 1977; Stone, 1990).

The women Sangster interviewed were granted anonymity visually as well as by name. Chatelaine used a stylized image rather than photos of real lesbians, an illustration that projected a glamorous, unrealistic vision of what lesbians looked like at the time. It was the kind of image that might have been less threatening to heterosexual women and would have appealed to straight men who might have read the article as well. In this picture, two very feminine women, wearing dark nail polish and wide-brimmed hats, toasted each other with matching glasses of red wine (Douglas Fisher illustration, 1977). This presentation could also be read as narcissistic, a psychological stereotype of lesbian relationships, as the pair could actually be a mirror image of the same woman. It certainly missed the reality mark, given that most lesbian feminists were going about in those days in denim and jeans, and more conventional lesbians, according to the article, seemed to favour trendy pantsuits. The article itself represented a transition, however, in Chatelaine’s coverage of lesbians and their issues. The focus had clearly shifted from psychology to equality rights. There was more acceptance of public discussion about lesbianism in 1977, less indulgence of psychiatric expert opinion, and new debates about where legal freedoms were going to lead, especially, for gay women who wanted socially sanctioned relationships and families of their own.
The 1980s: “It certainly is not my cause.”

Between 1977 and 1990, the liberal and radical feminist movements peaked and waned, at least in the media’s opinion, defeated by neo-conservative governments, policymakers, and media, and postmodern identity debates (Freeman, 2001a; Godard, 2002; Marshall, 1995). *Chatelaine* underwent a sea change of its own, losing Doris Anderson to the political arena in 1977 (Anderson, 1996). She was replaced by staff writer Mildred Istona, who, like a number of her American counterparts (Bradley, 1995; Budgeon & Currie, 1995; Linden, 1990), published more articles on fashion and entertainment, adopted a snappier tone, and gradually softened the magazine’s commitment to liberal feminism (Maynard interview, 2004), although it is difficult to ascertain exactly how much this was in response to her readers’ desires. In 1980, a survey done for advertisers garnered an 80% response rate, representing over 3,000 of the magazine’s readers, almost half of them “working women.” They were asked how much they depended on magazine advertising and articles for information on predetermined subjects ranging from fashion to “politics” to money tips (M-H Papers, Box 38, “Media Impact on Women”). They were not asked about women’s or any other equality issues specifically. This document and the results of an earlier survey (M-H Papers, Box 38, An Advertiser’s Guide to the Canadian Women’s Market, c. 1978) suggested that at the time women readers paid more attention to ads in magazines than those in any other medium and were most interested in articles on fashion, food, celebrities, the status of women, and related social issues.

Initially, Istona told advertisers that her readers were women who “want it all. A man . . . babies . . . career . . . And the big wide world to explore and enjoy” (Istona, 1978). Later, *Chatelaine* articles questioned that attitude (Drainie, 1986), and became more critical of the women’s movement (Gray, 1988; Crittenden, 1990), although feminist influence was still a factor in women’s lives (Maynard, 1988). In Istona’s words, “[W]e identified the postfeminist woman, who is putting personal priorities ahead of a feminist agenda” (Istona, 1988). Her outlook reflected not just a certain boredom with second wave feminism, but a more neo-conservative time in Canadian political life, during which advertising revenue increased, but so did federal taxes on magazines and competition from more specialized Canadian and American publications (Korinek, 2000; Vipond, 2000).

In the meantime, gays and lesbians continued to fight for legal equality, including protection from discrimination under the federal and provincial human rights codes, and some same-sex benefits in other areas. By this time, gay rights
activists had embraced more liberal than radical ideology and were actively engaged in attaining equal status with heterosexuals both within the workplace and in their domestic partnerships and families (Dranoff, 2000; Smith, 1999).

