

Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-84 by Liz Millward

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Volume 109, Number 2, Fall 2017

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1041297ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041297ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Hrynyk, N. A. (2017). Review of [*Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-84* by Liz Millward]. *Ontario History*, 109(2), 284–286.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1041297ar>

tailed study of all Canadian nursing sisters through their attestation and enlistment papers. Through this analysis she found that nursing sisters were older on average than often portrayed, almost exclusively white, and often circumvented eligibility requirements like marriage restrictions and waiting lists. Other chapters explore themes like conditions endured at the front, the effects of disruption and travel through various theatres of war, the suffering nurses witnessed and treated including shock, relationships between nurses, patients, and other soldiers, and the civilian administrative careers many women led after the war, particularly in the new field of public health. This research sets a foundation for further explorations of relationships between the CAMC nursing sisters and women's movements, including

suffrage, ideas of friendship and intimacy both between nurses and with other military personnel, and exclusions or tensions based around ideas about race and class.

Nursing Sisters is a must-read. It presents a thoughtful and detailed account that fills in the many silences left behind by the nursing sisters themselves. Toman reinforces the idea that war experiences were at once both similar and different, both individual and collective. There was, Toman argues, no one universal war experience or story. Instead, the stories of nursing sisters "reveal that war's impact on individuals, families, communities, and societies was much more complex and diverse than is often portrayed" (10).

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Making a Scene
Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-84

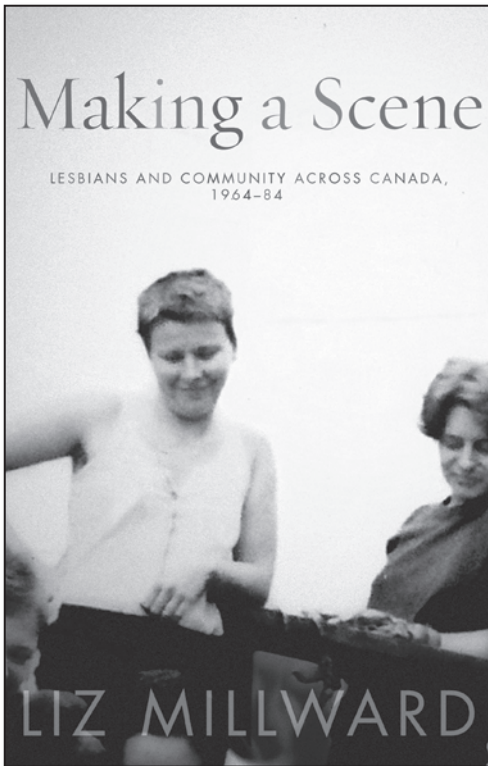
by Liz Millward

Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 2015. 316 pages. \$32.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-7748-3067-6 <ubcpress.ca>

“Outside the club they might be closeted or apologists, but inside they were *free* to be themselves, to be proud, and to take up space” (103). This was true of a generation of Canadian lesbians who proudly made a space for themselves, whether in the club, the community centre, the café, or the home, as Liz Millward demonstrates in *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-84*. An exciting book which traces the formation and development of lesbian experiences in Canada, *Making a Scene* explores how lesbianism flourished within varying cultural geographies, urban and rural alike. As a cultural history and historical

archive of lesbianism, *Making a Scene* examines the relationships among sexuality, gender, and class within a geographic and spatial framework. Millward argues that, “[w]omen produced the spaces, sometimes alone, sometimes with gay men, and sometimes with straight women, in order to make possible ‘lesbian identity’” (24). In doing so, Millward demonstrates that space (including both private and public space) has been fundamental to how lesbians politically and socially came together, fostered nurturing relationships, and celebrated themselves in a stigmatizing social climate around homosexuality.

Making a Scene emphasizes the ten-



sions which arose in the lesbian community when creating, sharing, negotiating and renegotiating spaces for themselves. This is evident in the book's structure, which is divided into two sections: "Creating Spaces" and "Overcoming Geography." In the first section, Millward thoroughly maps the various spaces created by and for lesbians, such as the Montreal club Baby Face, Calgary's members-only Club Carousel, Toronto's Three of Cups café, or the Just Women Folk Retreat in the wilderness outside Almont, Ontario. While Millward stresses that these spaces were never completely safe from violence or free from internal conflict, one must wonder if the importance placed on space and place usurps a broader underlying statement that lesbianism did not develop as a cohesive whole in Canada. There remains a constant sense

of discord between lesbians, particularly white women, who could afford the financial costs and time to participate in conferences and workshops and those who could not. Conferences such as the third annual National Gay Rights Coalition/Coalition nationale pour les droits des homosexuels (NGRC/CNDH) conference held in Ottawa in 1975, aimed to articulate a national political strategy for lesbians and gays but, as Millward argues, emphasized issues in Ontario, and more specifically Ottawa, by virtue of its location (190).

The marginalized position of non-white women plays a minor role in *Making a Scene*, raising questions about the tendency of historical accounts to privilege white subjects. Non-white lesbians do appear throughout the book: their presence is noted in clubs, at committee meetings, Gayday events, and Dyke Marches. Millward even describes their efforts to form unique groups and identities, in many ways insisting that there was widespread determination "not to see white, middle-class women as autonomous sexual beings, and to see Black women, Aboriginal women, and white working-class women as only possessing a hyper-sexualized focus on men" (202). However, the book would benefit from a more explicit intersectional analysis that considers the relationship between class, race, sexuality, in various spaces.

One of the major feats of *Making a Scene* is Millward's ability to alternate between the broader cultural developments in lesbian communities across Canada and the individual experiences of lesbians such as Jan Trainor, Chris Fox, and Helen Fallding. Using interviews, as well as diary entries, meeting notes, and other records, Millward allows the reader to form a visceral connection with these women. Indeed, it is this human(izing) element that transforms this book from a history of les-

bian activism or lesbian spaces to a history and archive of lesbianism in all its myriad forms, intimate and otherwise. For example, when Jan Trainor is asked about the experience of dancing and sharing a physical and sensual closeness with other women in a club, she recalls: “Oh my goodness, oh my goodness! Am I levitating? Because it is such a powerful feeling” (106). These moments of personal reflection give the reader pause to consider and empathize with the trials and tribulations faced by women attempting to find a sense of place in Canada. Tracing this quest for a sense of place transforms what would be solely an analysis of space into a deeper discussion of how women’s individual subjectivities and identities were grounded in and shaped by the spaces they inhabited.

Millward’s book follows a trend within queer scholarship which stresses the importance of space in the creation and evolution of sexualities. Works such as Eliza-

beth Kennedy and Madeline Davis’s *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993), George Chauncey’s *Gay New York* (1994), and Matt Houlbrook’s *Queer London* (2005), all situate sexuality within spatial frameworks—most notably the urban. What makes *Making a Scene* unique however, is the effort to trace the oscillating movements of lesbians and lesbian activity between the rural and urban in Canada. In doing so, Millward’s book is a valuable contribution to more contemporary efforts of scholars to examine queer life outside cities, such as Valerie Korinek’s forthcoming book, *Prairie Fairies*. *Making a Scene* is a worthwhile read for those interested in exploring either the relationship between space and sexuality in Canada, or the unique, and often fragmented, developments of lesbianism in postwar Canada.

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