Still, *Chatelaine* seemed to pull back from any major coverage of these issues, at least for the lesbians most affected. Rona Maynard, who was then a contributor to the magazine, recalls that she included a lesbian with a partner and children in an article she wrote about different women coping with motherhood. Maynard thought readers “would be fascinated to see how much she was just like them; that her concerns about her daughter’s coming adolescence were not so very different from their own.” But the editors deleted the lesbian from the story, a hurtful act of censorship. “She was very sad, very disappointed,” Maynard recalls (Maynard interview, 2004).

Perhaps the editors felt its readers weren’t really ready. In a reader poll on sexuality issues, published in 1986, only 20% said they had no reservations about homosexuality, but the question did not separate gay men from lesbians, or even indicate why readers seemed somewhat troubled by the issue (Womanpoll, 1986). Instead of articles on lesbians themselves, there were several service or advice articles and features that focused on heterosexuals’ relationships with gay or suspect family members and friends (Cameron, 1981; Marchand, 1980; Maynard, 1992; Phillips, 1987; Ullyot, 1990). There were also several articles relaying heterosexual women’s fears that gay or bisexual male lovers might possibly put them at risk for AIDS (Budra, 1987; Katz, 1987), a disease that became a fact of life during the 1980s and took up much of the media space on gay and lesbian issues (Donham, 1988; Gross, 2001). *Chatelaine* did run Maynard’s profile of Sally Boyle, a lesbian minister who, in a highly publicized case, fought for equality in the United Church (Maynard, 1989), as well as a debate between her partner, Erin Shoemaker, and a conservative male minister (Debate, 1989). The couple were the first two openly lesbian women to have their photographs published in *Chatelaine*, but were the last advocates to be profiled for a while. A few years later, the magazine ran a cover story on singer k.d. lang, who came out as a lesbian but was quoted as saying that she did not want to be typecast as an advocate. “It certainly is not my cause” (Goddard, 1992, p. 127).

**The 1990s: “Out of the Closet and into the Fire?”**

In February 1995, Maynard replaced Mildred Istona as editor of *Chatelaine*, bringing a more personal tone to the magazine, epitomized by her monthly editor’s column Woman to Woman. Increased competition and less government support for the magazine industry had continued, along with new threats through international trade agreements (Korinek, 2000; Vipond, 2000). Niche marketing to a more specialized female audience had become even more important at *Chatelaine* and was strongly influenced by reader surveys, focus groups, an online panel that responded to every article, and letters to the editor. Over the next decade, Maynard shifted the magazine toward a younger demographic, particularly working women. She supported feminism in the sense that “it is about women’s lives. . . . [I]t’s about being free to do what you want to do and do it without a sense of guilt. And we are not there yet.” She feels the term itself, however, was often misunderstood and carried too much “baggage” by the time she became edi-
tor, and readers were no longer interested in analytical articles on topics such as pay equity. She did not abandon issues-oriented copy altogether, but mixed it with the usual service and fashion articles, with an added emphasis on women’s holistic health. In her words, *Chatelaine* appealed to women ages 25 to 49, “mostly working, mostly urban, thoughtful, active, life-loving, engaged” (Maynard, 2003; Maynard interview, 2004).

In October 1995, *Chatelaine* published another major article on lesbians and their issues. It dealt mainly with lesbians at work, more than their family, religious, or community life, and was likely prompted by the battery of court cases over the past decade that often affected gay and lesbian rights on the job, including same-sex spousal benefits (Smith, 1999). The article, written by Charlotte Gray, was headlined in big, bold type “Out of the Closet and Into the Fire?” (Gray, 1995). The question mark denoted the difficult decision lesbians faced about coming out at work, given the prejudices of co-workers, managers, and government policymakers. The women interviewed were almost all middle-class professionals that Gray, like her predecessors, used as “experts” for her assignment, along with some of their straight co-workers, rather than psychiatric and religious authorities. The magazine was able to publish the real names and photographs of two federal civil servants—Anne Whitehurst and Donna Wilkie, both 47—because they had decided to be open about their lives. But Gray, like her predecessors, also used fictional names or no names at all for most of the “dozen” other lesbians she interviewed because they were still not comfortable coming out so publicly.

Gray informed her readers that while the federal and most provincial governments now had human rights codes that outlawed overt discrimination in the workplace, Alberta, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and the Northwest Territories did not. But even lesbians who came out in relative safety still had to contend with co-workers who were uncomfortable with their decision. The biggest threat was the possibility of being fired, demoted, or otherwise punished under the guise of inadequate job performance or some other excuse, especially when departments were being restructured and workers were feeling insecure.

But the alternative, remaining silent, was too difficult for some lesbians to bear, and this was true of Anne Whitehurst, a librarian at the National Archives of Canada. As she explained to Gray, “I refuse to accept that something is wrong with part of my life, something is shameful and should be hidden. I refuse to make myself invisible.” It was a bold quote that was highlighted in large type under a colour photo of Whitehurst sitting on the steps of the archives. This photograph can be read simply as a lesbian sitting in front of her office building. There are details, however, that offer more complex readings and raise other questions. She sheltered herself under a large umbrella while behind her a sculpture symbolically signified the broader heterosexual social context within which all lesbians struggle. It was of a pubescent boy and a girl sharing an apple, sitting close together in the throes of what appears to be first love (Gray, 1995, p. 114).

At the time, federal civil servants were not allowed the same benefits as heterosexual spouses when it came to pension plans and issues such as job relocation. This problem was addressed by Donna Wilkie, who said that she became anxious and angry after she was unable to get relocation leave when her partner
of 11 years was given a job transfer from Ottawa to British Columbia. Her blunt comment on her situation appeared prominently in the layout below a colour close-up of Wilkie in a garden, looking openly and directly into the camera: “If I had been straight, I would never have been in the position of having to choose between my partner and my job.” As it turned out, a local manager saw to it that she got personal leave so that she was able to relocate to Vancouver and find a federal job there. But Wilkie decided to file a human rights complaint anyway, which was still pending when the *Chatelaine* article was published. Invisibility, she explained to Gray, “allows people to think that gays and lesbians are other people, somewhere else. We’re not. We’re here” (Gray, 1995, p. 115).

By 1995, then, *Chatelaine* had moved light-years away from its 1960s treatment of lesbians, and the stereotypes and the constant psychiatric and other expert assessments had all but disappeared. Lesbian sex was not discussed, but the issue of equality in the workplace was another matter, especially when it could be personalized.

**Toward the twenty-first century: “Straight Women, Curvy Choices”**

In the late 1990s, *Chatelaine*’s editorial direction changed again, shifting away from committed lesbians and their struggles to a new fascination with what I call “no-logo lesbianism.” Features and advice articles began to appear in which ostensibly heterosexual women wondered if they should switch their romantic interests from men to women (Timson, 1995), or discovered that they could have lesbian fantasies without the actual sex (Johanson, 1989; Rowley, 2000) or both intense and light-hearted sexual liaisons with other women, without necessarily labelling themselves as lesbians (Reichert, 2002). While postmodern debates over the blurring of sexual orientation boundaries were becoming more common, even among lesbians (Archer, 1999; Butler, 1990, 1999, 2004; Salih & Butler, 2004), in these articles heterosexual female readers were invited to explore their romantic desires for women more frankly than real-life lesbians were ever allowed to do in the pages of *Chatelaine*. These articles stopped short of descriptive sexual passages, however, even though sex manuals that encouraged lesbians to be adventurous in bed were certainly available (Bright, 1990; Loulan, 1984). When sex techniques were discussed at all in *Chatelaine*, it was usually in service articles that simply assumed its readers were heterosexual and their partners were always “him” (Binks, 2002).

The feature articles about exploring lesbian relationships reflected the editorial outlook of Rona Maynard, who believed the magazine should be tackling issues on the cutting edge of her readers’ sexual interests, gleaned through marketing surveys and focus groups, regardless of complaints from the more conservative and religious readers who cancelled their subscriptions over any sexual content in the magazine at all. She had written several articles about gay and lesbian rights over the years and observes that letters objecting to these relationships tended to be the most “vicious” (Maynard interview, 2004). Scholars such as Clark (1995) and Wilkinson (1996) have argued that pandering to sexually curious women reflects a “bisexual backlash” against lesbianism and lesbian feminism in popular culture that is both a tactic for attracting consumers with
non-political “lesbian chic” content and a strategy that allows all women to explore their sexuality, often in defiance of both conventional heterosexual and “politically correct” norms. It also de-politicizes lesbian rights and shores up what some academics refer to “hetero-hegemony” (Rand, 1994), meaning the dominant cultural assumption in magazines and other media that heterosexuality is the privileged and preferred norm, and lesbianism must take on its characteristics, particularly its most “feminine” ones, in order to be deemed even noticeable, let alone “acceptable” in liberal circles. As Clark argued in relation to lesbian images in advertising, lesbianism was being “treated as merely a sexual style that can be chosen—or not chosen—just as one chooses a particular mode of fashion for self-expression” (Clark, 1995, p. 148).

Clark’s comment, which may be true of American fashion magazines such as Elle, cannot be applied directly, however, to Chatelaine, which did not use overt or discrete lesbian themes in the ads that accompanied articles with same-sex content. Rather, the accompanying ads, some portraying straight couples, shored up the homemaking, heterosexual family norm and usually featured food, cleaning products, and various over-the-counter medications, the kind of ads usually seen in women’s service magazines. Even though lesbian images are occasionally used to titillate heterosexual readers, especially males, in magazines such as Newsweek and Vanity Fair, most North American brand advertisers are reluctant to risk alienating audiences, especially the majority of Americans who do not support same-sex civil rights. In addition, lesbians are not perceived to have enough disposable income to make them attractive targets as consumers, even in gay publications (Clark, 1995; Fejes 2001; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005).

Although lesbianism did not feature in Chatelaine’s ads, it was still presented editorially as a lifestyle one could sample or try on, in fantasy or in fact. In that way, the several Chatelaine articles about lesbianism published between 1997 and 2002 could be read as a shift to sexual consumerism over equality concerns. Regardless of their liberal and daring tone, they were actually conservative and naïve. With the exception of one previously heterosexual writer who became involved in an intense lesbian affair with a straight friend (Cameron, 1997), one heterosexual feminist with “lesbian” fantasies she could share with her husband while they watched “porn” videos (Rowley, 2000), and one woman who told the writer she is a “dyke,” the women in these articles were never named, even the supposedly “label-defying” ones who actually acted on their sexual desires and slept with women (Reichert, 2002). The possibility that some of them might identify themselves as bisexual rather than lesbian is not even mentioned, although the pattern of some of their love affairs certainly suggests that might be the case. Obviously, the anonymous women interviewed did not feel safe enough to reveal their identities, and Chatelaine was protecting them from the harm a more open treatment might bring. Even so, equality issues were not even mentioned, despite the fact that prejudice and discrimination can harm women known to experiment with lesbian sex. At least the psychology experts who were consulted accepted occasional same-sex attraction among ostensibly heterosexual women as normal, unlike their predecessors who condemned or medicalized it. But the fact they were even asked suggests that the writers believed these women might really be...
confused, or certainly 

in Chatelaine’s readers by their behaviour, and that the experts’ reassurances were necessary.

In keeping with their subjects’ anonymity, these articles also featured stylized graphics or photographs of models. For example, the one from “Straight Women, Curvy Choices” showed only the pedicured foot of one woman caressing the bare leg of the other (Reichert, 2002) and is reminiscent of the glamorous twinned females used in Sangster’s 1977 article. In fact, it comes from a Getty Images stock shot database that features both real-life lesbians who look like themselves and glamour shots of models posing as “lesbians” (see Digital Vision #427051 at www.istockpro.com/file_closeup.php?id=133771). In other words, there are elements in some of these articles—especially the textual and graphic anonymity and the use of experts—that are reminiscent of the articles about lesbians that Chatelaine published 25 to 35 years earlier. Further, while these images are undoubtedly feminine, they do not overtly identify any of these women as “femme” lesbians, whom, Walker complains, have become invisible in modern culture because people simply assume they must be straight (Walker, 2001).

Lesbians and diversity in Chatelaine

Not since 1995 has Chatelaine published a major article on the gains or losses that lesbians as a group have experienced in their fight against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Those featured in the magazine over the past 40 years were apparently White, predominantly middle-class, urban, able-bodied, and between the ages of 25 and 55, remarkably close to the magazine’s heterosexual reader demographic. A focused examination of Chatelaine’s shifts in racial representations of Canadian women in general is beyond the scope of this study. Given the growth of racial minority groups and debates about racism within the lesbian community over the past decade or so (Warner, 2002), one wishes for more complex discussions of race and sexual orientation combined in some of the magazine’s features. As the poet Audre Lorde, who was a Black lesbian feminist and socialist, once wrote: “I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as a meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live.” She wrote that differences among lesbians, and all women, must be recognized and respected, not denied (Lorde, 1996, p. 223).

Maynard took a decidedly pragmatic, liberal tack in her attempts to include more racially diverse images on the cover of Chatelaine and in its articles and advertising. “The truth is that blondes still sell more, they do. We have to remember that our job is to sell magazines, not to be politically correct.” Nevertheless, she believes women of all races should have a place in Chatelaine, but not necessarily be the focus of attention just for that reason. “I think that all diversity issues, all of them, were best approached just by treating the people who were supposedly different as if they are part of the mainstream, you know, you just put them in there” (Maynard interview, 2004).

The only time Chatelaine even mentioned a lesbian’s ethnic background and sexual orientation together was in a June 1998 cover story on novelist, playwright, and actor Ann-Marie MacDonald (Subramanian, 1998). Although the word “les-
bian” was not used, the article discussed her youthful attraction to girls and the initial family conflicts over her “sexual orientation” when she came out. Her Scottish/Lebanese Catholic heritage was also acknowledged in the context of her Cape Breton upbringing and the diversity of the characters she brings to her own writing. It was essentially a celebrity profile that included these aspects of her identity and outlook as notable elements of her story, even if neither she nor the author, Sarmishta Subramanian, overtly politicized them.

Identity politics became even less important as lesbians became incorporated into shorter articles with broader storylines. In 2002 an interracial couple—author and broadcaster Irshad Manji and her “partner,” Michelle Douglas—were included in a lifestyle feature about six women and their role models (Carter, 2002). Again, the word “lesbian” was not used. The brief text explained that Douglas had successfully encouraged the busy Manji to take up running to safeguard her health. In the accompanying large colour photograph, Douglas had her arm around Manji’s neck and was touching her hand. The warmest portrait of a real-life lesbian couple that has ever appeared in Chatelaine; it conveyed caring and intimacy but the text was so brief, it told the reader only that Manji would be a “seven-project-at-a-time, round-the-clock entrepreneur” without the influence of Douglas, who had a “regular job” with benefits, to help her find a balance (Carter, 2002, p. 104).

The story did not reveal that Manji, a Muslim of South Asian descent, came to Canada as a child after her parents fled Uganda. A few years before she appeared in Chatelaine with Douglas, she had published a book that questioned, among other things, the “middle class, White mind-set” of feminism (Manji, 1997, p. 3) and the conservatism of the media, but this was not mentioned in the article. She has since published another book in which she openly and bravely challenges religious intolerance in the Muslim and other communities, risking her life to do so (Manji, 2004; see her website http://www.muslim-refusenik.com). The Chatelaine story also omitted the fact that Douglas successfully fought the Canadian military in a precedent-setting court case in 1990 after it discharged her for being a lesbian. She continued fighting for gay and lesbian civil rights, primarily as president of the Foundation for Equal Families, the successor of the Lesbian Mothers’ Defense Fund (“Michelle D. Douglas,” 1998; Warner, 2002).

The Manji/Douglas article reflected Maynard’s interest in women’s health and her general editorial policy of including rather than spotlighting lesbians and racial minority women. This particular couple and their stories could have been the focus, however, of far more substantial questions about lesbian relationships, race issues, religious intolerance, and same-sex rights in another kind of article altogether. That presumes, however, that the Chatelaine writer assigned to such a project could have conveyed the undoubted complexity of the ensuing conversation. In her first book, Manji had written that she was willing to wear the labels “feminist,” “woman of colour,” and “Muslim lesbian,” but only “as an entré into conversation. But that conversation must take place. Otherwise, the labels stick, get confused with an identity and frustrate belonging” (Manji, 1997, p. 17).

Another Chatelaine feature, which ran through most of 2003, presented
women of different backgrounds as inspirations to readers. These “soul models” included a former cocaine addict, Denise McLaren of Edmonton, who helped other addicts in their recovery. Judging from the accompanying photographs, her racial heritage is other than White, or is possibly mixed, but the article does not state her background. Neither is she identified as “lesbian” or “bisexual” as such, but after she quit taking drugs, she became involved in what was described as a “healthy relationship” with a woman, identified only as “Susanne, with whom she feels comfortable just being herself” (Hitchcock, 2003, p. 178). Nothing more was said about how her race, her sexuality, the role discrimination, and isolation on both grounds might have played in her addictive behaviour, or how self-acceptance and pride might have aided in her recovery. She is presented instead as an unlabelled, apolitical, de-racialized, de-sexualized, redeemed subject as much as a real heroine with genuine spiritual strength. Journalistically speaking, race and sexual orientation were no longer “issues” that inspire storytelling conflict and drama in Chatelaine, not even articles about lesbians’ varied responses to gay marriage, because, Maynard recalls, the subject became very “mainstream” in Canada, and was already well covered in the media. But stories about women “rebounding from crisis [are] ageless” (Maynard interview, 2004).

**From “no go” to “no logo”—and back?**
The progression of lesbian representation in Chatelaine over close to 40 years raises a number of issues about the complex interplay between culture, politics, and market forces in the Canadian mainstream media. The magazine’s liberal feminist edge has been blunted in recent years by a shift away from collective rights issues to individual, personal concerns. Chatelaine can fairly claim to be more inclusive than American magazines, such as Ladies’ Home Journal, Glamour, Cosmopolitan, Jane, and Self, in which heterosexual women’s romantic issues are ubiquitous (David, 2005). But making its contents more personal and less political produced an uneasy equilibrium for lesbians. On the one hand, they were treated the “same” and included in features with straight women, becoming “equal” in the magazine’s liberal discourse of text and imagery. Politically speaking, however, they lost their sexual and racial identities. Sexual “fluidity” gave Chatelaine’s readers a new “sexy” subject to consider—heterosexually appropriated and reconstituted lesbianism—to help sell its magazines. In the process, it rendered real-life lesbian and bisexual women, regardless of their race or any other elements of their identities, safe, unlabelled subjects.

While Chatelaine liked to consider itself a “step ahead” of its readers (Anderson interview, 1992; Maynard interview, 2004), it actually followed political and cultural trends in Canadian society and among gays and lesbians themselves. Especially since the 1970s, the most high-profile battles for legal equality have been fought on liberal principles in tandem with ongoing postmodern debates in the gay and lesbian communities about sexual identity. Although Chatelaine did lag behind these trends in its coverage, its liberal, journalistic approach advocated equal rights, respected feminism, and flagged lesbians’ visibility, making them real human subjects rather than criminals or medicalized misfits because of their sexual orientation. Intensified niche marketing in the media...
and the attendant consumer appeal of “postfeminism” and “no logo” sexual ambiguity has had a different impact. It renders lesbians invisible at worst (Garber, 2001) or, at best, frames them as trendy, individualistic adherents of what Bronstein calls “Feminism Lite” (Bronstein, 2005, pp. 794-795), regardless of what they prefer to call themselves, how much they represent and embrace racial diversity, and how politically active they actually are.

No matter how lesbian subjects prefer to identify themselves and exercise their personal agency in the media, it is journalists and editors who decide how their stories will unfold. In making those decisions, they can mollify upset advertisers with free ads (Maynard interview, 2004), but they must constantly engage readers for the magazine to be a success. If Chatelaine truly has been using reader feedback as a primary consideration, the magazine’s contents suggest that its predominantly White, heterosexual readers are socially liberal but obsessed with their own personal concerns, and are uneasy with anything that smacks of overt feminism or identity politics. That could, of course, be true of the lesbian and bisexual women among them as well, or at least those who are unwilling to think their way through the Queer Studies relativity debates to some well-placed activism. It is also possible that Chatelaine has been underestimating its readers and should reconsider its approach, especially given the recent disruptions at its editorial offices.

In late 2004, Rona Maynard left her position as the executive editor of Chatelaine, feeling she had accomplished what she set out to do (Maynard interview, 2004). She was succeeded by Kim Pittaway, its progressive Broadside columnist (see, for example, Pittaway, 1999), who abruptly left after a few months and was followed out the door by several other staff members. She cited editorial control conflicts with publisher Kerry Mitchell (Posner, 2005), which suggests she was not able to put her stamp on Chatelaine as her predecessors had done. Under Mitchell, the magazine has tended to acquiesce more to advertisers’ demands for more editorial articles based on their products and has also been inconsistent in its handling of some of the readers’ favourite editorial and service features (Warburton, 2006). An interim editor, Beth Hitchcock, author of the article on Denise McLaren (Hitchcock, 2003), sat in Pittaway’s chair for a while and has also since left, knowing she was not in line to replace her permanently (Warburton, 2006). The magazine’s new editor-in-chief is Sara Angel, a former publishing house non-fiction editor, who, in Rona Maynard’s words, is “a bold and interesting choice [who] inspires a lot of loyalty.” Angel is married to a cousin of Maynard’s, so the two women know each other personally as well as professionally. Angel has written articles on politics, social issues, and household, gardening, and similar lifestyle interests for Saturday Night, and has also produced a monthly food column for the National Post. Chatelaine, she said recently, “has always understood that a healthy interest in fashion and beauty does not preclude an interest in social issues, and it has had enormous respect for readers’ intelligence” (Ross, 2006, p. A2), and she has promised longer stories on politics and social issues (Warburton, 2006). In recent years, however, not enough journalism in Chatelaine has reached beyond features on “lipstick and lasagna,” an apparent and successful response to marketing pressures (Friede, 2001; Gaulin, 2004; Ross, 2006).
2006), so unless Angel is given the freedom to take the magazine in a more challenging direction, it is unlikely that more substantial social concerns will be explored anytime soon. The danger for lesbians is that once they are considered just a passing “no logo” media fad, their fight for equality rights will be lost in another “no go” zone of political and cultural amnesia.

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Notes

1. The terminology, but not the context, is borrowed from Naomi Klein’s No Logo (2001).

2. Walker (2001, chap. 5) argues that White is a colour that may render a person in Western culture “invisible,” but any lesbian’s racial background will influence how she sees the world and how the world sees her and thus forms an inherent part of her identity. Garber further argues, following Spelman, that gender, race, class, and sexual orientation “interlock” with each other as essential elements of a woman’s identity, and should not be separated into an ampersand pattern (gender & race & class & sexual orientation) that simplifies the complexity of the individual (Garber, 2001, pp. 24-26, citing Spelman, 1988).

3. As Steeves and Wasko point out, it is important to incorporate an understanding of the political economy of the media with cultural analyses of its contents if we want to have “a more complex, holistic perspective” in feminist research (Steeves & Wasko, 2001, p. 17).

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